

**WHAT KIND OF COMPETENCES ARE SOUGHT BY EMPLOYERS AT THE  
TIME OF CRISIS?**

Irena Stejskalova<sup>1</sup>, Tomas Kincl<sup>1</sup>, Pavel Strach<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Faculty of management, University of Economics in Prague,

Jarosovska 1117, 377 01 Jindrichuv Hradec, Czech Republic

<sup>2</sup>SKODA AUTO University, V. Klementa 869, 293 60. Mlada Boleslav, Czech Republic

**Abstract**

*Competences are important prerequisites for any kind of job. Competences accumulate across a long period of time. Key competences for lifelong education have been suggested even by the European Parliament and EU Council in December 2006. This article provides analysis of a nation-wide survey of desired competences at the time of global economic uncertainty. As such it may assist educators in designing suitable courses and curricula that provide graduates with competitive edge on the labor market.*

**Key words:** *tertiary education, school curriculum, labour market, qualification, competence, graduates*

**1. INTRODUCTION**

The preamble of the decree No. 2008/C 111/01 of the European Parliament opens with the statement, that development and recognition of knowledge, skills and competences of citizens is the key factor for personal development, competitiveness, employment and social cohesion. It reflects previous recommendation No. 2006/962/ES on key abilities for lifelong learning. In case any graduate applies for a job with an employer, it is not just the diploma but his or her individual qualification and competence profile. Graduates, and perhaps even more university graduates, should be able to handle diverse tasks and life situations successfully (Havlová, 2010). Universities do not just provide knowledge and qualifications, they primarily develop competences sought after on the labor market. Universities do not just teach students, they educate them.

The demand for university graduates could be considered in relationship to the overall development of the Czech Republic, in which the tertiary education has been transformed from elite-only to mass accessible educational level over last 20 years. New universities, including private institutions, emerged, traditional ones expanded their offering of degrees, diplomas and fields. However, the Czech Republic has recently faced a demographic backlash with fewer high school graduates. By 2014, the number of university students may decrease by as much as one third (Koucký, 2009).

By then, the capacity of universities will surpass the total of high school graduates. Business schools are in a specific situation: they provide more than a quarter of all university graduates and can be hence affected at large. At the moment, employers view business education as universal with high degree of flexibility and suitability to various jobs.

The survey conducted within the project entitled “FM VŠE - Innovation of the Field of Study and Educational Programmes of the Faculty of Management” focused on identifying typical positions, jobs, and competences which are currently sought after by employers. This could be a significant feedback for universities when establishing future strategies or redesigning study programs (Arcodia et al, 2003; Bennett, 2002; ) The aim of this paper is to discuss the findings and provide the lead for implementation of research outcomes into the business school curricula.

## 2. SURVEY

The survey was conducted from July to September 2009. Job advertisements posted on the largest job portal in the country ([jobdnes.idnes.cz](http://jobdnes.idnes.cz)) were followed and further analyzed. In total, 157 job offers targeted at fresh graduates were gathered. All job postings included in the analysis required at least secondary education and were categorized by educational levels, fields, and required competences.

### 2.1. Education level

Out of 157 job postings, 142 advertisements required tertiary business or unspecified education which is 90 % (see rows in bold). It means that at the time of economic crisis the demand for business related jobs was still relatively strong in comparison to other fields. It may well be that business related jobs are more frequently advertised online than other types of jobs (such as in educational institutions, medicine). However, internet can be seen as a key media for communicating with generally younger audiences.

**Table 1.** Required education level among researched job postings

<b>Demand for education level</b>	<b>Count</b>
<b>Tertiary – business oriented</b>	52
<b>Secondary – business oriented</b>	42
Tertiary - unspecified	21
Secondary or tertiary - unspecified	21
Tertiary – technical, engineering oriented	12
Tertiary – business or technical	6
Secondary or tertiary – business or technical	3
Total	157

### 2.1. Fields in demand

The classification of fields is based on categories utilized by the particular portal. The firms most commonly looked for graduates to fill position in business, economics, and administration (42%). Frequently, job offers were related to positions in management, sales, finance, insurance, accounting, quality control, research and development. The least graduates were sought for jobs with utility companies, in human resources, real estate, public administration and construction. Some of those sectors could have been hit by economic uncertainties at the time of crisis.

The Faculty of Management provides graduates with knowledge, that can cover up to 80% of all analyzed job offerings including the fields of business, economics, administration, management, sales, finance, insurance, accounting, quality control, marketing, advertising, public relations, IT – sales and services, human resource management, and public administration. Hence, there is a good fit between employer requirements and the curricula.

**Table 2.** Required fields among researched job postings

<b>Field</b>	<b>Count</b>
Total	157
<b>Business, economics</b>	48
<b>Administration</b>	18
<b>Management</b>	14
<b>Sales</b>	14
<b>Finance, insurance, accounting</b>	13
<b>Quality control</b>	9
Research and development	9
Manufacturing	7
<b>Marketing, advertising, public relations</b>	5
<b>IT- sales and services</b>	4
Services, personal services, au-pair	4
Engineering	3
Transport and logistics	2
IT - unspecified	2
Utilities	1
<b>Human Resources</b>	1
Realty	1
<b>Public administration</b>	1
Construction	1

Although a lot of graduates enter the workforce with diplomas from business schools, it seems that there is pertaining demand for those graduates and that the labour market could even absorb more fresh blood.

### 2.3. Competences

The following table presents the analysis of key competences sought by potential employers in their job postings. Employers usually categorize their job requirements by the degree to which each

competence is eligibility criteria (condition) or would just provide a candidate with competitive edge (advantageous competences).

The key competence specified by employers was command of English. It would be very difficult for graduates to find placement with knowing English. Other important competences include capabilities of working with information and communication technologies on user level, communication skills, independence, reliability, flexibility, proactive approach, and analytical thinking. More than 10% of analyzed job adverts looked for experience with finance, ability to drive a car, leadership skills, German language, advanced IT skills, sales abilities, planning and strategic thinking.

**Table 3.** Required competences among researched job postings

Competence	Eligibility criteria	Competence is a plus	Total
English language	116	10	126
IT – user level	72	0	72
Communication skills	60	0	60
Independence	49	0	49
Reliability	42	0	42
Flexibility	38	0	38
Proactive approach	34	0	34
Analytical thinking	32	0	32
Experience with finance	30	1	31
Driving license	31	0	31
Leadership	30	0	30
German language	20	7	27
Accounting	25	2	27
IT – advanced level	26	1	27
Sales skills	18	1	19
Planning and strategy	16	1	17
Ability to learn	14	0	14
Other languages	5	4	9
Russian language	3	5	8
Law	6	0	6
French language	1	3	4

2.4. Relationship between competences

Further analysis was directed towards uncovering the most typical combinations of skills (skill sets) requested by employers. The analysis was conducted through data-mining software HUGIN which is based on Bayesian networks. The outcome is presented on the following scheme.

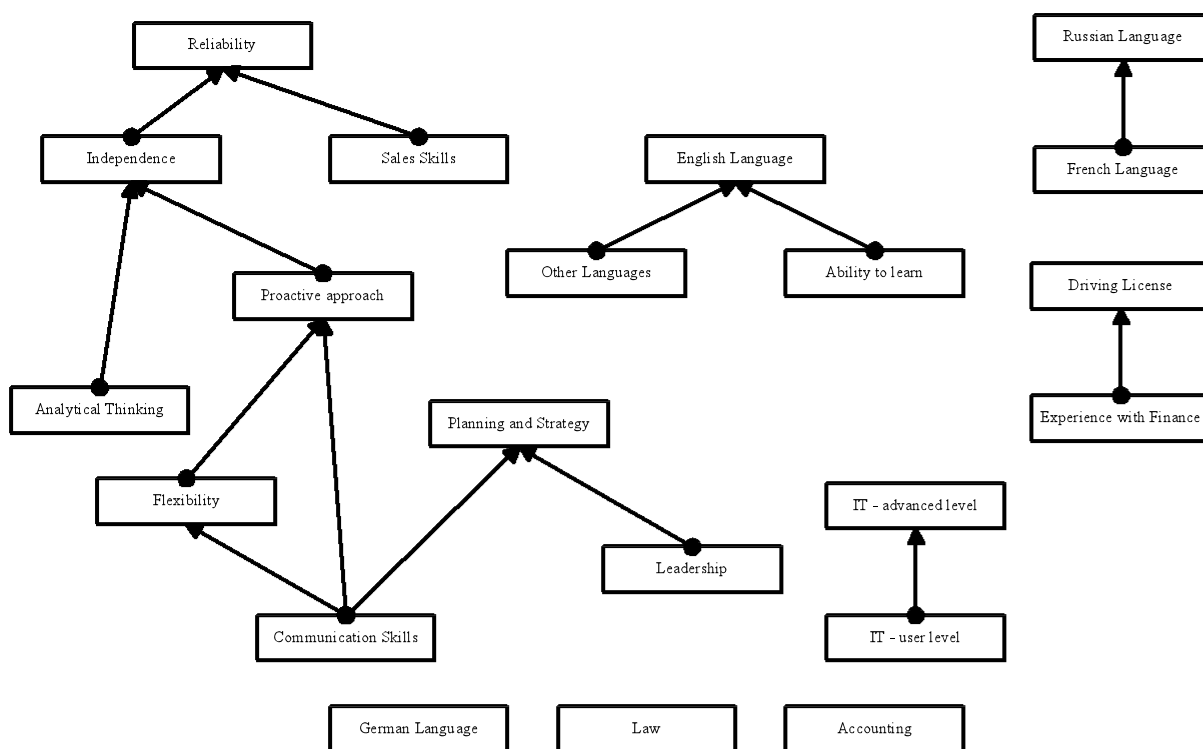


Fig. 1. Relationship between competences

The key interrelated competences are clustered in the upper left corner, connecting reliability, independence, analytical thinking, proactive approach, flexibility, communication skills, planning and strategy, leadership, and sales skills. Most of those skills can be labelled as soft skills which are not necessarily reflected in the usual business school curricula to such a degree (not being the most important subjects or skills thought at business schools). Some of those attributes may even be extremely difficult to include in the curricula. Characteristics such as reliability and proactive approach are hard to teach and learn. It may be even a question whether such attributes may or should be provided on tertiary-education level. The lack of soft skills focus in the current curricula of the Faculty of Management has now been the impetus to redesign the structure of subjects and courses.

3. CONCLUSION

The analysis of employers' demand can be an important source of feedback in relationship to the content and quality of business school curricula. The results indicate lasting interest of employers in business school graduates, although it appears that several key competences may not be explicitly

transformed into learning objectives. Both academia and practitioners could work hand in hand in addressing crucial competence deficiencies in terms of content as well as instruction approach.

Although the study reviewed job postings only for a short period of time and from one particular job portal, it may be regarded as a signal about job market demands at the time of crisis. The results presented in this article serve as a point of departure for subsequent studies. At the moment, the research has been focused on establishing automated processes for gathering and analyzing job postings from multiple resources in order to track ever changing nature of labour markets.

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