

We are interested to know the impact the softs skills courses have had on you, whether you're still doing your research or are now working in academia or industry?

What it has brought me, you ask? You are still in my life. Need I say more?
You helped me find my true passion and I've never been happier. I honestly believe that I wouldn't be where I am now if it hadn't been for our discussions and your nudges that drove me in the right direction.

Nora

Proposal Strategist @ Haskoning | Industry & Energy

I'm not exaggerating when I say the courses have changed my life. For the better of course. SDI test and explanation of how I'm dealing with conflicts gave me power to overcome those fears. Prisoners dilemma game taught me how individuals see the same thing completely differently. And by far the biggest impact for me was the painted picture exercise - it made me realize what I want to do in life and thanks to it I'm living my dreams.
So thank you for everything.

Kristjan

Innovative Radiotherapy Technologist | Passionate About Cutting-Edge Cancer Treatments

The courses are still in my heart and they have had a huge impact on my personal development. Especially the first one honestly changed me as a human. The second one also had a huge impact on me, as a colleague and mentor, and some lines that people told me there, including Steve, still echo in my head and my heart. I am still in research, working at NASA Langley now.
Thank you for everything!

Francesca

Attending the 3-day Leadership and Career Development course offered by the Helmholtz Association was an outstanding experience. It was, without doubt, the most professionally enriching course I have taken so far. The content was highly relevant, practical, and thoughtfully designed to address the unique challenges faced by late-stage PhD students. The course has had a significant impact on how I view my future career path and has equipped me with tools and strategies that I can apply immediately. I left the course feeling more confident, motivated, and better prepared for the next steps in my professional journey. I genuinely believe that every research group, team, or principal investigator involved in a funded project should be required to take this training. It would lead to better decision-making, improved efficiency, reduced burnout, and higher overall quality. This course goes far beyond helping you reach your professional goals; the tools and insights shared are equally valuable in everyday life. It's more than just a career workshop—it's a course for life. It offers clarity, direction, and empowerment. For me, it felt like a beacon of hope, showing a path forward in both personal and professional growth.

I still remember our training weeks as intense and a lot of fun. Even more than ten years later, the exercise that has had the biggest lasting impact on me is the timeline map we drew. I still take it out from time to time, and I'm amazed by how many of the stations and wishes have actually come true — whether in terms of family, career level, income, or personal projects.

I've even redrawn it a few times since then, and we created a similar timeline together as a family — which has also turned out to be remarkably accurate.

Thank you for your passion and guidance — it truly made a difference!

Alex

Turning Data into Business Impact | Cloud & Big Data Strategy

Nice you are collecting evidences of the results of the Helmholtz soft-skill courses. I always considered them a valuable addition to the PhD track, I would have maybe even liked to do a couple more trainings back then :)

I still remember the leadership course, in which you all showed us the different types of leaderships, a concept that I have had the chance to use during the last 10y, both to cope with different managers, as well as to manage people.

In my opinion such courses can spark interest in PhD's (who are fully focused on their niche investigation) to explore different realities, maybe outside of the academia.

Regarding my story, I left academia right after the PhD, despite I got two offers for a PostDoc position. But in 2014 I needed to change and focus on the future of my personal life. I have been working in finance since 10+ years now. But 5 years ago I also started my own company which brought me back to physics (I work as an expert of quantum technologies for the European Commission, research centers and a few corporates).

Best regards and greetings to the whole team

Giuseppe

Quantum Business Developer | Tech DD | EIC jury member for emerging techs | Senior ALM specialist

I guess you checked out my LinkedIn profile, so you're up to date anyway on my CV and current activities. Since my PhD I kept working in different international research institutes, still in the field of particle accelerators (in various variations). Since my first position after being a fellow at CERN, I had permanent contracts always.

Regarding the impact of your courses: does it say enough to tell you that I had the poster with the visualisation of my goals still up on the wall until about two years ago? What I loved most about the courses was the opportunity to step out of my daily business and reflect on my core values. I still try to practice that regularly and it helps me to align myself with what happens in live.

I had a few points in my career when I struggled deciding to take a step further or to change the path I was following. Especially in these moments I had a "Mini-Emma" in my ear encouraging me and telling me not be afraid to fail and to trust in myself. The personal talks that we had, helped me to understand that I'm allowed to give space to my own needs and to talk to people about their expectations rather than interpreting their thoughts. Not only in my work-life that helped me a lot - even if I can still improve here ;) I'm so thankful for the time that you invested here for me.

Last but not least, I joined Sascha to give courses myself (more on technical topics) and I love it.

I'm sure I would not have started that without my good experiences with your courses and the deep belief that a good training can seed something that can grow in a person.

I'm still joining courses from time to time myself, keeping the habit to learn and develop myself.

Okay, now I ended up in quite a long email. But anyway, I really wanted to say thank you!!

Janet

I can definitely echo the sentiments expressed by others: your classes have had a significant impact on me personally and have been directly linked to my professional development. One of the most memorable exercises for me was the questionnaire based on the Strength Deployment Inventory (SDI) and its interpretation. This experience was strongly enhanced by the personal feedback loops with you and the other coaches.

On the one hand, it greatly helped me to better understand and improve myself in interactions with individuals and groups. On the other hand, it also significantly improved my ability to understand others—their perspectives and behaviors.

Furthermore, your classes and coaching taught me how to transform self-perceived weaknesses into strengths I can now rely on with confidence.

I can confidently say that your coaching has left a lasting positive impression on me!

Johannes

Senior Product Owner at CARIAD - a Volkswagen Group Company

Even after 12 years I still remember the soft skill courses as the events where I learned to reflect in structured way about how others see me, group dynamics and leadership.

Pascal

Application Development Manager at Asahi Kasei

I knew that I wanted to leave academia and, in this sense, I don't think the soft skills courses had a significant impact on this decision. What they did, however, was offering a forum where speaking openly about career choices was encouraged, as well as giving me the instruments for this transition, this opportunity was tremendously helpful.

If I can summarise what the courses left me (especially B2 and B3), I would group it in these key three areas:

1) reflecting on my skills: how to relate the work and skills developed in a PhD with the stuff the industry is looking for. I would have never landed an interview at BCG without learning how to market my experience and highlight the transferability of my skills. I stayed in consulting for 3.5 years, after which I started looking for a job somewhere else. The approach that I learned at the soft skills courses was useful again, when I had to reflect on my project achievements and on the skills that I developed, and leverage them when applying for a role or during interviews.

2) practice communication: learn to present, create a story, write an effective CV, answer interview questions with the STAR method and many more things.

In my research environment, I tried to do things a bit differently, but things changed for real only when I moved to BCG, where the focus on sharp communication was relentless. I learned a lot during those years in consulting and improved a lot, but it all began with the tiny exercises in the soft skills courses. In addition to that, the interview skills that I learned during the courses proved to be very effective and long-lasting. When I enter an interview, it's normal for me now to do it well prepared and with confidence - and that's in large part thanks to what I learned in the soft skills courses.

3) reflecting on my career: again, I knew I wanted to leave academia, but that still left a whole world of opportunities open! At the soft skills courses I was able to reflect on what was important for me and reflect on how to choose the most appropriate career path.

I recently went into a career break, because I was diagnosed with cancer. A few months ago, when my health had improved to the point of feeling confident in doing some long-term planning, I decided to slowly go back to the job search. I'm still in the process, but I'm doing it in a very systematic way, using, among the other things, the lessons and methods that I learned in the soft skills courses.

Despite the setbacks in the most recent experiences, I still believe that the career planning mindset, that I first learned during the courses and later on with coaching, is a great tool to direct the career towards the most desirable outcome.

I hope this helps! Have a great day,

Tommaso

It's been more than 10 years for me and I have done many courses since then. Here are my reflections on impact:

1. Creating awareness: Softskills are a muscle that is typically not trained for years in traditional university education and in research groups. I have hired so many PhDs, many of them lacked foundational soft skills. Tragically, the people that were most resistant about the courses were the ones most in need.

2. Building self confidence: The courses helped me personally to discover early leadership skills. I did not expect to have these skills and it was great to receive positive confirmation when discovering and practicing them.

I'm still working at the research center where I completed my PhD. Since then, I've taken on a leadership role and currently manage a team of ten people in the field of project management. I'm doing well overall. While I'm no longer working in research directly, I'm still involved in research-related activities. My role focuses on enabling the further development of the FAIR project at GSI through strategic project planning and management.

Looking back, I'd say my career development has worked out quite well. After attending your soft skills course, I continued with additional training, including through the Helmholtz Leadership Academy. For that reason, it's a bit hard for me now to distinguish exactly what I learned with you versus later on - but I do remember that your course sparked my deeper interest in this field.

I believe soft skills training is essential, especially for students in technical or scientific disciplines like physics. Those who are open to it can gain a lot. For me personally, it helped me better understand who I am, what I want, and how to achieve my goals - and I think that journey really started with your course.

Best regards,

Natalya

As promised let me get back to you with a few points concerning the soft skill courses you offered in HGS-HiRe:

*I'm not any longer working in academia, after a few years in consultancy and software development I switched to Commerzbank.

*In retrospect I'd say that the soft skill courses were/ are of great value to my personal and professional development, I started with a senior position in the consultancy; and hiring later myself (I'd say I was „on the other side“ in the hiring process for 20 - 50 colleagues/ applicants) that almost never happened even with a Ph.D

* I remember my first direct boss saying she was always skeptical to MINT laureates in consulting, but conceded I was „not looking on my shoes only“ and „able to talk to customers“.

* Also, I swiftly got promoted to a managerial level. Which I think the soft skill courses contributed to. Though, I continued taking the offered soft skill courses in consultancy as well (which brought me to Yale for a training)

* Working in a quantitative field also in Commerzbank and hiring/ training juniors I sometimes think by myself, I'd have loved applicants/ new hires to have taken the program we had in HGS-HiRe.

Jochen

Since your course, I've been fully in the biotech world. I started out as a project manager at Vakzine Projekt Management, then moved into more senior roles in development and leadership. I later became Chief Development Officer at Memo Therapeutics, leading the development of a monoclonal antibody for transplant patients. Now I'm Chief Operating Officer at Serum Life Science Europe, where I oversee R&D and consulting projects in biologics and vaccines.

Your courses came at a really useful time. It helped me fine-tune how I lead teams and handle complex communication — skills I still draw on regularly.

Gerald

Hello Emma,
the soft skills courses were not only fun, but also helped gaining confidence while talking in front of groups. It increased the awareness of how I affect others, too.
I hope this helps

Bjorn

PL & Data Scientist bei DB Analytics

By the way, it's borderline scary how well-known you two are in the German science community... I was attending a leadership workshop by the DPG, and got into talking to one of the guests of the panel discussion, who is now working for the ministry for education and research. We were chatting about workshops we attended during our PhDs, and she mentioned some great experience she had with "people who used to work for BP", and I instantly knew who she was talking about :Dominic

The courses (and the instructors) were great. Although at the time of the PhD courses order (and online-covid courses) were not allowing to see the most immediate impact. With the time passing, however, the course materials become more and more relevant as you need to interact with increasingly more people, work in more different teams in very different roles. I can say that the lessons learned during the courses, the friendships and the memories made had a really positive and productive impact on my career. I'm still in research (now in France).

Vadim

Accelerator physicist at Synchrotron SOLEIL

Hi Emma!

I don't know if you remember me, I was just one theoretical physics PhD student that talked definitely too much, among the dozens of people that you helped during all these years. But I remember fondly of you and your courses, and I also remember that, even after the end of the courses, you were always available to help me in the next steps of my career: you helped me re-write my CV after I left academia, and also thank to your tips I got my first job in industry.

Let me answer your questions a bit more deeply now.

1) First of all, as I anticipated, I left academia after obtaining my PhD, I came back in Italy searching for a job in industry. Here your courses (and your personal counsel, as I said!) helped me in this difficult transition, and following a lot of strategies on the interviews and CV writing that I learned in your courses I got my first job outside academia!

2) Long term Impacts:

Now I find myself married and changing my third job, after three years in a big IT consulting firm. I am now leaving consulting for a job, still in IT, in an insurance company.

I basically just finished all the selection process, that was honestly the hardest of my life. I went through something like 6 interviews and meetings, including a soft skill assessment center. In these topics especially, in these very weeks, the lessons that I learned at your courses were PRICE-LESS! Especially the parts related to the CV writing, the interviews and the assessment center.

Indeed, I honestly didn't even remember that these assessment centers even existed (it was the first time that I had to do a real one), but reading through my notes of your courses I realized that we had an entire part of those dedicated to this kind of interview! So, I studied all my notes again and, when the assessment started, among all the people there I was the only one that kind of knew what I would have faced, the actual goal behind these tests, and how to behave to maximize the final results!

Another thing that I found extremely useful are the personal feedback that I received from you in a 1 to 1 call, at the end of the course. They were perfectly on point and I tried to apply them in all these interviews and especially in the assessment center.

In the final part of this selection we had a 1 to 1 interview from the soft skills counsellors and there I explained that I was aware of my strength but especially of my weakness, and how I tried (quite successfully I have to say!) to overcome them during both my regular jobs and the assessment. I even cited your courses, saying that they helped me a lot focusing on my weak points and to improve myself during my job. I also showed that I knew and was consciously applying the theory behind the teamwork and leadership that I learnt in your courses, such as the Kantor model, for example.

Needless to say, the feedback that I received was astonishingly positive, and I got the job! I will start this September.

They were particularly impressed by my awareness and how I dealt with my weak points, and they realized that I was consciously and successfully trying to improve myself during all the assessments.

I honestly have to say that I owe a strong part of this particular success to you and your courses, that are constantly helping me become a better person, especially professionally, even after all these years.

So summarizing:

- I applied a lot of theoretical info on Teamwork and Leadership that I learned from your courses into my jobs and the assessment.
- You and your courses helped me overcome a lot of interviews in these years, especially thanks to the career development part.
- Your courses recently helped me overcome a soft skill assessment center with incredibly positive feedback.
- I am more aware of my strong suits, but also of my weakness and I am constantly learning how to improve myself, both in the interviews and in my actual job.

So, again, thank you for everything that you taught me! <3

Lorenzo

Being clear in communicating with different people, expressing your thoughts and being aware in what you excel and where your weaknesses are is important. As I am attending second and third

interviews for candidates in our company, I see a lot of people who never learned that, to the extent that some get aggressive when flaws pointed out. Learning to self-reflect on one's behavior and skillset is a lot more important than boasting or defending abilities.

Also, while during the courses some exercises felt a bit playful, sooner or later everyone will conclude that most teams in most companies sometimes behave childishly on different levels. Not losing focus in this situation but find solutions and keep on working is important and it helps if you have some ideas of the dynamics beforehand.

Of course, three courses of a couple of days each over three years will not substitute for years of experience in the workplace, but for my they were a helpful foundation.

Moritz

Senior Cloud Engineer

Your leadership and communication trainings really had a big impact on my development and supported me to get where I am now.

It helped me to understand more about myself, my strengths and weakness. This still helps me to successfully challenge complicated and complex situations every day.

Andreas

Head of Application C2C - Process Commissioning