

Tomasz Domański



The Impact of MBA Degree on the Progression of Postgraduates' Careers

Case-study of the Polish-French postgraduate MBA programme in Management



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programme in Management**

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Foreword

This monograph aims at highlighting the role of Master of Business Administration (MBA) postgraduate programme in advancing graduates' careers.

The publication is based on findings from original empirical studies designed and conducted by the author on a group of postgraduates of the Polish-French MBA programme in Management (since 2023 referred to as an MBA). This programme is the only one of a kind in Poland, where postgraduates can receive a French Master 2 degree in Management and a Polish certificate confirming the completion of a postgraduate MBA programme. The Polish-French MBA – launched on the initiative of the author of this monograph who has been running the course from its inception – is also the oldest one in Poland as it has been already completed by 32 subsequent postgraduate cohorts (an average of 15–20 students per year).

At the educational level, the course is delivered by an international team of lecturers from the Institut d'Administration des Entreprises (IAE) of the Jean Moulin Lyon 3 University in France in cooperation with the teaching staff from the following academic structures of the University of Lodz (UL): Department of International Marketing and Retailing (Faculty of International and Political Studies), Faculty of Management, Faculty of Economics and Sociology, and many invited external lecturers, also with business practitioners from Poland and other countries. Classes are taught entirely in English (40%) and French (60% – including drafting the diploma thesis), which only confirms the unique and very clear international orientation and exceptional status of the programme.

Empirical studies were carried out separately for two groups of graduates. The first group included graduates from the edition delivered over the Covid-19 era (2020–2022). It consisted of twelve people representing 50% of all students enrolled in this small-scale edition of the MBA programme. All of them held online in-depth interviews and took part in an online survey on the Teams platform. Special attention was paid to the assessment of circumstances, in which online classes were chosen as the best educational format and evaluation of its effectiveness. The study examined

the perception of the unique format of the programme and its impact on the evolution of graduates' careers. The research was carried out between 1 January and 31 August 2024.

The second phase of qualitative study in the form of in-depth interviews took place in Warsaw in December 2024. It consisted in holding seven face-to-face in-depth interviews with the oldest MBA cohorts (who graduated 30 years ago – 4 interviews), graduates from 10 years ago (1 interview), and graduates from the latest editions (one year after graduation – 2 interviews) designed to look at their professional careers. Respondents were selected in a purposive sampling procedure. The interviews were recorded and are stored in the author's archives.

The goal of the study was to learn why the respondents decided to choose the French-Polish MBA programme and what were their individual career motivations. The crucial component of the study was devoted to the evaluation of the attractiveness of the MBA programme to its students and the role MBA played in unlocking their career advancement.

For this MBA programme, the French language and connections with France have been of particular relevance to graduate career goals. Previously, these aspects were not explored in a separate study while they are critical for postgraduate MBA programmes available in Poland taught in French in cooperation with a French partner.

Today, when MBA programmes fiercely compete with one another, universities, but also consumers of educational services, are challenged with the need to find a unique strategic positioning addressed to a carefully selected and profiled narrow group of recipients.

This publication also fits into the latest trends in higher education promoting its internationalisation and digitization and focused primarily on developing online learning formats and internationalization of curricula and student community.¹ Despite numerous studies, we can feel that the discussion on the synergy of both these trends – internationalization and digitization – is still incomplete. Distance learning opens doors for international students to the course. A new educational model also calls for an innovative approach to developing attractive courses that would appeal to students from different countries and successfully integrate the students.

¹ C. Krusekopf, *Internationalisation of Online Learning: A Double Degree Model*, [in:] *The Disruptive Power of Online Education*, eds A. Altmann, B. Ebersberger, C. Mösenlechner, D. Wieser, Emerald Publishing Limited, Bingley 2018, pp. 63–80. <https://doi.org/10.1108/978-1-78754-325-620181005>

Another major goal connected with the above mentioned digitisation and internationalisation trends in education is to evaluate the growth potential of online MBA programmes delivered in an innovative hybrid format (online classes combined with in-person instruction). In addition, everyone is striving to identify the best way to internationalise the programme.

Over more than 30 years of its history, the programme was known under different names and now it is titled: Polish-French MBA Programme in Management. In this monograph we will be using its shorter title: the Polish-French MBA programme.

Today, teaching MBA students poses a serious challenge to both public and private universities. MBA programmes are mainly designed to provide the graduates in courses other than Management or Economics with a compendium of managerial knowledge. Hence, they are primarily intended to prepare graduates in diverse academic courses to work as managers in medium-sized and large enterprises. The second goal of MBA programmes, in particular Executive MBA targeting already experienced managers, is to help them in updating their knowledge and experience with new perspectives and tools. Apart from updating their knowledge, the role and mission of MBA programmes addressed to experienced managers is to establish new relationships with fellow students.

The specificity of MBA programmes lies also in an original approach of each and every university to this course. The openness of MBA format leaves a lot of discretion to universities in developing innovative and marketing tools linked with the strategy of an educational product. An original model of the MBA programme may be attributed first of all to the degree of internationalisation of the programme that depends on the participation of strategic foreign partners, international teaching staff or the sectoral profile of the content. The development of a hybrid educational model that combines in-person and on-line classes can also be seen as an original solution. A unique solution applied in MBA programmes can also consist in seeking to strike a new balance in the structure of students between experienced managers and younger people who aspire to become managers. All these efforts are expected to prepare the participants to the programme to face new challenges, which they can identify in planning and further advancement of their careers.

PART I

CASE STUDY OF THE POST-GRADUATE POLISH-FRENCH MBA PROGRAMME IN MANAGEMENT

1. Student segmentation and factors influencing the choice of postgraduate MBA programmes

In general, MBA programmes offered by Polish universities can be divided into postgraduate MBA programmes – targeting younger students with smaller professional experience – and Executive MBA, MBA programmes for students having longer professional experience.

Offered in cooperation with Lyon 3 University (Institut d'Administration des Entreprises) and the University of Lodz (Department of International Marketing and Retailing – Faculty of International and Political Studies and the Faculty of Management), the programme is a mixed solution addressed to both these groups. In practical terms, it ensures a more heterogeneous profile of students, which can be seen as either an asset or a weakness depending on who you ask. Those who run the programme see age heterogeneity of students in combination with the diversity of their professional experience as an asset. The trait linking all the students is a strong international orientation and fluency in French and English.

Since the programme is designed to be taught in French and in English, the group of candidates potentially targeted by this educational offer is rather narrow. Today, French is not spoken by a wider audience in Poland. Thus, one may conclude that this is an elite offer of limited scope as those interested in studying management at a postgraduate level are relatively little fluent in French. Yet, students of this MBA programme receive a French master of management degree (*diplôme national*) and good command of French is a precondition to enrol. On the other hand, good command of English is an additional requirement in the recruitment process because apart from 60% of classes delivered in French, the remaining 40% are taught in English. The diploma work, which is also the master thesis for the French degree, is written in French. The final master degree exam is also taken in French before a mixed French-Polish jury.

For such an MBA course, fluency in French combined with degrees of the students and their professional experience in corporate management are the key segmentation criteria for students' cohort. The latter can be broken down, first of all, by the degree profile. The principal dividing line runs between two groups: MBA students with degrees in languages and graduates in university courses other than linguistics. The group of linguists was primarily made up

of graduates in French studies and applied linguistics with French as their primary language. The principal motivation to this group was the wish to complement their purely linguistic skills with management knowledge.

Among the non-linguist group, one can find graduates in courses such as engineering, economics, sociology, medicine, agriculture, and even art. All of them have a unique pool of specialist knowledge in diverse fields but they lack expertise in management. Their command of French and English also allows them to get a rather good picture of international affairs. Many of them speak other foreign languages which makes them potential candidates to work in international business.

For the purpose of this research, graduates of postgraduate studies were divided into five segments based on their primary educational profile, as well as professional experience and the country of origin. Given the qualitative nature of the research, purposeful sampling was used to select respondents for in-depth interviews. This procedure guaranteed an appropriate profile of representatives of the different segments.

1.1. Segment 1 – graduates in language studies, mainly Romance Studies, with short professional experience in business

The segment included graduates in linguistic studies, in particular of French studies. For students from this segment, the Polish-French MBA is primarily a way to acquire necessary managerial knowledge and an effective tool to find a new professional path. The structure of this segment complies with the philosophy behind such studies in France where they are addressed mainly to people without a degree in economics as an opportunity to acquire missing managerial knowledge.

Due to strong competition in the labour market, students and graduates in language studies rather quickly come to realise that foreign language/languages of their choice are just communication tools in international business contexts. To have a successful corporate career they need a solid foundation of managerial knowledge. Most students become aware of labour market challenges already during their earlier studies upon securing their first part-time corporate jobs as undergraduates.

In the Polish context – given the rapid pace of business internationalisation and a powerful upswing in the sector of outsourcing services – foreign businesses exhibit a very high demand for people able to speak foreign languages. This demand comes mainly from international outsourcing businesses running

service centres for customers from outside of Poland. Most graduates in language studies start their corporate careers in such centres only to realise two or three years later that continuing on this path requires a postgraduate degree.

To graduates in language studies with at least two years of international corporate experience, postgraduate studies offer an opportunity for fast-track promotion or serve as a springboard to a better-paid and more interesting job requiring more managerial responsibility.

Young graduates in Romance Studies with little professional experience, sometimes only with a bachelor's degree, who need to quickly supplement their language skills with management knowledge are increasingly more visible in the segment of students with linguistic background. In line with regulations governing postgraduate studies in Poland, people with a bachelor's degree may formally apply for admission to MBA programmes. The specificity of the Polish-French MBA programme requires of them a minimum of 2–3 years of professional experience. The same minimum professional experience is also required of candidates for other MBA programmes in Poland.

Given that most applicants to postgraduate programmes are working while studying, the above condition is not difficult to meet. This segment is highly dynamic because candidates from this group are active not only as employees but also often as independent service providers in the service sector (e.g., educational services) still at university.

Thus, we have a very dynamic segment of people strongly oriented to accomplish specific professional and financial goals. They hold a bachelor's degree and have an intense short-term corporate experience gained in international companies operating in Poland or overseas.

The distinctive features of this segment include: a powerful international orientation, ability to work in multinational environments, high international mobility manifesting itself in availability for overseas assignments (also while studying), high ambitions and career aspirations stemming from comparing one's position and professional achievements with those of one's peers in other countries, readiness to embrace new knowledge and awareness of the importance of self-development and gaining certified knowledge in a competitive field.

This segment brings together many extremely active and ambitious people who proactively manage their careers and attach a lot of attention to its dynamic development. They are young people, between 23 and 28 years of age, strongly focused on their self-development and willing to benefit from various forms of postgraduate and professional education (e.g., IT literacy certificates). Apparently, students in this segment are very much focused on accomplishing

their specific career and financial objectives. At the same time, they show some impatience in achieving the latter.

In-depth interviews allowed us to learn about motivations driving some students from this segment.

A young (23) graduate in Romance Studies at the Jagiellonian University determined to move abroad for work. While pursuing her postgraduate studies online, as a student of a French University, she could easily complete her internship with an international company in Paris. Thus, she could get first-hand experience of living and working in Paris. Time spent in the French capital also helped in crystallising plans for the future when she wanted to continue working in France but for a different, more attractive international company. The status of an MBA student at a French University opens up many doors abroad and is an opportunity to acquire new experience (preferential student internships).

*The completion of this MBA programme has improved my availability to move abroad for work. Currently, I work in digital marketing in Paris with a German company that cooperated with Google Ad. I am in touch with colleagues from various regions of the world who work with me in different markets. When I move back to Poland from France, I am confident that experience gained in an international setting will be beneficial to my future career. In France I can work online but I go to the office every day because I like working in an international team.*¹

The above-quoted postgraduate represents a new generation of postgraduate students well aware of what they need to be ready to work abroad. They see this work as a stage in acquiring experience in a multinational business setting. Looking for a job with a multinational corporation using modern technologies in international marketing communication in the French and Polish markets is their natural next step.

A graduate in Romance Studies at the University of Lodz – a young entrepreneur (25) with managerial ambitions. Already as a fifth-year student of Romance Studies and an owner of a language teaching business (mainly French and Spanish), he enrolled in the postgraduate programme. A highly dynamic, independent person exhibiting strong managerial skills. He is one of those graduates in Romance Studies who see postgraduate programmes as an opportunity for fast personal and professional growth. Being a mobile person, he spent two years in France. After the graduation and a one-year internship with a global multinational company in Poland, he is increasingly more

¹ Quotations come from in-depth interviews conducted by the author. These interviews were recorded and are stored in the author's archive.

inclined to permanently move abroad for work. Working with a big multinational corporation suits him as it is an excellent opportunity to speak foreign languages every day. He is very much committed to work abroad and he is working hard to be well prepared for this. In ambitious persons like him, MBA studies often trigger high financial expectations. Working in a multinational corporate environment alongside older managers, less skilful in modern technologies, enhances his hopes for a quick promotion.

My choice of this course was dictated by the reputation of both universities, Polish and French. These studies also fitted into my profile of someone who studied abroad. At the start of my MBA, I was already running a small foreign language teaching business. I wanted to quickly acquire necessary knowledge in economics and law to be prepared to work with a multinational business in Poland or abroad. To me foreign languages are just communication tools. I also felt urged to advance my self-development.

A graduate in Romance studies from the University of Lodz – a young woman with ambitions to work as a manager for multinational corporations. She has been holding an administrative position in an international consulting business for two years but wishes to become a manager in a multinational company based in Poland or abroad. Her ultimate goal is working with a multinational company. Apart from completing the postgraduate programme, she learns foreign languages, including Korean as she plans to work for a Korean company investing in Poland or in South Korea with a business involved with the European markets. She is one of a new wave of graduates in language studies looking for jobs strongly internationally-oriented in Poland and abroad.

I picked this MBA programme because my colleague from Romance studies recommended it as a very good choice, worth making and future-oriented, taught by friendly professors. She also said it was not easy but surely worth studying.

It took me 18 months to make a decision also because I wanted to accumulate funds to pay for this MBA course. At that time, I was at the beginning of my professional career and my financial position was not very strong. Additional motivation for studying came from the recruitment interview which left me with a very positive impression.

My previous experience with the University of Lodz as a student of Romance Studies was very good so I knew it had a strong reputation in the field of education and I felt pretty sure about my choice of the programme.

Statements of graduates from this segment show a clear trend of rising demand among graduates in language studies for postgraduate programmes.

Increasingly more often, having completed their 1st degree (bachelor) courses, they start looking for diverse forms of postgraduate education or continue with the 2nd degree (master) programmes in fields other than languages. The development of different forms of interdisciplinary education that bring together language studies and business (linguistics in business, etc.) is also remarkable.

1.2. Segment 2 – graduates in language studies with longer prior career in business

This group includes individuals with a degree in languages. They have usually completed studies in Romance languages or other fields of linguistics and typically have 7–10 years of professional experience in various French or international companies. For this category of students, postgraduate studies are primarily an opportunity to acquire new managerial knowledge or update the knowledge gained during their professional practice. In addition to supplementing their managerial knowledge, their goal is also to obtain a specific management degree that will validate their aspirations for promotion to managerial positions in foreign companies operating in Poland and abroad.

Students from this category perceive a degree in Management Studies as a powerful argument expressing their career ambitions in the current workplace or an incentive for seeking a new job. What they need the most is a formal confirmation of managerial background as large multinational corporations have very formal promotion schemes and require the candidates to meet specific criteria.

Students from this group are fully aware that having no MBA degree will be the major barrier in planning their future career.

A graduate in French Studies (Jagiellonian University) – 10-year experience in business; no degree in management.

I graduated in French Studies from the Jagiellonian University in Krakow and began my postgraduate studies in Łódź 10 years later. After completing my master degree, I moved to Warsaw, where I immediately joined the tourism industry. In the meantime, I also completed another postgraduate programme at the Warsaw School of Economics (a one-year programme in purchasing management). Your MBA-type postgraduate programme came to me via Facebook. I knew that it was not a classic MBA degree, but an MBA-type postgraduate programme with the possibility of obtaining two degrees, including a French Master MAE degree, and that was the most important thing for me.

The above statement is typical of students with excellent command in French and experience gathered over many years of working for international corporations, very often French ones. However, when planning further careers they come to realise that managerial knowledge officially confirmed with a 2nd degree, MBA-type or MBA degree is insufficient. These people especially appreciate the perspective of obtaining a French degree in Management (Master 2).

What surprised me was the composition of the cohort, as this was not a typical Executive MBA programme dominated by participants with extensive professional experience. Here, we were dealing with two distinct groups: on the one hand, a group of experienced participants, and on the other, a group of young, less experienced newcomers, including international students. We, the more experienced ones, formed a team consisting of people with solid professional experience; in this way, we balanced out the diversity of the entire student cohort.

Here, we can observe a tendency typical of this student cohort: they expect programme organisers to ensure more homogenous groups of participants aged 35–40 with similar experience and professional backtrack career. They are also more sceptical about learning together with younger and less experienced students.

In the case of the discussed programme, the heterogeneous structure of the student group is intentional and seen by the organisers as an advantage of this educational approach, as it allows people with different professional profiles and business experience to get to know each other. The heterogeneous structure of the group is also a result of the recruitment process. Interest in the proposed programme format is signalled both by more mature individuals with longer business experience and a good command of French, as well as by younger individuals with shorter business experience who are looking for a faster path to professional advancement.

To participants from this group, being part of an MBA programme often leads to fostering their position in the eyes of their superiors, collaborators, and business partners of the company for which they currently work. They seek additional arguments that would enhance their inner belief about being able to better comply with the expectations of their superiors and collaborators.

A graduate in Romance studies with extensive work experience – many years in business, over 10 years working for an international company.

I decided to enrol in this postgraduate programme even though right now I am not looking for a new job. To me this programme is an important investment for the future. My company was pleased when they found out about it, but they did not provide any financial support. I had already been promoted in my company,

and I believed that choosing these studies would further enhance my credibility within the company. My manager is very happy with this decision, and the company is interested in me sharing the knowledge I have gained during my studies with other employees. Before defending my thesis, I was invited to participate in an internal know-how transfer to share the knowledge I had acquired with other employees of the company as part of a series of internal training sessions.

Paradoxically, under such circumstances, my prior promotion was decisive for the choice of the programme as I felt that in my new managerial position I would need broader knowledge which I did not have and wanted to acquire very quickly.

The above statement is a good illustration of how useful an MBA programme can be for building one's professional career. In this particular case, joining the programme was the effect of an anticipated necessity to acquire new knowledge suitable for the position to which our student was previously promoted. This is an example of looking at postgraduate studies as a tool assisting the students in their professional advancement. It also manifests an extremely responsible approach to new managerial challenges and serves as a positive example of self-assessment of training needs and knowledge required to perform specific tasks. This statement shows the student readiness to invest in her development for the benefit of the company, even though the employer offered no financial support to her.

1.3. Segment 3 – holders of a degree in languages and longer experience in sectors other than business

Examination of this cohort of participants shows that interest in managerial studies is also exhibited by quite a large proportion of people employed in other non-business sectors. The latter include public administration, local authorities, secondary or tertiary education, non-profit organisations, such as associations or foundations, and the healthcare sector.

This group typically comprises people aged 40–45 who are taking stock of their professional careers to date and view postgraduate studies as a potential catalyst – or even a 'last chance' – to make radical changes or adjustments to their careers. They view participation in the programme as a time for reflection and reassessment of their professional path to date. The outcome of this process may be either the initiation of certain entrepreneurial activities or a radical change in their existing career path.

Given the specific profile of the Polish-French MBA programme, which requires the participants to be fluent in French, the student cohort includes also teachers of French who at some point of their career have come to contemplate entering potential, but still feasible, new career paths.

A graduate in Romance Studies (University of Lodz) – teacher of French at a secondary school with ca. 15 years of experience

*I was a very active teacher with a lot of initiative. I promoted international student exchanges and various forms of volunteering, but I had never worked in the business sector before. **The pandemic proved to be the catalyst for me to go back to the university;**² we were confined to our homes for nearly six months and I found it very hard to cope with. Then, the education sector also faced the problem of a decline in the number of pupils wanting to learn French. Under these circumstances, the fear of potentially losing my permanent job at school (due to the closure of many French classes) loomed large in my mind. The crisis that emerged at that time became, at the same time, an impetus for me to take action.*

*A colleague of mine who worked for the programme suggested that I take up these postgraduate studies. It was intended as an extra safety net for the future, a ‘**fallback option**’.*

At the same time, I had personally matured enough to take on new challenges and not remain stuck in one place forever (a teacher at a secondary school). Due to the pandemic, an MBA postgraduate programme came along at just the right time. Had it not been for the pandemic, I would certainly have been pursuing other areas and would not have had enough time to study. The pandemic turned out to be the right moment, and I had to be able to make the most of it.

***I was looking for a change and something new in my career.** As I did not know anything about the programme, I was afraid whether I would be able to cope with it successfully. However, at the same time I discovered that I had already used many of the skills and competences developed through the course in my work as a school teacher.*

The above statement of our postgraduate is very typical of the MBA programme students during the Covid-19 pandemic, which paradoxically unleashed a lot of positive energy and the will to act in many of our students. Without the threat posed by the pandemic such mobilisation would not have been possible. To this student cohort, the pandemic acted as a positive incentive that not only inspired them to act but almost forced out action. The online format surely allowed them to study.

*After completing the programme, I didn’t leave the school. For the time being, I’m continuing with my previous job, but I’m also working in two new roles (at the Faculty of Philology of the University of Lodz and as a member of the examination board). **Now, having completed these studies, I feel completely different;***

² Text bolded by the author.

I am more than just a teacher. I have undergone an inner transformation and gained a different perspective on many things. I have broadened the scope of my activities. I feel competent and have greater self-confidence.

This comment clearly shows that, for most students, postgraduate studies act as a catalyst for certain processes and contribute to the candidate's personal transformation. The outcome of this transformation need not necessarily be an immediate change of job, but could, for example, involve broadening the scope of one's activities and fostering managerial or entrepreneurial attitudes. As the quoted statement suggests: postgraduate studies trigger a range of new initiatives in postgraduates and strengthen their self-esteem and readiness to take on new entrepreneurial and managerial challenges, including in non-business areas.

1.4. Segment 4 – holders of a non-language degree and a longer professional experience

People in this segment are the natural target audience for this type of programme, which has always been, and continues to be, designed to complement basic education in management. In Poland – given that the programme is taught in two foreign languages – it is also of interest to candidates who have previously gained an understanding of management but undertook their studies in different circumstances and exclusively in Polish. Studying in French and English offers them a unique opportunity to work in international corporations and within international teams.

The above is particularly true of Polish MBA students (aged 40–50), to whom speaking a foreign language on a daily basis may be a completely new experience. Studying management in foreign languages to people holding non-language degrees is very inspiring when it comes to planning their further career in an international environment.

In the case of student cohorts with a heterogeneous internal structure, we often find ourselves dealing with individuals who are able to adapt to an international environment to varying degrees. The heterogeneous educational model, deliberately chosen for this postgraduate programme, is based on the assumption that each cohort will comprise students from two groups: a younger (less experienced) group and an older (more experienced) group.

This bipolar structure is regarded by the programme's managers as an asset, as it provides an opportunity for mutual learning, although the group of students with longer backtrack career may sometimes be reluctant to take advantage of this opportunity.

It seems that, given the current trend towards the computerisation of many managerial functions and the integration of artificial intelligence into business management processes, this mix of participants in the programme could serve as a positive distinguishing feature and a source of competitive advantage. This is because we are dealing here with a new group dynamic that has the potential to become a highly inspiring factor for the functioning of businesses undergoing technological transformation.

Younger students perceive the diversified internal structure of the participants cohort as positive.

Younger participants may sometimes lack some knowledge, but I am sure that we have also something to share with older colleagues, e.g., young people perspective and our fresh view on different things. We represent diverse fields of business. Older people also can learn something from young people familiar with new, innovative sectors and vice versa (a young graduate in Romance Studies and a postgraduate programme in French law at the Jagiellonian University who works in an international company dealing with digital marketing in Paris).

It seems that younger students are far more open to the process of mutual exchange of knowledge and perspectives on business management issues and tools than their more mature counterparts, who sometimes fail to recognise the benefits of such exchanges. For mature students, the exchange of knowledge between those with a degree in management and those with a different educational background (e.g. law or engineering) is also very important. This is evidenced by the following statement from one of the postgraduates.

I chose this course because it wasn't a law degree. I also work with businesses, as I deal with entrepreneurs and company managers on a daily basis. I wanted to learn about the specifics of management and how financial matters are analysed. I wanted to gain this knowledge so that I could advise business clients more effectively and better understand their needs (a law graduate with 10 years' experience in business – a law firm).

The above quoted postgraduate is an enthusiast of lifelong learning and represents employees who regularly enrol in postgraduate programmes.

Previously, I graduated from several postgraduate courses offered by, e.g., the School of French Law at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków run in cooperation with Orleans University in France; School of American Law at the University of Warsaw; and a course in competition law. But I was still lacking managerial knowledge and therefore I chose this programme, which also has a strong international orientation (a graduate of law faculty).

This segment also includes graduates of management courses taught in Polish in a traditional format be it at technical or classic universities. A graduate in management course taught in Polish at the Lodz University of Technology for 10 years holding a managerial position at an international company is an example of such previous path.

I chose this course as I wanted to update my general managerial knowledge. The wish to study in French was the effect of my experience of joining a French manufacturing company Hutchinson immediately after graduation. The company's director at the time – a Frenchman – organised morning French lessons for us; two graduates of that course were already working there at the time, and I had the opportunity to meet them. These lessons took place in the morning before work began, at 7.00 or 7.30. It was generally rather inconvenient, and over time most of the students dropped out, leaving me on my own. Due to the small number of participants, the French course was later discontinued. I was employed at Hutchinson for about 2–3 years, and after that I no longer worked for French companies, as I wanted to specialise in finance and accounting.

After that I worked in several international companies; my choices depended on the responsibilities and remuneration. Foreign companies offer corporate culture and work organisation different than the Polish ones. They have standards and procedures that need to be observed and everything is put in order.

Later on, I taught myself a bit of French, and I wanted to take it up again. I knew that if I was going to study in French, I would have to put in a lot of effort. My interest in French stemmed entirely from my inner motivation. I felt it would be a shame to let the language go to waste and didn't want to lose the opportunity to use it. So I looked for a course of study that would motivate me to learn French. A Polish-French management degree seemed to me the most suitable way to achieve both my managerial and linguistic goals.

*I learnt about these postgraduate studies almost 20 years ago when I worked for Hutchinson, but at that time my knowledge of French was not sufficient so I had to postpone these plans (**a graduate in Management from the Lodz University of Technology looking for a French programme in management**).*

The comments of this graduate in management from a Polish technical university show that, for students with prior formal management training, postgraduate studies in foreign languages – with an emphasis on French – are an excellent way to improve their language skills and, consequently, to better prepare themselves for working in an international environment. Graduates of programmes originally offered exclusively in Polish have the opportunity, at a more mature age, to prepare themselves for a managerial role in a foreign company – one operating in an increasingly international environment.

1.5. Segment 5 – foreigners working in Poland with connection to France or French language

This segment comprises students from France working in French or international companies in Poland and students from French-speaking countries who work in Poland (Belgium, Canada, Switzerland or some African countries: Morocco, Senegal, Algeria, Tunisia, Kongo, Cameroon, Ivory Coast, etc.).

This cohort also includes students from non-French-speaking countries – e.g., Ukraine or Bulgaria – living in Poland and working in French or international companies. In international outsourcing companies they usually work with French-speaking customers or suppliers from the French-speaking countries. Given the limited availability of postgraduate programmes taught in French, our offer is unique among all MBA courses offered in Poland.

Generally speaking, all individuals in this segment are interested in obtaining a French management qualification that would enable them to apply for managerial positions in multinational corporations or French companies. The number of such candidates is steadily increasing due to the internationalisation of the Polish market and the growing presence of representatives from various French-speaking countries among foreign workers employed in Poland.

The growing presence of international outsourcing companies in the Polish market induces the influx of graduates of 1st degree studies from French-speaking African countries (Morocco, Tunisia, Senegal, Kongo, Ivory Coast, Cameroon, Guinea, etc.), who often apply for jobs in these companies when there is a shortage of Poles to fill these vacancies. At the same time, we observe an increasing number of French interested in building their careers in French or international companies in Poland. For French students Master 2 studies are an attractive opportunity to obtain a French degree in Poland.

This form of study is particularly important for French nationals living and working in Poland. These individuals did not previously hold a French master's degree in management, which is now a formal requirement for applying for senior management positions. The ability to combine learning with work is a major advantage here. An example of this strategy is a French national working in Poland with a bachelor's degree and extensive professional experience, for whom a master's degree enabled rapid promotion within an international company.

These studies allowed me to apply for a more attractive and better paid managerial job in a competitive international company from the medical industry.

A similar opinion was expressed by a student from Belgium, to whom obtaining a master MBA degree became a springboard to applying for a managerial

position in Poland and then in his country Belgium where he returned after graduation. When it comes to foreigners, we need to stress that they usually have family links with Poland (spouses, partners).

Today, we can observe a new phenomenon of choosing such courses by experienced French employees who need a formal diploma from a university to confirm their professional competencies.

For experienced professionals, particularly French nationals, the MBA programme taught in French offers an excellent opportunity to refresh their theoretical knowledge through interaction with academic staff from French and Polish universities. Another advantage of the programme is its greater affordability, due to the fact that it is offered by a Polish public university.

In addition, among foreign students we should also mention people originating from the French-speaking countries working in Poland in international companies, often from the outsourcing industry, to whom a French degree in management and a Polish MBA diploma open the doors to applying for higher managerial positions.

The policy pursued by the course organisers is very consistent as only candidates working in international companies in Poland and aspiring to senior roles are admitted to the course.

2. International MBA programme: an opportunity for promotion or finding a new job

When analysing students' motivation for choosing an international MBA programme, it is important to emphasise the role such a programme plays in shaping each student's future career path. Choosing this form of study is usually a well-considered and well-planned strategic decision. Given the adopted model of studying at weekends over a period of 18 months, the decision to participate in this type of programme requires students to be good at balancing their professional and private lives with a cycle of academic classes delivered in a hybrid format (online classes plus several on-site sessions at the university).

Students who decide to enrol in this programme are aware of the time commitment required to complete their studies. When assessing students' motivations for choosing this mode of study, **three main career paths** can be identified, linked to the prospect of obtaining a Master's 2 and an MBA degree.

2.1. Promotion at the current place of employment

The first model assumes that the graduate will continue working at their current place of employment, with the hope of a swift promotion or an expansion of their responsibilities. This model meets the expectations of that group of graduates who are generally satisfied with their current workplace. This group often includes employees of companies that value their staff's commitment to professional development and self-improvement. Those in the most advantageous position here are people whose postgraduate studies are actively supported by their employers. This applies not only to the purely human aspect, but also to the financial aspect, involving the partial or full funding of the study costs incurred by the employee. Currently in Poland, we are increasingly dealing with employers pursuing active policies in the field of co-financing external training. This is part of a broader policy of rewarding employees and recognizing their contribution to the company's development.

In line with adopted assumptions, all diploma theses written under the MBA programme should focus on solving significant problems of the company in which the MBA student is employed. In an optimal situation for the student and for the company in which he works, an issue to be examined in the

diploma thesis should be selected together by the two parties. Unfortunately, currently, we still lack such optimal cooperation. Students do not always inform their companies about taking up postgraduate studies, not to mention determining the subject of the diploma thesis together.

Apparently, cases of harmonious collaboration between the parties are still rare. Usually employees inform about being part of the course when they plan carrying out empirical research among company staff which they need for the diploma thesis as conducting such internal research on company employees requires employer's prior consent. The same procedure is performed for external research among company's customers, suppliers or other businesses, including the competitors. Success of all these activities relies on transparent relationship of the parties.

What is positive about students' participation in MBA programme is the increasing willingness to share the findings of research conducted for their diploma work within their company, which helps to build a positive image of the postgraduate within that company and strengthen their position.

Most students satisfied with working for an international company in Poland, see the company as an opportunity to stabilize their careers. International MBA programme prepares the students to smoothly adapt to international business contexts. Students of such courses very much appreciate working in international settings.

I have always been more interested in working for a foreign company than for a Polish one. In my work, I value the opportunity to interact with people from other countries and to improve my French and my command of the language in everyday situations. I am keen to build relationships with the people I work with and to expand my international network of contacts. I enjoy working with people from an international background and feel at home in such an environment **(a graduate in Romance Studies with three years' business experience; employed by a global corporation).**

One can see here both the influence of his earlier language studies (a fascination with perfecting his command of a chosen foreign language – in this case, French) and the significance of his second Master's degree in International Economic Relations, which has broadened his openness to international contacts. It seems that the specificity of an international MBA programme delivered in foreign languages naturally attracts those interested in international business relations. These individuals have always been interested in such contacts and are well-prepared to develop them further. It can therefore be argued that, generally speaking, this programme attracts people who are more open to the international environment in its various dimensions and who feel comfortable working in international teams.

It seems that professional progression within the company where a student is currently employed is becoming an increasingly common model resulting from employees' desire of stability within a familiar environment. This model is, of course, better suited to the profile of more experienced employees with longer professional career (5–10 years), who value the quality of their workplace and the prospects for career progression. Postgraduate MBA programmes are designed to strengthen an employee's position within the company, both in relation to their superiors and colleagues, as well as the company's business partners.

This model is increasingly more practised by students working in international corporations and planning continuation of their career paths with these usually attractive employers with strong position in the local as well as international labour market. Under increasing deficit of employees, the model stands good chances of proliferation as both parties should be interested in stabilising employment relations.

2.2. Changing the place of employment in Poland

The second approach adopted by students is to view the programme and the qualifications obtained as an important means of changing jobs within the Polish labour market. This is usually linked to the search for more financially attractive jobs, which may also involve a need to relocate and greater mobility. This model is most commonly adopted by younger people (aged 25–30) with less professional experience, who are free from family commitments and are therefore more mobile.

Completing the programme and obtaining two international degrees is usually a strong selling point for postgraduate students when negotiating with a prospective employer. For many employers or external recruitment agencies, the mere fact of having started an MBA programme is sufficient to offer students attractive and career-developing roles.

Generally, however, the process of changing jobs is linked to obtaining an MBA and taking on new challenges in the job market.

After completing my MBA, I wanted to start working in a corporation, even though I don't like corporations. Thanks to my excellent command of French, I quickly landed a good position. In the future, I want to be a Customer Manager. I'm also thinking of Denmark as my new place to work and live in a few years' time. My girlfriend used to live in Copenhagen; she is a Danish-Polish woman. It is a very tolerant, stable and open country. I believe in full assimilation. I want to learn Danish, because speaking Danish is a requirement for any job in Denmark. You have to be there in person, as employers prefer candidates who are based locally.

My current role at Google is a major asset in my future plans. I take part in high-quality, in-depth, expensive internal training courses. I have professional qualifications in IT (cloud certificates). I enjoy what I am doing and don't wake up with a headache thinking that I must go to work. I mainly work online from home, as I'm involved in meetings where I sell offers. For me, there's a client and a customer. As a young employee from Poland, I wasn't very well received at first, but that's all in the past now. There are great opportunities for development in my job. This job is a springboard to further promotions.

*All account managers are based abroad; the ceiling of PLN 12,000 net in Poland is unattainable for **non-technical staff** (often PLN 10,000). In Poland, non-technical staff are still undervalued; abroad, an Account Manager's salary is €7,000–8,000, which is not the case in Poland (B2B Customer Manager) **(a young MBA graduate, with a degree in languages, highly mobile)**.*

When listening to the opinion of this young and very mobile graduate with a degree in languages one needs to note that an MBA diploma obtained at an early stage of one's professional career serves as a powerful catalyst for the career path in large corporations; in many people it also generates expectations for fast-track promotion and high remuneration linked to it. This graduate is very mobile, immediately after graduation he moved from Łódź to Gdansk to join a global corporation. He also exemplifies a new generation of graduates very much focused on professional and financial goals.

The model involving the change of the place of employment may currently be increasingly more true of female employees as the change does not have to automatically imply moving to a different city. Nowadays, working remotely is gaining in popularity and allows people to work in a remote place without having to make radical changes of residence. The above is confirmed by a more mature MBA graduate holding a degree in law.

*I found a new job right after graduation driven not exclusively by the profile of my studies but also by other circumstances. When looking for a new job, I was part of a number of recruitment procedures and I can say for sure that having this degree was generally received with quite a lot of interest. It was especially important when I was interviewed by non-lawyers. People from recruitment agencies wanted to learn why I completed the course. I am confident that it is appreciated that having a degree in law I acquired additional managerial competences **(a lawyer, completed three postgraduate programmes in law, 10 years of experience in a law firm rendering services to the business sector)**.*

2.3. Taking up employment abroad

Professional career path including a plan to take up employment abroad features to a different degree in selected groups of students. This option relies on receiving a French degree Master 2 Administration et Gestion des Entreprises. Fully recognised in the French labour market, the French degree opens the door to applying for a job outside of Poland.

2.3.1. Option for young graduates in language studies

Young students, aged 23–26 see temporary or permanent overseas employment as a natural component of their personal professional career. People from this group with a degree in languages master their fluency in a selected foreign language and maintain high mobility acquired as undergraduate students. For them, obtaining a French degree is a natural step giving access to a new labour market. They increasingly more often take up employment abroad even before graduation. A blended-learning format combined with university classes held on the weekend allows young students without family obligations to harmoniously mix an MBA programme in Poland with working and living abroad. Every year we observe a gradual increase in the number of students who choose a combination of working abroad with online learning in a blended-learning formula. The phenomenon became very popular in the post-pandemic period when working remotely proliferated in many companies.

Among students graduated in the academic year 2022/2023 there were 4 students, Poles working permanently in France and studying in Poland.

According to a graduate of the course of 2023: *The completion of the programme has clearly enhanced my readiness to work abroad. I worked in Paris before and now I continue working there in an international company. I also took an extra course in digital marketing and I work in this area in a German company collaborating with Google Ads.*

For graduates not planning working abroad immediately after an MBA course having a French degree opens up such opportunity for the future.

Right now I do not aspire to working abroad but with the experience that I have and with my educational background I could easily find a job overseas (a graduate in Romance Studies, 28 years of age with 3 years of experience in business).

The opinion of the Polish postgraduate suggests that for many people working in Poland for an international corporation seems like a very good option but due to the international profile of the MBA programme working overseas also becomes a viable option.

*I would like to work abroad in the future. Experience gained overseas would work as valuable input into building my further career in Poland or abroad. I am open to receiving offers from other countries and do not confine my plans to the French market. Currently I am learning Korean at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. For 3 years I have been working with a native speaker during online courses organised by the Korean Language Department of the University in Poznań in cooperation with the Institute in Seoul. I know that in Lower Silesia and in Wrocław there are many investment projects carried out in cooperation with Koreans. I am constantly seeking new opportunities (defence and energy industry). I have successfully passed the screening phase in a Korean company and I know that Koreans like diplomas (documents) **(an MBA graduate with a degree in linguistics in business, determined to work in an international setting with 2 years of experience in a consulting business).***

*Previously, I spent 2 years in France. After a year of working in Poland, having completed the MBA programme, I am increasingly more often contemplating looking for a job abroad. Foreign languages are no problem to me, neither is working abroad. The economic situation in Poland is not favourable for young people. Buying a flat is not easy, I also do not trust politicians. I think of moving to Scandinavia, to Denmark as the situation there is much more stable. For 2 years I have been working for a large multinational corporation (Google Cloud) in Poland and I realised that there is a kind of glass ceiling for remuneration and hierarchy beyond which I cannot get. I can also see that there are many older and incompetent people in the company **(a young MBA graduate with a degree in languages and expectations for a fast-track promotion in an international company, ca. 27 years).***

Remote working is also increasingly becoming a new way of working abroad, without the need to leave Poland. This model is seen as increasingly attractive to those graduates who are considering working abroad in a remote format.

*My private life is currently linked with Poland but since remote working is increasingly more popular and many of my colleagues work in this format, I also contemplate such an employment format in companies based abroad. An international programme like this one offers more opportunities and MBA degree confirms the acquisition of specialist knowledge beyond language skills, which I acquired earlier. Receiving two degrees improves our chances of finding an interesting job with international companies **(a graduate in Romance Studies with 10 years of experience in international business).***

Apparently, working abroad remotely and having a permanent domicile in Poland may be gaining in popularity in the future. Many postgraduates appreciate the ability to continue living in Poland and greater opening to new remote working formats offered by international companies.

2.3.2. Option for holders of other degrees and a longer professional experience

This option is gaining in popularity among Polish candidates aged 35–45. Taking up a postgraduate programme taught in a foreign language is a specific test and practical preparation for entering an international labour market.

This applies in particular to those with degrees in fields other than languages, such as engineering or management. This generation of postgraduates previously studied at Polish universities and completed courses taught in the traditional format, in Polish. Completing postgraduate studies offered entirely in foreign languages – French and English – and obtaining two international degrees, combined with specialist knowledge and many years of professional experience, is a factor that builds greater self-confidence within this group. Students in this group view working abroad as a professional challenge and an opportunity to test themselves in a new environment. Completing international studies and obtaining a foreign degree is definitely to help them in this. Postgraduate studies are a clear opening for them to the possibility of working abroad, even if they did not have very specific goals in this area before. Many people who have not previously planned to work abroad, as a result of what they experienced at university and the international format of the programme, realise there is such a possibility (see the statement below).

Having completed the programme I thought for the first time that I could work somewhere abroad. In the past it was never an option. Now, everything has changed. Perhaps I will decide to work overseas at a later stage, maybe in the remote format. A thought began to grow in me that being fluent in French and English I could work abroad.

I've always said that I could go on a trip abroad, but I should always come back; now, however, I've realised that I could also live in another country. The programme has certainly opened my eyes. I now see myself in a different place, not just in Poland. Taking part in this programme has changed my thinking and my attitude towards the possibility of working abroad. The younger members of my family view this positively and have noticed this change in my mindset. I've already seen a few remote job offers involving languages (an MBA graduate with a degree in management from a University in Poland, over 20 years of experience, working in an international company in Poland).

The comment of this postgraduate clearly proves that the international format of the programme can become important in building active attitudes towards planning future professional career abroad. This opening to the international business environment is typical of people who previously studied exclusively in Polish and completed their traditional university education

in slightly different circumstances. For these category of postgraduate students, the internationalization of programmes and their format is a completely new and very meaningful experience. This is also due to the fact that as undergraduate students they studied at universities, which were much less internationalized and did not prepare students for working abroad. At that time, in the best case scenario, graduates ended up in foreign companies operating in Poland, as was the case with the above-quoted postgraduate.

Participation in our international MBA programme encourages many graduates to reflect more deeply and re-visit certain attitudes. It is undoubtedly a catalyst for greater openness to the world. The author's many years of experience in designing and developing international educational programmes enable him to observe the importance of this approach in building graduates' international careers.

2.3.3. Option exercised by students from French-speaking countries

Professional plans of this group of students are highly diverse. Similarly to the case of Polish students, we can distinguish three career paths.

Going to France is generally considered by people with extensive family relationships, linked to the prospect of finding a secure and attractive job. This model has many limitations due to the restrictive French migration policy, which also has an impact on the admission to universities and subsequently on recruiting graduates. This model is mainly used by selected representatives of African French-speaking countries with an extensive network of family contacts in France (graduates from Algeria, Morocco, Senegal, Guinea, and Congo).

The second group – firmly established professionally in Poland – generally plans to continue their professional careers here. It appears that these students have the opportunity to pursue a very balanced international career, with Poland and foreign companies operating in our country serving as an important point of reference and providing valuable professional references in the development of this model. Foreigners belonging to this group usually have a settled professional status and positive experiences relating to work, studies and family life in Poland. Their international orientation results primarily from seeing Poland as an important place abroad, allowing them to gain experience in the field of internationalization of their professional career plan. These people also often choose the model of internationalization of family life through relationships with Poles or foreigners living in Poland.

The third group plans to return to their home country, where they intend to continue entrepreneurial activities by running their own or family business.

Given that African countries strongly support any initiatives that stimulate entrepreneurship, some postgraduates are using the programme as a preparation for a business career in their home country. These individuals view their work, and often their own entrepreneurial experience gained in Poland, as a kind of business capital that can be used to replicate a similar model of professional activity in their home country. This applies especially to those who deal with trade, first of all e-commerce, work in various outsourcing companies (outsourcing of business services), as well as broadly understood transport and logistics. Postgraduates who previously worked in similar sectors often contemplate using a similar business model in an African country from which they originate and where they plan to return (Cameroon, Ivory Coast, Guinea, Ghana, etc.).

Generally, due to the administrative procedures involved in recruiting African students from the French-speaking countries, a decision was made to receive applications only from candidates already working in Poland and holding a permanent or temporary residence permit at the time when the admissions process is announced for the programme. This group of candidates is well established in the international business setting and links their career plans to this environment.³

Postgraduate MBA programmes are usually viewed from the perspective of securing better career opportunities to their graduates. This issue has been, and continues to be, the subject of numerous studies. Higher education institutions are under considerable pressure to demonstrate the employment rates of graduates from various degree programmes.

Generally, most research on graduate employability focuses on undergraduate, bachelor and master's programmes, whilst there is a lack of research on this topic amongst postgraduate students.

An international study carried out on postgraduates of programmes in Management⁴ is an attempt to fill this gap. Its findings have demonstrated that postgraduate courses in Management have a positive impact on the perception of participants' skills and effectiveness in achieving their professional goals. The above conclusion is more evident in women than in men. Students with previous work experience perceive their employment opportunities better than people who have not worked before.

³ C. Jones, *Does studying taught postgraduate management education increase students' perceptions of their employability?*, PHD thesis, Aston University, 2016, <https://publications.aston.ac.uk/id/eprint/30861/tions.aston.ac.uk/id/eprint/30861/> (accessed: 21.01.2025).

⁴ Ibidem.

Although these studies were conducted at a different time and in a different context, their findings appear to be similar to those observed in Łódź. It seems that the Polish-French MBA programme has a very positive impact on the perception of employment prospects after completing the programme among female graduates and those with less professional experience. At the same time, it should be emphasised that the programme is aimed at working professionals and, in most cases, is designed to strengthen their negotiating position with employers in a competitive labour market.

3. Programme positioning in the Polish market of educational services compared to competitive MBA programmes

It seems that the consistent niche positioning of the programme has given it a strong position connected with its French identity. It is clearly visible in the use of French business language, the foreign degree awarded and the foreign staff of lecturers from the partner university.

3.1. Niche positioning of the programme

The programme's positioning in the Polish education market relies on highlighting the benefits of learning management in French. For this very reason, graduates of the programme are highly sought after by foreign employers and have no difficulty finding a job. The programme is clearly positioned as international as it emphasises – alongside instruction in French – the fact that other classes are conducted in English as a natural complement to the international orientation of the educational process. All classes being taught in foreign languages is a key distinguishing feature of this programme.

The decision to take up this programme “had been maturing in my mind for a very long time,” as I had already been interested in it five years earlier and had been gathering information about it from you – as evidenced by our extensive “history of email correspondence.” In my case, this long period of reaching the decision to pursue postgraduate studies was due to numerous responsibilities and the need to participate in various important professional projects, which did not leave me much time to study.

However, when in 2021 I was appointed a manager responsible for client relationships with one of the company's Key Accounts, I realised that the process requires me to have a very broad managerial knowledge of management, finance, relations with employees, etc. This new and significantly expanded scope of responsibilities in the company – requiring broader managerial knowledge – naturally encouraged me to pursue postgraduate studies. The programme you proposed covered all areas of managerial knowledge that could be helpful to me as part of my new duties.

*As for French, however, I must point out that **my entire professional life has been spent working with French companies.** Generally speaking, I feel more*

attached to French culture than to Anglo-Saxon culture. It simply feels closer to me. I know this culture well and I know how to work with the French, which is something I wouldn't know about the Anglo-Saxons. I know how to conduct myself in conversations with the French and what to avoid.

I am also loyal to my French employer. My entire professional career (almost 20 years) is linked with one French company (ATOS). At present, the company is undergoing restructuring and its part responsible for security will most probably be sold to AIRBUS, while the other part will be taken over by a Czech investor and continue operating under a new name.

My decision to take up this postgraduate programme was mainly driven by the wish to enhance my knowledge; then I was also motivated by a desire for professional development and improving my French. It is very difficult to find courses in Management taught in French in Poland. Your programme is practically the only option (a graduate in International Relations who received his first master degree 15 years ago; a Francophile, enthusiast of France and French culture).

The words of this student draw our attention to two very important aspects featuring in the decision-making process evolving in the candidates. A decision to choose the Polish-French MBA postgraduate programme in Management is usually taken on the eve of new important managerial challenges facing the candidates in their place of employment. Candidate's appointment to a new, more senior managerial position requires him to quickly embrace a broader and more diversified body of knowledge. Postgraduate programme in Management excellently meets these needs as it offers an interdisciplinary spectrum of managerial knowledge at the theoretical, as well as operational level.

The second very important decision-making factor is the wish to link management studies with the French business environment. The choice of the programme is dictated by the opportunity to study in French and learn from individuals who have strong connections with France. This powerful connection with the French culture and language is very important to the candidates, as well as, at a later stage, to French and foreign employers operating in the French market.

The niche nature of the discussed programme lies in its strong focus on a small group of Francophiles interested in working in a French-speaking environment and with French companies and clients. This is therefore a relatively narrow target group, dominated by linguists, mainly Romance language specialists, but also graduates of other disciplines who are fascinated by France and the French language.

French – as a language of instruction – becomes a natural passport to the world of French business. Our postgraduates unanimously declare that they are very **loyal to the French culture and their French employers**. This aspect of mutual loyalty is a crucial distinctive factor of the relationships observed in the Polish-French and international labour market.

3.2. Continuous presence in the Polish market of educational services

The positioning of the programme has always been, and continues to be, strongly based on its long-standing presence on the Polish education market. This programme is the only one offered in French – at Master's and MBA level – that has been available on the market continuously for 32 years. Given its niche nature, the communication strategy with the market requires constant reference to these facts. The continuity aspect also adds an extra dimension of trust in the programme and its organisers.

The continuous presence in the market is primarily the effect of the programme management close identification with the offer and its unique French cultural dimension. That perfectly coincides with the niche nature of the idea of the programme, which requires strong identification with its unique values. Without this commitment and cultural identity the programme would not have survived for such a long time.

3.3. Programme offered by a Polish publicly funded university

The rapid growth of private universities in the Polish education market during the 1990s soon led to significant disparities in the quality of education between public and private institutions. Research has shown that Polish students place far greater trust in public universities than in private institutions. This applies in particular to postgraduate MBA programmes. The reputation of non-public universities has been severely damaged in this regard by the unethical practices of some of them, which treated MBA programmes as a quick source of revenue (see the case of Collegium Humanum).

According to some students, in Poland the status of a publicly funded University serves as a guarantee of the credibility of the courses it offers, which, unfortunately, cannot be said of private universities.

If it were a private, unknown university, I would not have decided to take up this programme. For me, public universities – present on the market for a long

time – are a guarantee of the quality of the programme. As an active manager in our international company, I personally have a rather conservative approach to recruiting new employees with degrees from non-public universities. If I am recruiting a new employee, I always prefer graduates of well-known universities, e.g., the University of Lodz or the Lodz University of Technology, and if I am looking for an accountant, I choose people who have completed the courses of the Accountants Association with their certificate.

*Candidates from various private schools are significantly less skilled and have a poorer work ethic, including ethical shortcomings. I tend to rely on universities with a long-standing tradition, which have been established in the education sector for many years. Given my educational background, I place my trust mainly in large local public universities that I know well, as well as in the Association of Accountants, where I completed additional training (**a graduate in Management taught in Polish at the Lodz University of Technology, over 20 years in business**).*

The quoted postgraduate trusts primarily reputable public universities that meet the standards of quality of education. She speaks of private universities with great reserve as “schools,” i.e., entities that do not meet the standards set for higher education institutions. This is how she perceives private universities as a potential student taking up programmes offered by them and as an employer receiving applications from graduates of these “schools,” whose quality of instruction raises her serious doubts. Building the reputation of a university and the brand of a programme is a derivative of the status of an academic institution (a public university with long traditions), as well as the permanent presence on the market of a given program and the related long-term partnership with an overseas university.

Having greater trust in public universities does not exclude having trust in a few top non-public universities, but their group is rather small.

3.4. Prestige of getting two degrees

The rating of the discussed MBA programme results from a credible and long-term international strategic partnership. This partnership gives students access to two prestigious degrees: French (Master 2) and Polish (MBA) awarded by public universities.

Students of the programme have a guarantee that the French master's degree they receive after completing the programme in Poland is the same as the one awarded to those who study in France at the Jean Moulin Lyon 3 University

(IAE – Institut d'Administration des Entreprises, Institute of Business Management). These aspects are decisive for the position of the programme on the market of educational services. In the satisfaction surveys carried out on programme participants, this element is rated the highest, as it determines the future position of graduates in a highly competitive labour market.

For many students employed in French or international companies working with French clients, getting a French degree from a prestigious university triggered a marked shift in how they were perceived in the workplace. Obtaining such a degree was especially important for their relations with direct superiors or clients on the French market, where cultural aspects (language skills and a French degree) are very important components of employee evaluation.

The study clearly demonstrated that, by obtaining a degree from a French university, postgraduates were automatically viewed much more favourably in their workplace, of which they were obviously very proud. Their self-esteem was consequently much higher; they also gained greater self-confidence and felt valued at work.

These positive feelings were highlighted by many programme graduates, which demonstrates the power of impact of getting a French degree.

4. French degree as an important factor for the perception of an employee in a French and international company

According to all graduates, especially those who work with French or international companies in direct contact with French customers, a French degree is an important determinant of how they are perceived as employees and what promotion perspectives they have. The change in perception of postgraduates by their French superiors and clients is observed by most participants to the programme.

This is very clearly confirmed in the opinion of one of the postgraduates who works with French customers on a daily basis.

My French degree was noticed and very much highlighted in my company. The French showed a lot of interest in me. I felt really encouraged and appreciated. I was also proud. I see this degree as a kind of connection with the French. At work I deal exclusively with French clients (a postgraduate with previous a degree in Romance Studies; aged 28; 3 years of experience in working with French clients in the medical equipment market).

The same statements feature also in opinions of a number of other postgraduates, which confirms that having a French degree immediately places the Polish employees of French companies or international corporations operating in the French market in completely new positions and changes the nature of mutual relations in a very positive way. This aspect is particularly important in French companies where a lot of attention is paid to the cultural context.

For me, this degree provides a kind of connection with the French; it has also brought me closer to them. This is our common denominator. Besides, I work only with French clients (a statement by a postgraduate aged 28 working with the French market).

This statement highlights the significant need among Polish postgraduates to establish common ground and build cultural relationships with their business partners through a French degree, which is emerging here as a new kind of cultural bridge.

Working day-to-day in a French company and with French clients, as well as being active on LinkedIn, I see that now I feel much more confident in these relationships because I hold a French degree – at least that is how I feel. The

fact that I have a French degree gives me greater confidence in this French environment (a postgraduate with 12 years of experience in doing business with France; she has a previous degree in Romance languages).

This statement once again confirms the thesis that for many Polish graduates of the MBA programme, obtaining a French degree has become a crucial distinctive feature in building their personal brand and in their perception in the French business environment. Also, a degree from a French university is an important argument that enhances the credibility of its holder and validates her/his skills. It is especially important in the context of working with the French to whom the cultural context, fluency in French, and educational background are extremely important.

Graduates clearly stress that completing the MBA programme and obtaining a French degree exerted a powerful impact on how they are perceived.

Getting this degree has changed the way I was perceived by my immediate superiors and collaborators. In the eyes of my collaborators, I will be perceived differently – above all as someone who wants to develop and consistently acquires new knowledge. In my company, I was previously seen as ‘someone formally promoted to a new position because there was a gap in the team.’ This postgraduate programme has confirmed that my promotion to a senior role was the right decision. As a postgraduate I can rest assured that I will be further promoted in my company. Sharing knowledge acquired from the programme with other employees will give me an additional advantage. Based on my experience gained from the research carried out to write my diploma thesis, I plan to organise several internal training courses for my collaborators (a holder of a degree in linguistics, 8 years of working experience in business; French clients unit).

At the same time, this statement fits into a broader context related to the added value of MBA courses resulting from the transfer of knowledge acquired under the programme from the employee to the company. The flow of knowledge from an MBA graduate to their mother company is often a subject of separate research. Results of such research show that proper knowledge transfer can take place only when there is good chemistry between the partners.⁵

⁵ M. Prince, D. Burns, X. Lu, R. Winsor, *Knowledge and skills transfer between MBA and workplace*, “Journal of Workplace Learning” 2015, 27(3), pp. 207–225. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JWL-06-2014-0047>. See also: J.Z. Rouiller, I.L. Goldstein, *The relationship between organizational transfer climate and positive transfer of training*, “Human Resource Development Quarterly” 1993, Winter, Vol. 4(4), pp. 377–390. <https://doi.org/10.1002/hrdq.3920040408>

From the comments of the same respondent, we know that although post-graduate programmes offer opportunities to find a new job, a large proportion of mature postgraduates value job stability and the chance to continue building their careers at their current workplace.

I also know that by completing this degree, I have the chance to develop further in other companies. At the moment, I am happy with my job and do not plan any changes. However, if I were to want to change companies in the future, thanks to this degree I will have completely new opportunities.

This comment fits into a growing trend in the number of students seeking long-term stability in a well-known business environment, in which they are well-established in their careers and completing an MBA programme may only improve their position.⁶

This is confirmed by the findings of a number of studies, which show that some MBA students focus on seeking long-term job satisfaction and stability in their career plans. It appears that such stability is becoming an important value for an increasing number of employees.

This shift in approach to career planning should therefore also be considered in the context of choosing an MBA programme, which can help to stabilise an employee's position at their current workplace. Graduates also notice a very positive change in how they are perceived as employees after obtaining their MBA degree.

*In my case, finding a better job was not the main driver to enrol in a post-graduate programme. Overall, I was and I am happy with my current workplace. I studied mainly for my own satisfaction and to gain new knowledge. In my company, I couldn't count on a quick promotion either, as the organisational structure is very flat, and there is only my CEO above me. But I can certainly say that **'I have improved my standing in my CEO's eyes.'** The perception of me is now even more positive, and the CEO greatly admires what I have done.*

*My boss speaks German because he used to live in Germany for some time and he is 'still struggling' with English. I can see respect for me and my achievements in his eyes, which I appreciate a lot. Our company belongs to a German-Belgian group and our group CEO in Belgium also congratulated me (**a postgraduate working as a Director of Finance and an accountant in an international company; many years of experience in business**).*

⁶ N. Muja, S.H. Appelbaum, *Cognitive and affective processes underlying career change*, "Career Development International" 2012, Vol. 17(7), pp. 683–701. <https://doi.org/10.1108/13620431211283814>

French degree as an important factor for the perception of an employee...

Our postgraduate's comments show that, for an increasing number of people, postgraduate studies are part of the process of a continuous self-improvement and the acquisition of new knowledge. For those working in international companies, studying in foreign languages is also part of a broader process of internationalising their career path and preparing for new challenges associated with the international labour market, which is becoming increasingly open, partly thanks to the use of remote working format. The need to internationalise one's career path is particularly evident for those aged 40 and over who acquired their first degrees within traditional courses taught in Polish at technical universities or in non-language-related fields, where speaking at least two foreign languages was not expected at all.

5. Enhancing managerial skills

Research shows that younger people with shorter experience in business after completing an MBA programme have much more trust in their skills and are more ready to face new, previously unknown managerial challenges. At the same time, it results from research findings that they are not always fully ready to embrace these challenges and stress linked to them at the professional level. Postgraduate courses give them only certain tools that have to be supplemented with maturity and personal experience.

According to a graduate working in a multinational corporation, for him an MBA degree marked the beginning of a completely new career with the company.

MBA programme gave me courage and motivation to become a manager. Previously, I was not sure whether I wanted to take up managerial responsibilities. The programme encouraged me to start seriously thinking about going in this direction. When the first opportunity occurred to apply for a higher position, I was ready and I did not ask myself any further questions. MBA degree gave me mental comfort and confidence to apply for a managerial position. From that moment on I have had no doubts. This self-confidence made me ready to apply for such positions (a young postgraduate with a degree in Romance Studies and International Relations; 3 years of professional experience).

For this graduate, however, we observed some deficit in the ability to cope with stress resulting from an appointment to a new, previously unknown position and serious challenges linked with it.

After being promoted to a managerial position I lacked skills in organising meetings with my team and in stress management. I had problems with assuming the role of a team leader. I felt like I had been thrown into the deep end without any support from my corporation. Under such circumstances, I had to receive mental help therapy to get support from the therapist and a business coach. I needed these several sessions to learn how to operate under conditions of uncertainty and the absence of data. The beginning of a managerial career may initially introduce some destabilization. I needed six months to take care of it (a young postgraduate with a degree in Romance Studies and International Relations; 3 years of professional experience).

Research has shown that for less experienced people and in the absence of proper support from the company, starting a managerial career may generate strong additional stress and the MBA course should – at least partly – prepare

students to cope with such challenges. This also demonstrates the importance of the systems of internal support that should be in place in multinational corporations to assist people internally promoted to managerial positions.

International studies focused on the students of MBA programmes demonstrate in particular that MBA courses enhance the ability to formulate personal goals and targets for organisations, for which the students are responsible.⁷ International studies also confirm that the MBA programme gives students an opportunity to develop their emotional intelligence, trust in their own strengths, self-efficacy, and self-control. Many empirical studies conducted among MBA students and graduates emphasise the programme's impact upon the ability to define and achieve professional and organisational goals.

In our study carried out in Łódź, for individual students without any previous working experience in business we can observe a very strong and positive impact of the MBA programme on fostering their personalities and a number of traits that managers and entrepreneurial people surely should have. The opinion of a student who is a school teacher is an example of such attitude.

*Participation in the programme for sure **gave me a lot of self-confidence**. I realised that I have other options apart from being a teacher. Importantly, I gained self-confidence when the labour market for teachers was little stable. Thanks to these new skills, I'm also finding my work as a teacher easier; I'm a better leader and feel more confident when dealing with large groups. I've developed better my team management skills (including with pupils – I know how to do it better and how to be a better leader). I feel much more confident when dealing with large groups, who aren't always on our side. I'm confident that I'm doing a good job. I've eliminated certain managerial mistakes, simply because I'm more aware of what won't work.*

*I have also learnt to see various issues within the organisation from a new perspective. Today, even though I continue working at school, I can see and I am more aware of what can be done and how, although my agency is limited as I am not the headmaster. But I am doing my job much better as I have full control over my responsibilities (**a graduate in Romance Studies with a long working experience as a secondary school teacher; after the completion of the MBA programme she continues working in the sector of education**).*

⁷ C.L. Thompson, A.T.H. Kuah, R. Foong, E.S. Ng, *The development of emotional intelligence, self-efficacy, and locus of control in Master of Business Administration students*, "Human Resource Development Quarterly" 2020, Vol. 31(1), pp. 113–131. <https://doi.org/10.1002/hrdq.21375>

The above statement shows that even for people not planning a rapid change of the place of employment and moving to the business sector, we can observe a serious transformation. The completion of the MBA programme prepares them to be leaders in different professional groups and to deploy managerial skills when performing their responsibilities and roles in other professional settings. They may work in public institutions, schools, government or local administration, or other non-profit organisations, such as foundations, associations, etc.⁸

Recently, MBA programmes have been assessed from different perspectives and criticised. Nevertheless, it is beyond any doubt – which is confirmed by results of many empirical studies – that these problems improve mental resilience of graduates and their self-confidence.

An empirical study of 700 current students and graduates of MBA programmes in Brazil found that the subjective benefits of participating in such programmes are primarily reflected in an increased belief in one's own capabilities and ability to be active in the labour market. Such research also helps MBA programme providers to improve their programmes.

Given the current situation in Poland, it seems that besides the supply of MBA programmes, one should also consider the overall economic situation and the labour market. The latter has a very powerful bearing on career planning and strategy of the employees – students and graduates of these programmes. Each time we examine MBA programmes, we need to differentiate between full-time and part-time programmes targeting potential students with different working experience and, by the same token, a different position in the labour market.⁹ Many authors point to the need to examine MBA graduates to learn about the efficacy of the course for the accomplishment of planned professional goals. Usually, an MBA programme acts as a specific catalyst in establishing professional career goals and may induce changes in this respect.

These conclusions are similar to the observations made by graduates of our programme, who also often modify their previous career goals as they gain in confidence as a result of obtaining an MBA degree.

⁸ J.F. Personini Cruz, T. Wood Jr., *Perceived effects of part-time MBAs on careers*, "Career Development International" 2015, Vol. 20(6), pp. 646–662. <https://doi.org/10.1108/CDI-012015-0012>

⁹ N. Muja, S.H. Appelbaum, *MBA program enrolment as a catalyst for boundaryless career goals (part one)*, "Industrial and Commercial Training" 2014, Vol. 46(3), pp. 135–142. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ICT-02-2013-0011>

MBA programmes have a very positive impact on the students' sense of security at the place of employment.¹⁰ The mere participation in an MBA programme gives students a kind of sense of security through building a specific psychological capital (PsyCap¹¹). Besides getting a solid body of knowledge, being part of an MBA programme gives you a sense of security at the university and at the place of employment.

Such relationship was also observed in in-depth interviews conducted among graduates of our course. Surely, participation in the programme is a signal to the student that they have become part of an elite, prestigious project, which gives a sense of exceptionality and security linked to it, which over time may expand from the programme to cover the place of their employment.

¹⁰ F. Wu, G. Chen, S. Xiang, *Does psychological safety at school affect psychological capital at work? Evidence from part-time MBA students*, "Nankai Business Review International" 2022, Vol. 13(3), pp. 441–456. <https://doi.org/10.1108/NBRI-08-2021-0056>

¹¹ „PsyCap, in other words, psychological capital is a term used in psychology to describe a pool of employee's positive resources” – after Mp.pl: Uniwersytet SWPS, *PsyCap – własny bank pozytywnych zasobów*, 14.05.2024, <https://www.mp.pl/pacjent/psychiatria/aktualnosci/348738,psycap-wlasny-bank-pozytywnych-zasobow> (accessed: 15.09.2025).

6. Preparing students to work in an international environment

The entire philosophy of the Polish-French MBA programme has been designed to optimally prepare graduates for working in an international cultural environment. This is achieved in equal measure through the internationalisation of the teaching approach and the international composition of the student cohort and teaching staff. The programme is taught in foreign languages, within an international student cohort and with the involvement of an international teaching staff, including entrepreneurs and managers working in multinational corporations and in foreign markets. Internationality is the hallmark of the programme and a key element of its brand identity.

6.1. International teaching format

Unlike most MBA programmes taught at Polish universities in our mother tongue, the Polish-French programme has been conceived as an international course taught in French and English. Such a language profile of the programme requires the candidates – already at the very start – to be fluent in foreign languages, i.e., in French and English. At the same time, the bilingual format offers a huge advantage over MBA programmes taught in Polish or programmes including part of classes taught in English, and programmes taught fully in English (also rare in the domestic market).

The source of competitive advantage of the programme lies also in simultaneous highlighting the relevance of a good command in French and, by the same token, being familiar with the cultural business environment and management.

I was particularly impressed by diverse teaching methods deployed to deliver the classes, the commitment of the teachers, and respect for students. I also learnt a lot as a teacher. I did not expect that some classes can be so interesting. The programme fully met my expectations – I cannot think of anything more that could be offered or better presented and discussed. I did not expect to acquire so much knowledge and skills. Nowadays, in my capacity as a University teacher I recommend this programme to students of languages (a postgraduate with a degree in Romance Studies and a long working experience as a secondary school teacher who having completed the MBA programme took up an additional job as a University teacher).

The above comments confirm the thesis about the MBA programme usefulness also in preparing some students to work as University teachers in degree programmes with an international language focus comprising aspects of business and management. This is a small group of postgraduates who contemplate pursuing academic careers and sharing their managerial knowledge at classes taught in French. As an example we can take new interdisciplinary undergraduate and graduate programmes that combine languages and management knowledge in reference to international environment of enterprises, e.g., languages in business.

Having an international teaching staff with a strong presence of French lecturers from the Institute of Business Administration (IAE) of the Jean Moulin Lyon 3 University is very important. The involvement of lecturers from France is very highly appreciated by the students.

For me lecturers from both countries are added value to the programme. French specificity can be seen in the teaching methodology and in their knowledge of enterprises. An extension of a special component dealing with the specificity involved in working with French clients would be worth considering. The French focus on the analysis of case studies, which was not always a standard for Polish lecturers.

Studying management in foreign languages is a clear advantage of this course. I would not have chosen it had it not been taught in foreign languages. I got interested in this MBA programme because it was taught in French and English. I would not have chosen it if it had been taught only in French. At present, multinational corporations always expect their employees to speak English so an MBA taught only in French would not have been favourably perceived. The international format of the programme taught in two foreign languages is a big added value.

In Poland there are many MBA programmes but they are taught exclusively in Polish. For me they 'make no sense' in the context of working with multinational companies. I see no point in wasting time on such programmes since English is very much needed in business. Had it not been for these two languages, I would not have taken up this programme (a lawyer with 10 years of experience in a law firm offering services to foreign business clients).

This graduate's comments, given her legal background, highlight the added value of the programme, which is in fact aimed at all students who ultimately aspire to work in an international environment and wish to prepare themselves thoroughly for such a role. The international nature of the programme's structure is very distinct here and is evident in every aspect of the educational process. This stands out clearly in comparison to other programmes, which have never developed this type of structure.

The key motivation for undertaking the course was the desire to acquire and expand my managerial knowledge. The second factor was the inclusion of French in the curriculum, as I wanted to improve my command of the language, which I was less fluent in compared to English. The third factor was the fact that the programme has a long-standing tradition and is run by public institutions, which was very important to me. The cost of the programme is also very attractive, which was another major advantage (an IT engineer with 15 years of working experience in the European Commission in Brussels).

The choice of the MBA programme founded on its international nature and two foreign languages of instruction is crucial for most students. However, a distinctive feature of the programme in the eyes of Polish and French students is surely the possibility to study management in French in Poland, something not offered by any other university. This is the effect of the anchoring of the programme within the structure of the Department of International Marketing and Retailing (Faculty of International and Political Studies of the University of Lodz) and a long-term partnership agreement between Lyon 3 University in France and the University of Lodz. From the very onset, the management team of the programme put a very strong emphasis on the international format of the course at all levels, which has allowed to train a large cohort of post-graduates with truly international business orientation.

6.2. International teaching staff

As the programme is designed to prepare students for work in an international environment, with a focus on cooperation with France and the French market, a key distinguishing feature has been, and continues to be, the opportunity to offer them a comprehensive block of classes taught by French lecturers. This applies to courses covering all key areas of managerial work, namely: human resource management, accounting and finance, marketing, organisational sociology, the economic and social environment of businesses, business development strategies, etc.

Apart from language-related benefits and mastering business communication in French, this factor brings in a huge cognitive input, as it allows to better familiarise with cultural values typical of the French perspective on managerial functions.

Students very much appreciate programmes which are truly international, which in our case is manifested by the presence of French lecturers. The importance of this factor is further enhanced by fact that French lecturers delivered their classes in person, allowing students to fully benefit from their presence

and expertise through face-to-face interaction. This element was a very important aspect of the programme in the post-pandemic hybrid model. It assumed that all classes delivered in person will be taught by French lecturers, which meant that students could fully benefit from knowledge transfer and get to know the lecturers' teaching styles, whilst also having the opportunity to build relationships through direct contact.

The students are also interested in teaching methods practiced by foreign lecturers and their practical knowledge of practices exercised by enterprises in the French market, as well as specific regulations and directions of changes in the business environment.

The involvement of French lecturers allowed me to view the issue of business management from a different cultural perspective, even though I had already lived in France for two years during my Erasmus exchanges. I also found the case studies analysed by the French professors to be very effective; they were highly interactive and encouraged everyone to join in the discussion (a graduate in Romance Studies working with a multinational corporation in Paris).

Learning about the diversity of perspectives on corporate management and environment is very much appreciated by the programme's participants. Most of them work with French clients or, broadly understood, French market on a daily basis thus many of these perspectives may have a direct bearing on operational and strategic activities. This is clearly confirmed by the comment of another postgraduate, an employee of a multinational corporation trading in medical equipment in the French market.

I made a note of whatever I observed among the French during classes and I tested it at work. Their solutions worked in the same way as they were presented to us. Classes on human resources worked the best for me and what I learnt in theory worked out exactly the same in practice.

I experienced a cognitive shock when moving from an operational role to a managerial one. Under such circumstances, one must know and be ready to ask older colleagues managers for help as everyone goes through the same process but you must be open to receiving help from others rather than focusing on your laptop.

More practical knowledge on planning and conducting business meetings and drafting the minutes would be very much welcome (a graduate in Romance Studies and International Relations aged 28 working with a multinational corporation).

The above comment reveals a very interesting aspect of the educational process consisting in a direct application of knowledge acquired during classes in everyday work in the company vis-à-vis French collaborators, Polish

colleagues, and French clients. New solutions and ideas discussed during classes are thus tested in corporate practice.

The participation of French lecturers is seen by the students as one of the components of the added value and competitive advantage immediately after the possibility of receiving a French Master degree.

***I cannot imagine the programme without French lecturers.** I also realised that the same courses taught by Polish and French lecturers were complementary. They just drew attention to different aspects of the same problem. These two international approaches excellently complemented each other. At the same time one also needs to stress that they neither replicated nor doubled. These two original approaches perfectly complemented each other. It was fantastic and exceptional.*

French lecturers helped us also in adopting a completely different cultural perspective on corporate management. This was a truly international perspective including case studies not only from France but also from Germany, US, China, etc. (a graduate in Romance studies with many years of professional experience as a teacher, working in a secondary school and at the university).

Similarly to many other postgraduates, the above quoted student very much appreciated the diversity of cultural perspectives and the international nature of the programme. It is very important in a complementary approach to the same problems from diverse cultural perspectives.

The presence of French lecturers among the programme's teaching staff made me realise that the approach to the system of education in Poland and in France is completely different. Evaluation of students' papers and exams differ a lot. I am used to obey certain rules in the Polish system of education which is why I quickly notice the differences.

When it comes to French lecturers, I believe that their expectations vis-a-vis students are little concrete. Their assessment of students boils down to a general discussion. With some lecturers we could not hold an open discussion. That was for sure caused by cultural differences, a clash with something that we are not used to. This new approach is slightly shocking and sometimes it is difficult to embrace from the start. That is why I often found it very difficult to comply with the expectations of our French lecturers as I was not clear about their expectations and requirements.

If we take the analysis of Hofstede's scientific works, we can see that we, Poles must always have clear, precise instructions in writing. When faced with a too relaxed approach, we experience additional stress (a graduate in Romance Studies with 10 years of experience in business; works with French clients).

The involvement of French lecturers in the programme allows students to get acquainted with their working methods and conduct. Remarks by the

lecturers during class help students to better understand the cultural determinants of their behaviour in interactions with others. At a later stage, these remarks act as an additional point of reference for direct observations in the working environment. We can try to draw some analogies and seek specific regularities.

The participation of French lecturers allowed me to take a completely different cultural perspective on corporate management issues. I do appreciate it very much.

First: there is a lot of emphasis on direct face-to-face meetings. I missed traditional in-person classes very much. On the corporate side, significant role of trade unions in France (syndicalism and its tradition). In France, trade unions have a lot of power, they defend employees while in Poland if you are unhappy with your employer, you just leave the company. Our approach in Poland is very individualistic and trade unions are much weaker. If we are not happy with the workplace, we just leave in silence and look for a new job elsewhere, we do not fight. The French are much more attached to their workplaces, which is why employee fluctuation is much smaller in France than in Poland (a graduate in International Relations with almost 15 years of professional experience with the French companies).

The above statement shows how many observations can be made during classes, also when analysing selected case studies, which present the state of affairs in French companies and the impact of business environment upon the conduct of employees and managers.

When you work with the French, you consider many cultural aspects. I do it vis-a-vis my French client and in relation to my French colleague working with our French partner, with whom we collaborate on a daily basis.

In my opinion, we in Poland are much more concrete. That is true of a sense of responsibility and duty, as well as of how we value and respect time. If we say our French business partner that we will call back in 15 minutes, we stick to what we promised; on the French side, it is not always the case.

In Poland we are in general more busy and less patient. We expect our French business partners to respond quickly and in a decisive manner in line with our expectations, otherwise we become impatient.

Sometimes I have an impression that the French are using double standards at work. We, Poles force ourselves to operate swiftly and precisely.

As for my French colleague, with whom I collaborate on a daily basis, I can see that she works more slowly but she expects me to act quickly and take concrete steps. She has a 2-hour break for lunch, while our lunch break is 30 minutes. I have an impression that we have made them used to our being available and

doing everything on time. The question is: haven't we imposed it on ourselves? (a graduate in Romance Studies with 10 years of experience in business, working with French clients).

The above comment shows the impact of cultural perspective, especially in the context of time, on differences in the conduct of Polish and French employees who collaborate with one another in a remote format within the same company. We can also see that specific customs and cultural habits may shape the course of collaboration (essential for remote work environments) and relocation of various operations. It appears that people from the Polish and French culture exhibit very different readiness and ability to adapt to the changing conditions. That is highly relevant for the internationalisation of corporate strategies and the need to work out effective forms of business cooperation.

The involvement of French lecturers undoubtedly allowed us to view a number of the company's issues from a different perspective. This was made possible through the analysis of certain detailed case studies during our classes. I believe that the number of case studies analysed in our classes could have been even greater, which would certainly have further enriched the curriculum.

I rate the added value of the programme resulting from the participation of French lecturers very highly. *The absence of lecturers from France would diminish the credibility of the French degree. Practicing the Cartesian model of work and style on a daily basis was a very rewarding experience for me, introducing me to a system of logical thinking that allows one to reach interesting conclusions and draw sound summaries.*

Lectures read by the French professors were always an opportunity to broaden the cultural context of our studies. This new cultural perspective was extremely important for me as I work with the French on a daily basis.

For sure, within our MBA programme we could hold deeper discussions with the French lecturers. The programme was closely related with my work and the participation of French lecturers enabled me to quickly apply many of the discussed solutions in my corporate practice (a graduate in International Relations with 15 years of experience in working with French companies).

The possibility to deploy knowledge acquired during classes with French lecturers in daily practice of a French company turns out to be hugely important. For students employed in French companies it is an opportunity to put into practice managerial observations and conclusions drawn from classes. This is a perfect example of how theory can be translated into current operations, in line with the principle according to which **“there is nothing more practical than a good theory”**.

I used to contemplate working abroad but because our country is experiencing fast-paced growth I have given up the idea for the time being, although I may come back to it in the future. On the other hand, this MBA degree has surely enhanced my overseas employability and chances of getting an interesting job.

However, one needs to bear in mind that the French labour market is much more restrictive for foreigners than the Polish one. Primacy in the access to the most attractive positions is given to the French.

The completion of the programme surely increased my chances of getting a job with a multinational company in Poland. Such is the effect of having a degree from a foreign university and a different perception of a candidate during job interviews. (a graduate in International Relations with 15 years of professional experience with French companies).

The above words confirm the thesis about strong international focus of the programme enhancing the readiness of graduates to take up a job abroad, also in France. Under the present conditions of the dynamic growth of the Polish economy, this increased readiness does not translate immediately into a decision to seek a job outside the borders of our country. That is true especially of more mature employees working in foreign companies (in this case: French) and enjoying a strong position in the Polish labour market, i.e., people satisfied with their professional career path.

Working with French companies allows the students of our MBA programme to make a series of direct observations that reveal differences in the approach to everyday tasks and managerial duties.

From what I've observed of my French colleagues at our company, I believe they have a much more relaxed approach to carrying out their daily duties. Generally speaking, they try to avoid stress. In France, work effectively only begins after lunch, i.e., after 2.00 pm (après le déjeuner). For us in Poland, this approach means that when we want to go home, as we finish our working day around 3.30–4.00 pm, that is when the French side generates the most enquiries and handles day-to-day communications.

One slightly annoying aspect of communication at work is 'political correctness', which means that many things are not said directly so as not to offend anyone. This is often a nuisance (a graduate in International Relations with almost 15 years of experience in working with French companies).

This comment shows huge importance of habits on the French side linked with the rhythm of work and life, which should be overcome in the process of international growth of a company. It appears that employees of French companies are not always aware of the extent to which their habits hinder the effectiveness of international cooperation.

My personal story behind entering the path paved with French culture and language begins with my dislike for the English language. At the University I wanted to learn a different language and I chose French as a good investment in the future. As a student I went to France for a year, where I worked as “garçon au pair” in Fontainebleau. Later I went on an Erasmus exchange to Grenoble to study at the university. I was also an intern in the Polish Embassy in Paris because I had a degree in International Relations. I learnt French when I was doing my master degree in International Relations (a graduate in International Relations with almost 15 years of working experience with French companies).

This comment also confirms the thesis about the clear majority, or perhaps the entirety, of students of our programme being very much impressed by French language and culture. The fascination extends on working in a French-speaking team and a French business environment. Apparently, fascination with France and relations with business partners are values in themselves and act as a valid argument to enrol in the programme.

6.3. Diversity of perspectives and points of view – international student cohort

Students very much appreciate the diversity of views and perspectives on the same issue presented by lecturers coming from different cultures. This is a crucial component of the added value of the programme which also promotes independent thinking.

The fact that some classes were delivered simultaneously by teams of Polish and French lecturers allowed us to get different perspectives on certain processes. When writing my diploma thesis I noticed both the diversity and variety of perspectives when analysing the sources, as well as French and Polish literature.

In Poland we perceive certain issues differently than in France. This diversity of perspectives emerged also when during classes we exchanged experiences with colleagues, considering their diverse experiences from different markets. The French always insist a lot on personal contact. I can see the same when I work with the French online. For the French, the camera must be on during the online session, and a direct contact is always preferred (a graduate of the MBA programme with a degree in Romance Studies and over 10 years of experience in business).

This cultural diversity is at the same time enhanced by the international composition of the student cohort and diverse experiences of students resulting from their work in various companies with the involvement of foreign capital. Cultural openness of students can largely be attributed to their linguistic background, which in a way assumes such openness.

An additional value of the programme lies in international student cohort, in particular in the continuously growing number of French students living and working in Poland. This final element enables Polish and French students to examine a range of issues relating to business management and business environment regulations from different perspectives. It also complements the differing perspectives on similar issues held by Polish and French lecturers. The cultural context is particularly significant here. Furthermore, the fact that the programme is delivered to a very small group of students creates an opportunity for direct exchange of views and for building relationships, which may also lead to new business contacts. It is also a key element of the process of learning from one another and sharing business and managerial experiences.

Studying management in a small, international, internally diversified group is the programme's greatest strength. In our group there were a Belgian and a Pole living in Belgium, students from France and Africa. The great thing was that we came from completely different educational backgrounds and walks of life. Everyone brought in something different but also valuable. During the Covid-19 pandemic our programme was fully delivered in an online format so at least two sessions in-person would be very much welcome so that we could get to know each other and establish direct face-to-face contact (a graduate in Romance Studies with many years of experience as a teacher in a secondary school).

Alongside the benefits stemming from the cultural and business diversity of the student cohort, the immense importance of diversity in the delivery of the programme is also emphasised. However, as the students emphasise, to fully reap the benefits of the programme's internationalisation, the purely online format needs to be replaced by a blended, or hybrid, format – one that enables the building of direct mutual relationships and contacts. The use of a purely online format during the Covid-19 pandemic has made students realise the value of face-to-face meetings, which enrich the teaching process and provide an opportunity to build relationships and develop networks.

7. Strengths and weaknesses of the hybrid format of the programme

On the one hand, the Covid-19 pandemic showed the ability of the programme to adapt to extraordinary circumstances occurring in the environment but, on the other hand, it revealed clear weaknesses of educational solutions relying exclusively on a remote learning format. At the same time, openness to teaching methods deploying new technologies allowed to take an innovative view on possible directions of the evolution of the programme and expansion of its scope at the domestic and international level.

7.1. In-person instruction

The initially practiced in-person instruction format gradually unveiled its limitations. It seems that, in the case of niche programmes, where most students (i.e., over 60–70%) come from outside of the local or regional market, it is currently very difficult to ensure in-person teaching format. This is because it poses significant challenges for programme organisers when it comes to recruiting candidates. It appears that even in the largest academic centres, the market viability of this model was being strongly questioned. The turning point in the shift away from the face-to-face model of MBA postgraduate education proved to be the Covid-19 pandemic, which, in a very short space of time, forced organisers to seek innovative solutions adapted to the extraordinary circumstances of the pandemic.

Naturally, the pandemic has elicited different approaches to postgraduate MBA programmes targeting professionally active students. The impact of pandemic on programme's evolution resulted also from changes in business operations of most companies, including international companies present in the Polish market of business services. The fact that all companies switched to the hybrid mode with a focus on remote working naturally stimulated the evolution of postgraduate programmes dedicated to the working student population.

7.2. Online programme format

In most countries, the Covid-19 pandemic (2020–2022) led to the suspension of face-to-face teaching. Lecturers of Management immediately adapted their teaching methods to the new online format. Students also quickly embraced these new circumstances. Researchers from Hong Kong¹² highlighted the opportunities and challenges presented by these new forms of online education. The authors reviewed research from 2020–2022 on Management teaching methods. A bibliometric analysis identified 920 articles from the Scopus database that examined issues relating to management education and online education during this period. Most publications on the subject were released in highly developed countries, in particular in Europe. Most frequently addressed research subjects included: teaching methods, deployment of new technologies in teaching, student assessment methods, teaching outcomes and acquired skills, and finally challenges facing these teaching formats.

Online MBA programmes were earlier examined in the work by W.K. McHenry¹³ using disruptive innovation theory. The author explored a complete list of MBA programmes offered between 2011 and 2012 by American universities. The study showed a diverse level of approval for the cost of postgraduate studies, the specificity of target groups, perception of pricing strategies, size of student cohorts or additional services offered to students. It also demonstrated different perception and positioning of online MBA programmes in the context of breakthrough innovations.

When the pandemic struck, the organisers of the Polish-French MBA programme viewed the external circumstances as an opportunity to develop the programme online. This approach led to a completely new way of thinking about the programme's target audience, as well as the format of the classes. The programme's high adaptability to changes in the environment attracted a number of new students. This is evidenced by the comments of many people who chose the programme mainly because of its online availability.

I chose this programme solely because of its online format. This was a great help during the pandemic for many people from different parts of Poland and Europe. During my studies, I was living in Paris, where I found an interesting job

¹² D.T.K. Ng, A.Ch.H. Ching, S.W. Law, *Online learning in management education amid the pandemic: A bibliometric and content analysis*, "The International Journal of Management Education" 2023, Vol. 21(2). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijme.2023.100796>

¹³ W.K. McHenry, *Online MBA programs and the threat of disruptive innovation*, "The International Journal of Management Education" 2016, Vol. 14(3), pp. 336–348. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijme.2016.07.002>

with a French company (convention de stage) (a young graduate in Romance Studies with the experience of living in France under the Erasmus mobility programme).

The student working in France shares the opinion that the online teaching format enabled the participation in the programme for a specific group of students who otherwise would not have enrolled in this programme.

For me, Covid acted as a strong catalyst to take up online studies. When we were locked at our homes, it was a perfect moment to begin these studies. I knew that was the moment (an employee of a multinational corporation, aged 28; degrees in Romance Studies and International Relations).

From the above we can conclude that the ability to adapt to new circumstances should be equally high on the side of programme organisers and the students. The latter also had to be ready to embrace the new remote teaching format, which, on the one hand, enabled them beginning the studies but, on the other hand, imposed certain restrictions on students. Thus, the pandemic turned out to be both the catalyst of some changes and a validator of this new educational approach.

However, participants in distance learning programmes were critical of the exclusively online format of instruction. It had clear weaknesses linked to the lack of face-to-face social interaction between students, and between students and lecturers. This is evidenced by the comments of graduates who felt a certain deficit stemming from the lack of meetings and relationships that can only be built through face-to-face forms of education.

I missed having a few in-person sessions within our online instruction format. The ideal would be a combination of online sessions and a few in-person meetings. This reliance solely on online contact limited us somewhat; we missed those few face-to-face meetings where we could get together, go out on the town, and have a bite to eat and a drink together. Then our relationships would have been completely different (a graduate in Romance Studies and International Relations working with a multinational Corporation, aged 28).

The above-quoted comment remains ambiguous as to the assessment of an online programme format. The possibility to participate in such a teaching format gave many students an unprecedented opportunity to acquire knowledge although, at the same time, they must have been aware of certain obvious limitations of such a format.

Online sessions are no less valuable, as you can get just as much out of them as from in-person instruction. It's simply the lack of that direct, face-to-face contact – and the sense of learning together, that atmosphere of being together. Being alone at home is just an extension of working online. In these circumstances, you

might not feel like you're actually a postgraduate student at a university. I finished work and switched to another laptop and new meetings on Teams. I missed that student atmosphere **(a graduate in Romance Studies and International Relations working with an international corporation, aged 28).**

This statement highlights the emotions also felt by those working remotely in companies who experience certain limitations of this working model. Under such circumstances, students felt a sense of dissatisfaction stemming from the lack of face-to-face contact and the broader atmosphere of the physical space (the lecture theatre, etc.). Studying online is not the same as being together in a lecture theatre.

But when you look around the room, smell the air in it and sit at the desk, it's a completely different experience, and that's when you really feel like you're studying **(a graduate in Romance Studies and International Relations working with an international corporation, aged 28).**

Graduates emphasise the need to experience purely sensory sensations associated with being in a particular place and perceiving it through the senses. The comments quoted above clearly demonstrate the value of direct contact to students, which is present in face-to-face or blended learning but absent in a fully remote format.

As highlighted above, the idea to shift from an in-person to online format was forced out by external circumstances arising from the Covid-19 pandemic. Also, rapid response to the limitations linked with the pandemic fitted into a wider innovation context resulting from the adaptation of the programme to market requirements. Paradoxically, such innovation not only left the market position of the programme untouched but automatically expanded its scope to cover first the European and then the global market.

No doubt, the online format has enhanced the availability of the programme for candidates residing in the most remote locations in Poland, such as, e.g., Szczecin or Rzeszów. Students from these cities most probably would have never chosen the programme if they had to regularly travel to Łódź to attend the classes.

The online format of the programme also re-defined the target market for recruitment extending it beyond the borders of Poland. This expansion allowed employees of French or international companies living in France and Belgium to join the programme.

On top of that, we witnessed a vivid interest in the programme exhibited by potential candidates from the French-speaking countries of Northern and Central Africa (Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, Senegal, Cameroon, Ivory Coast, Guinea, Congo) and Haiti. It was clear from both the number of applications

and the profile of applicants. Vast majority of them could not participate in such programmes due to visa restrictions. Hence, a decision was taken to accept candidates from these countries only if they had been staying in Poland (preferably for a minimum of 2–3 years) and were employed in Polish or international companies. Not only are they more motivated but they have no problems with applying for a visa or a residence permit in Poland.

The Polish market remained to be the target one extended with some individual Polish candidates working in France and in Belgium.

An additional benefit of implementing the online format was the ability to reach a segment that is less mobile, yet highly niche, with specific expectations: young, working mothers on maternity leave at home. Online courses are undoubtedly an offering that is very well suited to the expectations of this group. Women in this segment are highly ambitious and, at the same time, very well organised – they are excellent at managing their time, which allows them to combine maternity leave and the associated responsibilities with opportunities for self-development and education. In such a situation, returning to work with an MBA degree opens up additional opportunities for promotion, rather than simply regaining one's previous position. This example is quite telling, as a good command of French is significantly more common among women in Poland, and consequently also among working women in managerial roles or those aspiring to such positions.

Despite the obvious advantages of studying online, I also recognise limitations of the format compared to full-time programmes. It was both a plus and a minus. Full-time programmes require greater concentration from students, which is, of course, one of their strengths. In the online format, there are 'various distractions' linked to home conditions. The undoubted advantages are certainly the savings in time and money associated with not having to commute regularly to Łódź throughout the year (a graduate in Romance Studies; 2 years of business internship in a consulting business in Warsaw).

The participants of the program during the pandemic period were a very specific group. However, many of them, after graduation, paradoxically, emphasize the "positive impact of the pandemic." This specific time of many threats turned out to be a time of new opportunities for many people.

I rate the added value of the online format of the programme very highly: a definite 5. Thanks to this format, I had greater freedom to study and was able to do so. If I'd had to leave the house for two or three days a week, I wouldn't have been able to cope, either physically or mentally. I wouldn't have been able to manage it, either professionally or in terms of my family life. When I first heard about this course, I hadn't planned to take it, as I was worried I wouldn't be able to cope.

A friend persuaded me, saying: 'Come on' – and that convinced me. Faced with the potential threat of redundancies from teaching posts, I needed this 'second string to my bow.'

In my life, there are usually such opportunities that I grab and take advantage of. This was also the case here. I wanted to do something with myself and these studies stood in my way at the right moment in my life (a holder of a degree in Romance Studies; many years of experience as a secondary school teacher; having got an MBA degree she found an additional job at the University of Lodz).

The online format of the course came as a perfect solution for professionally active female students who otherwise would not have been able to enrol in a postgraduate programme.

I very much appreciate this online programme format designed for the Covid-19 era, I give it 5 on a 5-point scale. I am also used to working remotely in my company. I work on weekdays and can study over the weekends. It is also beneficial that I do not have to commute to take part in classes. I can stay at home and focus on learning, I am not tired.

My situation is certainly unique, as I'm used to working remotely on a daily basis. I find it easy to concentrate. Attitudes towards studying online depend very much on students' previous experiences and on their daily working routines. I was very happy with it. A separate case is that of people who don't work remotely on a daily basis; but there are fewer and fewer of them (holder of a degree in Romance Studies; 10 years of experience in business).

In the light of this comment of our graduate we can propose a thesis that for all people accustomed to remote work at their respective places of employment, the online learning format appears to be ideal, almost made to measure. This concerns mainly young people, to whom this format resonates well with independent lifestyle leaving a lot of space for allocating time for work, learning, and leisure. When working remotely or learning online one needs to be disciplined to control time and balance diverse forms of activities.

Online learning format offers a lot of added value, in particular to professionally active candidates and people with families. It adds on flexibility and saves time as students do not have to travel from across the country. In general, I am a great enthusiast of remote work, although at the same time it would be nice if we could have at least two in-person sessions throughout the programme so that we could come together, get to know each other, and have a networking session. The first on-site class should be held already in the first semester, not at the end of the programme (a lawyer with 10 years of experience in a law firm rendering services to international business).

The above comment was made by a student of the edition of postgraduate programme fully delivered online in the time of the Covid-19 pandemic. However, being aware of all benefits of online programmes, the student highlights the advantage of a hybrid format, which allows the programme participants to get to know each other and establish new business contacts during face-to-face networking sessions.

The context of the pandemic was critical for me when taking a decision to enroll in the online programme. Due to the pandemic, the European Commission obliged us to stay in Brussels and banned from leaving Belgium. Together with my wife we were locked in our apartment and soon we were bombarded with multiple offers of various online courses and programmes. The circumstances encouraged trying diverse forms of online learning. I completed a course for stockbrokers and a programme in drafting financial reports. Having participated in several shorter courses, I felt more ready to enroll in a longer postgraduate programme.

Your offer of a hybrid postgraduate programme came just in the right time and in a convenient format. Weekend classes delivered in the hybrid mode were perfect for me and fully complied with my expectations (IT engineer with 15 years of professional experience with the European Commission).

The above demonstrates how the specific context of the pandemic encouraged many students to enroll in diverse online programmes. Over time, this new profile of a consumer of online educational services triggered evolution towards new forms of hybrid learning. Getting familiar with the online format of education, with all its advantages and ramifications naturally prompted potential candidates to seek for and appreciate new forms of hybrid education.

7.3. Hybrid learning format

Hybrid format of the programme can be seen as a natural improvement and a step forward in developing the pure online learning mode. Research shows that in many students experience with postgraduate programmes delivered only in the online format is underpinned with some dissatisfaction. The dissonance that could not have been avoided during the Covid-19 pandemic needs to be eliminated in post-pandemic circumstances. The solution can be a hybrid format of the programme with adjustable mix of in-person and online sessions.

In the case of the Polish-French MBA programme, a decision was made to limit in-person sessions to lectures read by the French lecturers coming to Łódź from the Jean Moulin Lyon 3 University. This guaranteed the students a unique cultural dimension of the programme.

In a blended format, in-person sessions bring in a huge added value to the programme and become sources of competitive advantage as they make it possible to the Polish and foreign students to establish a direct face-to-face contact with French lecturers. The latter is fundamental for cultural and cognitive aspects and is greatly appreciated by programme participants. On-site lectures are scheduled for the spring semester, making travelling to Łódź easier for the students. In-person part of instruction meets formal requirements set out for the French degree and allows to hold exams on-site.

It needs to be stressed clearly that the Covid-19 pandemic and student experiences from the places of their employment, where remote work format was widely used, exerted a powerful impact on their expectations and the perception of various formats of instruction. Like in the corporate world, in the post-pandemic era, coming back to a purely in-person mode at the universities is not possible but also preserving a purely online instruction format is little likely.

Students openly demand hybrid solutions with the ratio of in-person to on-line instruction adjusted each time to the specificity of the programme and participant expectations. Apparently, an optimum option acceptable to the new generation of 'post-pandemic' students is a blended learning approach with ca. 20–30% in-person instruction.

Most online students from the Covid-19 era expect the instruction format to evolve towards a blended approach with the majority of online sessions. This goes hand in hand with the changes induced by the Covid-19 pandemic in companies where our students work.

In our multinational company, the French team works 100% online while our international team works on-site in Paris. In general, we all meet once a week – on Monday – in a hybrid format (on-site for the international team from Paris plus online for the French from outside of Paris who work online every day). This is a good new format which allows us to combine online and in-person work (a holder of a degree in Romance Studies working in a digital company in Paris, a graduate of our MBA programme).

In education, innovations are much more frequently inspired by the Polish rather than the French side. French people are more conservative, which is why they operate in a traditional way and are averse to change and innovations. The afore-said is true of business as well as universities.

Generally, the French are very traditional and little open to innovation. I am lucky because my company is not French but multinational so it is much more flexible about our office hours. In French companies it looks differently: they come to work in the morning and leave late in the evening. My company offers

a lot of benefits and more flexible office hours unattainable in a French company. In a French company many time-management aspects are subordinated to the school timetable which is good if you have children but can be a nuisance if you don't (a holder of a degree in Romance Studies working in a digital company in Paris, a graduate of our MBA programme).

This opinion of our graduate working for a German digital company in Paris shows that cultural determinants are often crucial and may hinder the adaptability to new external conditions.

*The online format of the programme is particularly convenient if you want to combine studies with work and family life. In my case, **despite the birth of a child** and sharing childcare duties, my wife and me could study.*

Obviously, I can see the weaknesses of the online format, which is why, in my opinion, the hybrid format is the best. It gives programme participants a chance to get to know one another and to feel the atmosphere of studying. Looking back at our online programme, I am slightly dissatisfied as we missed in-person sessions, even just a few ones (an IT engineer working for the European Commission in Brussels, an MBA graduate).

Our graduate's comment highlights a natural advantage of a hybrid solution over the purely online format of instruction. It appears that blended, i.e., hybrid, models of instruction are the future of post-graduate programmes. They are both more flexible and more innovative, they allow to adapt the format of the programme to the changing environment.

In the light of the experience of the Covid-19 era, many researchers of modern systems of education raise a question about whether in the future instruction should be provided exclusively online or in a hybrid format. In this context, the results of studies conducted by an international team of lecturers from Poland, Spain, France, and the USA¹⁴ are very interesting. On a sample made up of 93 lecturers and 366 students from three American universities they proved that the satisfaction of students and their expectations are very closely linked with the marketing of an MBA programme and its quality. At the same time, the research showed that all hybrid solutions are much higher and better rated than purely online solutions. New technologies also contribute to the integration of various values within the new hybrid format of teaching management.

¹⁴ L. Scaringella, A. Górska, D. Calderon, J. Benitez, *Should we teach in hybrid mode or fully online? A theory and empirical investigation on the service-profit chain in MBAs, "Information & Management" 2021, Vol. 59(1), 103573.* <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.im.2021.103573>

7.4. In the search of new forms of online instruction in partnership with business

Changes observed in the educational market occurring in the context of increasingly broader application of new technologies will no doubt lead to the development of a series of new MBA programmes. One of many innovative paths may include drafting MBA programmes in collaboration with corporations with a view to enhance their employees' skills. The value of such arrangements usually lies in working out diverse forms of strategic partnership that guarantee the stability of such collaboration and meet the expectations of both sides.

Online instruction format and its evolution towards hybrid solutions will surely stimulate searches for new and increasingly more innovative MBA programmes, designed within University-business collaboration. Studies conducted on students of overseas MBA programmes delivered within the University-business collaboration prove that searches in this direction were initiated already many years ago and today continue to carry a lot of potential.¹⁵

In the United States, it is very common to design post-graduate programmes in the online format in cooperation with business partners. Corporations are active partners of universities and play a crucial role in designing the programme and in the selection of the teaching staff. For many corporations retaining the most talented employees is a real challenge, which is why many companies are willing to sponsor their education. Employee enrolment in a traditional educational programme means they will not be available over the entire period of postgraduate studies. Therefore companies are looking for solutions that better serve their needs and resources, e.g., together with universities they develop 'tailor-made' online programmes.

Already many years before the Covid-19 pandemic more than 100 American universities applied various forms of online instruction.¹⁶ The advancement of new technologies raises expectations of students as to the online instruction format. It mainly concerns various forms of interactive cooperation between the students in this format of studies.¹⁷

¹⁵ L. Schrum, A. Benson, *Online professional education: A case study of an MBA program through its transition to an online model*, "Journal of Asynchronous Learning Network" 2000, Vol. 4(1), pp. 52–61. <https://doi.org/10.24059/olj.v4i1.1911>

¹⁶ Peterson's, *MBA Distance Learning Programs: The Hottest New Yaw to Earn a Graduate Business Degree (MBA Distance Learning Programs: The Best New Way to Earn an MBA)*, Peterson's Guides, Princeton, NJ 1999.

¹⁷ L. Schrum, *On-line education: A study of emerging pedagogy*, "New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education" 2002, 1998(78), pp. 53–61. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ace.7806>

Many corporations expect the universities to design joint programmes ‘made-to-measure’ that deploy online teaching methods. The use of quantitative methods allowed us to approach the process from multiple perspectives. Apparently, **the biggest challenge for lecturers was to establish and maintain active relations with students within the online instruction format.** The first students of such programmes were mainly afraid of isolation, loneliness, and lack of interaction with other students and lecturers but they very much appreciated the adaptability of the teaching staff to this format. Students also highly rated teamwork during classes, which allowed them to learn about diverse perspectives of colleagues from the group. It was an important component of psychological and emotional support.

Already more than 20 years ago (1998/1999) American researchers emphasised the need to use hybrid forms of instruction.¹⁸ The new paradigm of online teaching called for developing team working methods, allocation of scarce resources and the ability to listen to students.¹⁹

To a large extent, the programme is shaped by student feedback. Students quickly realise that due to the specificity of subjects the online format better suits some classes than others.

¹⁸ Ibidem.

¹⁹ P.F. Schlesinger, *Teaching and evaluation in an integrative curriculum*, “Journal of Management Education” 1996, Vol. 20(4), pp. 479–499; T.L. Watkins, *Stage one: Creating a new MBA core with team teaching*, “Journal of Management Education” 1996, Vol. 20(4), pp. 411–421.

8. Programme as a stimulant of postgraduate holistic development

For all the participants, the postgraduate Polish-French MBA programme in Management acts as a source of new knowledge and skills useful to managers but also as a stimulant of their holistic development. The extent of benefits drawn from the programme differs across the students as it largely depends on the starting point, i.e., the body of knowledge, skills, and professional experience, with which they come to the programme.

Remarkably, the programme is delivered in two foreign languages, by which it contributes to the holistic development of the participants and gives them a lot of self-confidence in international management circles.

The learning process and knowledge absorption profile are different when you study in a foreign language. You approach exams differently and you also think differently. It would be much easier to do it in Polish but then we would not have learnt so many new things from the programme (a graduate in Management with over 20 years of experience in business).

This opinion of a graduate of the Faculty of Management of the Lodz University of Technology is typical of students who previously completed domestic traditional courses taught in Polish with little international component. To a person with more than 20 years of professional experience, the possibility to study management in two foreign languages is like a new opening to internationalisation and a new outlook on managerial roles.

Participation in this programme enhanced my confidence when making conversation with new people. I do not feel uneasy about starting a conversation in Polish or in a foreign language. The programme has clearly helped me to improve my self-confidence. Now, I am sure that if I plan something, I can deliver as my determination has grown (a graduate with a degree in Management from the Lodz University of Technology; more than 20 years of experience in business).

The above-quoted comment of a postgraduate with many years of managerial experience reveals a huge role played by the postgraduate MBA programme in setting individual goals and proving that they can be accomplished. That is particularly important to mature people who need new, tangible evidence that they still can set and achieve ambitious individual goals.

Now, my perspective on my team is completely different. I can see the differences in how I worked with my team two years ago and now. I have eliminated certain schemes and stereotypes in making a priori judgements of people, especially young employees. I also put more emphasis on observing how they handle different situations (a graduate in Management with over 20 years of experience in business).

It also shows that studying with young people can be very inspiring for managers with a longer professional experience. Being part of the process and observing young students can trigger re-visiting certain judgements and breaking stereotypes.

*I also learnt a lot from my French colleagues. Their comments on many aspects and approaches to various issues often surprised me with openness and their innovative outlook on future plans. This attitude was very inspiring. I learnt to **view corporate affairs from a different perspective**; now I realise that I can always be wrong.*

An introvert by nature, I also improved my interpersonal communication skills and have become much more open. For me, learning in a small group was a strong incentive to engage actively; previously I did not talk much while now I am like a 'chatterbox' (a postgraduate with over 20 years of experience in business).

Deep internal transformation experienced by this postgraduate as a result of participation in our programme was observed in many fields. In her own opinion, the scale of changes was enormous: from the perception of herself and her environment to the perception of the workplace and members of her own team. Thus, she revalued the perception of the environment and her attitude to it, which increased the graduate's openness to her environment.

This comment also shows the potential impact of the postgraduate programme on different groups of students depending on their age, engagement in internationalization, professional and academic experiences.

Within a broad overview of diverse directions of the discussed programme, we can clearly see its impact upon various aspects of student development and, by the same token, on the working style and functioning in an international setting.

Many studies conducted in other countries confirm that the decision to enrol in a part-time MBA postgraduate programme is seen by the students mainly as an investment in the future advancement of their professional careers.²⁰

²⁰ See Y. Baruch, *To MBA or not to MBA*, "Career Development International" 2009, Vol. 14(4), pp. 388–406. <https://doi.org/10.1108/13620430910979862>

According to British corporate managers and heads of HR departments in American corporations, the completion of an MBA programme by an employee is viewed by the company as an added value to corporate resources. Companies achieve material and immaterial results. MBA programme participants consider postgraduate studies in the context of a return on investment in further stages of their career development²¹.

²¹ Ibidem.

9. Perception of an online course during the Covid-19 pandemic

This chapter discusses results of the survey conducted on a small group of purposefully selected students (12 people: 7 women and 5 men). All respondents were students of the Polish-French MBA delivered online during the Covid-19 pandemic. The group covered by the study included 50% of the total student cohort of 24 people. The study was carried out by the author as a questionnaire survey on Teams platform.

The author is fully aware of the small size of the sample but the goal of this study was to collect the opinions of programme participants about the edition delivered in very specific conditions of the Covid-19 pandemic and in the on-line format.

9.1. Reasons for enrolling in the MBA postgraduate programme

One of the most frequently given reasons was “the desire to acquire new knowledge in your field of profession” (66% of answers). The second was “to improve French language skills” (33%), followed by “the desire to get a better job” (25%), and “the desire to be promoted in your current job” (25%).

Younger holders of degrees in languages, as well as more experienced people with degrees in law, engineering, international relations, sociology, or disciplines other than management are seeking to acquire new managerial knowledge.

People motivated by the wish to improve French language skills are usually managers with an established reputation planning further career advancement in the international setting where fluency in French is a must.

The desire to get a better job is usually manifested by younger people with shorter professional experience, to whom an MBA degree is to become an asset when they apply for a more attractive job.

On the other hand, the desire to be promoted at the current workplace is usually given as a reason by people whose professional position is stable. Through a postgraduate degree they want to boost their career prospects within the internal organisational structure of the company.

9.2. The programme impact on goal attainment

By using the semantic differential scale we could assess the impact of the programme on the attainment of specific goals connected with knowledge update, change of the place of employment, promotion at the current workplace, starting one's own business, and improving French language skills. (see Table 1).

Table 1. Survey results for the selected group of students

Goal	Goal accomplishment rate				
	Very low	Low	Moderate	High	Very high
Acquiring new knowledge	–	–	1	3	8
Finding a better job	–	–	–	2	3
Promotion at the current job	–	–	–	2	3
Starting one's own business	–	–	–	–	–
Moving abroad	–	–	–	1	1
Improving language skills	–	–	–	4	2
Networking	–	–	3	4	2
Other	–	–	–	–	–

Source: author's own calculations.

Vast majority of students declared that the impact of the programme on the accomplishment of these goals was high or very high, which is indicative of a high degree of satisfaction of programme participants.

To almost half of respondents the programme appeared to be very helpful in their searches for a better job or in preparing or boosting their promotion prospects in their respective companies. As indicated above, recruitment agencies very much appreciate candidates who bring together preparedness to work in an international setting and solid management knowledge.

The students also highly appreciated the opportunities to improve their foreign language skills. That is important for non-linguists, as well as for those with a degree in languages who wish to learn specialist terms in the field of broadly understood management and quality science (a discipline in social sciences).

Satisfaction with networking was relatively slightly lower but that was due to the specificity of the online format.

9.3. Quality-price ratio for the programme

All respondents were very positive about the value for money ratio for the programme. To a clear majority 8/12 (66%) the quality-to-price ratio was very attractive and to 4/12 (33%) it was attractive.

The above scores confirm the correct price positioning of the programme which – due to being taught in French is rather niche by nature – comes at an affordable price compared to other MBA programmes. Apart from a narrow group of the target audience of French speaking candidates, the strategy is driven by the philosophy underpinning postgraduate programmes offered by public universities, which, by assumption, should facilitate access to knowledge rather than hindering it. This very attractive quality-to-price ratio for the programme was highlighted by many students, both younger and older ones.

9.4. Programme impact on career development

The MBA degree has boosted postgraduates careers to a very different degree. In this very small surveyed sample, 5 out of 12 respondents, i.e., 40%, reported rapid or extremely rapid career advancement. This ratio is relatively high given the fact that at the time of the survey most respondents were recent graduates who either had just changed their jobs or took on new challenges in their current place of employment. We need to bear in mind that the completion of such a programme marks an important stage in a longer process that may produce various career advancement depending on the position of a graduate and her/his individual career plan.

9.5. Programme recommendation to friends and colleagues

Due to the high satisfaction levels with the extent of goal attainment and good quality-to-price ratio, most respondents covered by the study were ready to recommend the programme to their friends and colleagues. A clear majority of respondents gave top ratings in this category: “will surely recommend” (6/12, i.e., 50% of respondents – score 5) and “will rather recommend” (4/12, i.e., 33% – score 4).

Recommendation is motivated by a graduate's satisfaction resulting from the substantive content of the programme and the type of degree.

9.6. Evaluation of selected advantages of the programme

The possibility to receive two degrees – Polish and French – is considered the most important advantage of the programme (12/12 – all scores 5).

The prestige of the Polish MBA degree is assessed by respondents in a more differentiated way: 6/12 gave it the top rating 5; 5/12 gave 4; 1/12 gave 3. The differences in ratings show that respondents – most of whom work for French companies or international companies rendering services to French clients – first of all expect the French degree Master 2, which is supposed to boost their position and prestige in the French **cultural and business setting**.

The prestige of the French Master degree is unanimously rated **very high** (12/12 score 5). This result confirms the hypothesis that for this format of international instruction targeting a narrow audience of people working in a French cultural and business setting, the prestige of such a degree is seen as a crucial advantage of the programme. That is the effect of the unique format of the programme: after the completion of the programme in Poland, graduates receive a degree identical with the one received by the French students who completed a similar programme in Lyon (Jean Moulin Lyon 3 University).

Instruction in a foreign language – this distinctive feature of the programme is also unanimously rated very high. All respondents covered by the survey (12/12 score 5) see it as a unique component of the programme. Compared to other MBA programmes, this one is fully international. Other programmes offered in Poland are usually taught in Polish or, only in a small extent, in English. However, there are no competitive programmes taught fully in foreign languages with a clear dominance of classes taught in French.

9.7. Programme impact on personality development and working style of postgraduates

Postgraduates included in the survey, although representing diverse opinions, realise tangible effects of their participation in the programme.

Boosted self-confidence. In the opinion of half of the surveyed postgraduates (6/12), their participation in the programme boosted their self-confidence. Apparently, that was the effect of the level of acquired new knowledge and proving to themselves that they can live up to the challenge and successfully complete the programme. For many respondents, getting a degree is a reflection of their ability to accomplish ambitious goals that they have set for themselves also in difficult and complex circumstances.

Managerial skill development. All postgraduates view the programme as a kind of catalyst and stimulus of managerial skills (4/12 score 4; 8/12 score 5). This is an extremely good rating as the participants expect lecturers to provide them with very concrete theoretical knowledge that can be used in practice in line with the principle that “there is nothing more practical than a good theory.” For those with no degree in Management, the results seem obvious and for postgraduates with a degree in Management this is the effect of knowledge update in a new international context.

Improved negotiation skills. Half of respondents covered by the study declare that classes in which they participated under the programme improved their negotiation skills. The rest of the sample must have participated in specialist negotiation workshops before and hence the programme has not enhanced these skills in them. Nevertheless, improved negotiation skills observed by 50% of the surveyed group should be seen as very positive outcome.

Mistake rate reduction in managerial activities. One third of respondents declared that the programme allowed them to eliminate some mistakes that they committed as managers in their current or previous workplaces. The result should be seen as significant as it confirms the causal power of the programme in eliminating bad habits and practices and replacing them with new, good ones.

Learning from other participants. The programme is also instrumental for knowledge transfer among participants. The survey shows that over 40% of respondents believe that they have benefited from knowledge exchange. They are all younger and professionally less experienced postgraduates, who are more open and willing to embrace new knowledge. Older participants are more sceptical and often assume *a priori* that there is nothing new they could learn from younger and less experienced colleagues.

The lower knowledge transfer coefficient can to some extent be explained by the online format of programme delivery, which naturally restricts the extent and number of interpersonal contacts. It seems that the in-person or even hybrid format could enliven such exchange.

Change of perspective on corporate matters. International profile of the programme with a strong cultural component made of a big team of French lecturers exerts a powerful impact on the change of perspective on corporate matters and approaching them from a completely new, previously unknown angle. Such a change was declared by over a half of respondents (7/12). The new approach is applied by programme graduates in their daily operational activities.

Mastering interpersonal communication. Given its international profile and international student cohort, the programme serves well mastering

interpersonal communication. The mastering process develops as the students are expected to prepare a number of business presentations and work in an international group during classes. Communication in two foreign languages: French and English is another permanent component of the programme.

In the surveyed sample, 40% of respondents declared an improvement in interpersonal communication skills. For less extrovert people, this also works as an excellent exercise helping to increase their openness to other people and their problems.

9.8. Impact of programme features on its value

Involvement of French lecturers. The study clearly demonstrated that the key distinguishing feature of the value of the programme is the presence of French lecturers among the teaching staff. In practice, it means that almost all participants view the permanent involvement of French lecturers as the fundamental component of the added value of the programme. Many students openly admit that they could not imagine the programme without French lecturers.

These results also confirm earlier observed high appreciation of the new cultural perspective offered by the presence of foreign lecturers. This new perspective is important for students working in international companies, as it allows them to transfer some of the good practices discussed in classes to their daily managerial work (50% of positive assessment).

Impact of receiving an MBA degree on postgraduates' preparedness to working abroad. Plans to find a job overseas are declared mainly by younger people trying to find the best place to work. In the current good economic situation in Poland only a small group declares the readiness to work abroad.

However, a new interesting question is the impact of receiving an MBA degree on plans of future relocating internationally for work. Many people with a stable professional position, who work in international companies, when they have received a French degree, declare the possibility to move and work abroad in the future.

Currently, for experienced managers the hybrid work model can act as an additional incentive as it does not exclude living in Poland and working in a hybrid format overseas. In our study, more than a half of respondents (7/12) confirmed such possibility.

At the same time, postgraduates very positively assess the impact of the programme on the possibility of finding a good job overseas (3/12) and a good job in an international company in Poland (4/12), or even in a renowned Polish company.

In general, these results confirm the thesis, according to which the completion of the programme and receiving two international degrees have a positive impact on postgraduate careers and expand the choice of potential jobs in Poland and overseas.

Learning Management in foreign languages. Vast majority of respondents very positively assess the added value of the MBA programme resulting from learning Management in two foreign languages: French and English. Many respondents stressed that had it not been for this added value consisting in instruction in two foreign languages, they would not have enrolled in the programme. This is one of key assets of the programme highlighted by almost all respondents (10/12).

Small group teaching. Respondents very much appreciate teaching and learning in a small, international student cohort (9/12).

Online teaching/learning. Respondents remain divided over the assessment of the online format of postgraduate instruction. Their assessments are either enthusiastic or sceptical. Enthusiasts of the online format usually are also very much in favour of remote work and diverse types of online education. Sceptics, on the other hand, notice obvious weaknesses of the online format linked with limited business networking opportunities. Nevertheless, they are also aware of the fact that the online format was the only viable option as they would not be able to study in the in-person mode.

Enthusiasts also very much opt for the programme evolution towards hybrid solutions, which could satisfy the need to build professional and social networks.

In the eyes of the students, **the perspective of receiving two international degrees** constitutes the core of the added value of the programme (10/12). That is mainly the opinion of postgraduates working in French companies or working on a daily basis with French clients or the French market in international companies. The relevance of this component was clearly highlighted in their comments made in in-depth interviews. It was considered not only at a purely formal level but also at the symbolic and cultural ones. By receiving a French degree, a postgraduate has become 'equal' to her/his employer. At the same time, he/she could apply for a higher position for which a French degree is required.

Polish MBA degree. Polish MBA degree is also clearly perceived by the postgraduates as a component of added value of the programme. According to most respondents (8/12), Polish degree awarded by a public University, such as the University of Lodz, is increasingly more often appreciated by the postgraduates, as well as by employers.

In the context of the Polish market of educational services, the fact that the programme has been offered by a public University continuously for over 30 years is a quality guarantee and very positively impacts its added value. This continuous presence in the market of educational services, in combination with sticking to high educational standards and quality guarantee, is especially important if we consider that there are many private educational establishments, which offer MBA programmes primarily driven by financial and often little ethical considerations. Against this background, a sustainable strategic partnership of two public universities and their strong position in both markets come as guarantees of the quality and continuity of the educational process.

PART II

PROGRAMME IMPACT ON THE EVOLUTION OF POSTGRADUATE CAREERS

10. Postgraduate careers in the light of qualitative studies

This chapter discusses the impact of the completion of Polish-French postgraduate studies in Management on the course of professional careers of selected postgraduates. It is based on a series of seven in-depth interviews conducted in a face-to-face format in Warsaw in December 2024. In-depth interviews lasted ca. 60–70 minutes each and focused on different stages of professional careers of postgraduates.

Interviews were conducted with postgraduates representing: the first edition of the programme from 30 years ago – academic year 1993/1994 (4 people: 2 women and 2 men), edition from the academic year 2014/2015 (1 person: a woman) and graduates of the latest edition of 2023/2024 (2 people: a woman and a man). The selection of interlocutors was purposeful and focused on people living in Warsaw, mostly working in international corporations.

Respondents invited to interviews remain anonymous, although the study uses real facts about their professional careers. At the same time, the study is used to assess the impact of the cultural context, resulting from good command of the French language and fascination with France, on the professional careers of postgraduates who choose to work for French companies or Polish or international companies focused on the French market. This aspect is clearly visible among the programme graduates.

No doubt, one can assert that people fascinated by France and the French culture are very much likely to choose MBA management studies that have strong ties to France. They also exhibit a high degree of loyalty to France and companies cooperating with the French market, which translates into the career paths of postgraduates. Based on this, we could create a certain typology of postgraduates' professional careers in connection with France and the French market.

This study was also aimed at showing how the profile of the postgraduate changed in connection with the external conditions of the business environment, which (depending on the year) created completely different opportunities for graduates of the programme to choose and develop their professional careers on the labour market. Changes in the corporate environment related to the transformation of the Polish economy created completely different opportunities for subsequent groups of postgraduates.

10.1. Postgraduates of the first edition of the programme (1994). Reflections 30 years after graduation

The first edition of the Polish-French postgraduate programme in Management was absolutely unique as the programme was totally new in the Polish market of managerial education. The programme was fully financed from external sources under European schemes and within bilateral cooperation between Poland and France, the cooperation of twin cities: Łódź and Lyon, collaboration of universities from Łódź and Lyon, as well as collaboration of regions and business organisations (Chambers of Commerce and Industry – *Chambre de Commerce et d'Industrie*). The project was very innovative, it engaged a wide group of partners from the local administration, business, and academic circles.

The programme fitted into a wider context of partnership cooperation worked out specifically for the needs of transformation. Besides the participation in a very extensive educational programme in Poland, it enabled the Polish postgraduate students to travel to Lyon and take part in classes taught at the Lyon 3 University by business practitioners. At the same time, we need to stress that in the first edition of the programme delivered at the University of Lodz large proportion of classes was taught by French lecturers who came to Lodz. Programme implementation would not have been possible without an effort on the Polish side of people very much engaged in the project who viewed it as a platform creating development opportunities to the students.

In addition to attending classes, the participants of the programme acquired the right to complete a 3-month internship in France in a selected French company, in accordance with their educational profile and further professional and business plans of the students. The programme was therefore undoubtedly unique by nature, as it created a completely one-of-a-kind opportunity for the students to acquire new competencies and set out their future business career.

10.1.1. French degree in Management as a passport to managerial positions in French companies

For a large group of postgraduate students without a previous degree in Management, the principal goal was to receive a French degree that would facilitate them applying for managerial positions in French companies.

I enrolled in the Polish-French postgraduate programme in Management in 1993 as a holder of a degree in Mediterranean Archaeology. Previously, in the 1980s I had been delaying graduation in Archaeology for 3 years because I was not clear about what to do in the future. This way I could postpone the decision about what to do with my life. I was at a crossroads.

This case is a good illustration of the first group of candidates who at that time were thinking intensely about their future and, having a good command of French, they contemplated pursuing career in connection with France and for that a French degree in Management could be an important asset.

I did not want to move abroad permanently, I wanted to stay in Poland. The first job that I found already in the 1990s (1992/1993) was in the French Danone in Warsaw. I worked at the Transport Department. Danone was then a very small company and I headed a team of 5 drivers. When the programme was launched, it was a great opportunity for me.

Students of the first edition were very determined to find a new professional career path in the context of economic transition. Postgraduate programme could provide them with solid foundations for building their professional career in connection with France and French companies. Receiving a French degree was a precondition to put such a strategy in place. Information about the launching of the postgraduate programme was mostly passed by word of mouth marketing and through personal contact.

I learnt about the programme accidentally, thanks to my wife who worked in Warsaw in the France-Telecom office. My wife brought me a leaflet about the programme from France-Telecom. My goal was to learn and get a diploma.

At that time, the intensity of the programme made it impossible for postgraduate students to combine learning with a full-time job. In practice, this meant that for the duration of the programme they had to reduce their professional activity to a maximum of half-time position, which was not always welcome by the employers. At that time, the programme was closer to an extensive full-time studies format rather than the current part-time programmes.

The difference compared to how the programme is delivered today is enormous. In-person sessions take place every two weeks over the weekend. Classes are conducted in a hybrid format, with a predominance of the online format. This hybrid solution makes it much easier for students to continue working full-time and this is the key difference from the previous, fully in-person programme format from the time of transformation. At the same time, it should be stressed that today the knowledge and business experience of the students are much greater than in its first edition.

I was trying to combine working in Danone with learning. However, as sessions were held every week I could not study and work 3.5 days a week. Therefore I decided to give up working for Danone and focus on learning.

The students of the first edition were requested to complete a mandatory 3-month internship in a French company in France. The goal was not only to familiarize them with the aspects of business operations in a market

economy, but also to see how business environment impacts the conditions in which companies operate. The internship in a French company also had a cultural dimension, as it allowed the students to experience the French management model. For many students, it was also a kind of invitation to continue collaboration with a given company beyond the internship. Understandably, many of these companies viewed the interns as future, potential employees of the company on the Polish market. This is perfectly evidenced by the following statement of our postgraduate.

I did my internship in Citroen in Paris and then in Warsaw. The internship in Warsaw at the import agent office made much more sense. After its completion I continued professional engagement with the office for 18 months.

After obtaining a degree, the key problem for more ambitious students, aspiring to managerial positions was to accumulate specific experience, which could give them a competitive edge when applying for such positions in various companies. At that time, a degree was not enough and specific experience gained as a manager in a company was also relevant. Opportunities for accumulating such experience existed also in Polish companies, which had to undergo rapid and rather radical transformation towards a market economy.

*In Danone I was only a “responsable” (lead/supervisor), not even a lower level manager. In Citroen I was also only an assistant without any managerial role. In Cora Garwolin finally I took on **the position of a Commercial and Marketing Manager**. Thus, I broke the glass ceiling but at the same time faced a very difficult challenge. This experience **allowed me to include in my CV that I was also a Commercial and Marketing Manager**.*

The case of this ambitious postgraduate is typical of people who were pragmatic about planning the advancement of their professional careers in the conditions of the Polish economy, which was in a complete transition. Obtaining a foreign degree was a prerequisite for applying for managerial positions. Subsequently, however, only the sum of specific experience gained in managerial positions could allow postgraduates to accelerate their professional careers.

Then I worked for a Swedish company which was constructing a factory near Warsaw. I submitted the winning managerial application and became a Commercial Manager in a corrugated sheet factory. That was the first time for me to be in a role, which I enjoyed a lot. I spent 4 years there. For me, this stage was very important. I worked in a factory employing 120 people. At some point, when the General Manager resigned, a call for application was announced to find a replacement for him in our company in Poland. My application was rejected. Since my goal was to assume the role of General Manager in the company, I decided to quit and discontinue further collaboration with this employer.

The course of our postgraduate's career is a perfect illustration of the thesis that postgraduate management studies can stimulate the ambitions and professional goals of our students. In this case, we are dealing with a very conscious and at the same time very ambitious person, a manager who aspired to perform managerial functions and was very much predisposed to it, which found confirmation in the course of his professional career.

When leaving the Scandinavian company I received a lot of proposals and job offers. I went to the first interview and immediately got a job. This time it was a position in a German company offering premium packaging solutions.

This example also confirms the thesis that the graduates of the programme were and still are strongly internationally oriented. Preference given to France and the French language does not preclude their active participation in Anglo-Saxon, Scandinavian or German projects. The described case also shows the importance of the industry specialisation of graduates who, despite previous industry reshuffles, then find themselves in one of the industries (in this case – packaging). At the same time, it is worth paying attention to the 4–5-year cycle in terms of workplace changes, which, according to the assumptions of the programme, rewards a mobile manager profile of a person, who is constantly developing, gaining experience in a new company and aspiring each time to higher managerial positions and a wider range of responsibilities.

Contacts with other postgraduates working in French companies play a major role in moving forward on the professional path. Word-of-mouth marketing and an extensive network of contacts can play a very important role here. The network of contacts among the students from the same edition is an important component of human capital, related to the essence of this programme.

Finally, I found a job with a French linen yarn manufacturer based near Olsztyn. I submitted the winning application for the position of Managing Director and spent 11 successful years there. The challenge was huge. The product was a low margin one and faced strong competition from the Chinese rivals. When I started working in the company, it reported losses. When I was leaving it 10 years later, the turnover doubled and we had 12 million of profits. After 10 years, the CEO of the company who hired me for the job retired and my collaboration with his successor, previous Commercial Director, turned out to be a problem. Having spent 11 years with the company, I was dismissed. At the age of 56 I was left without a job and finding a new one was really a challenge.

Paradoxically, a Polish manager in a French company reporting excellent results due to his effective management decisions, may lose his job. His position in the labour market, although it should be stronger given the circumstances,

is weakening and his age hinders his further career progression. Apparently, only the consistency and determination of our postgraduate enabled him to continue career planning according to a positive scenario.

In January 2019 I submitted a winning application to a French company manufacturing door fittings in Poland. In France the company is based in Paris. My position is that of a Managing Director. My predecessor established the company but he retired after 30 years of work. Once again I found myself in a new industry. The French founders and owners of the business sold it to an investment fund in Paris when they turned 70. The advantage of the fund is that it does not interfere directly with the corporate culture leaving quite a big margin of independence to the management. I was appointed the Managing Director with a manager's contract. The company has been developing dynamically since 2019. We are close to buying a company in Portugal that has a similar production profile and big capacity. The strategy consisting in taking over foreign competitors is a precondition for continuing and developing the production.

The course of professional career of our postgraduate shows how important consistency and determination are in career planning. His professional attitude shows a lot of consistency and reliability in his approach to the tasks and goals set for him. Another distinguishing feature of this professional path is the consistent and harmonious combination of professional and personal goals.

In our Polish-French management programme, the cultural dimension related of working in a French company, the French language and the French in the roles of superiors or business partners are all very important. Hence, the opinions of postgraduates concerning the circumstances surrounding this cooperation are vital to us.

People of every nation have their virtues and vices. Everything depends on who is the one to judge. Generally speaking, collaboration with the French can be more difficult than with representatives of other nations. It is also rather specific.

Once a colleague of mine who works with Americans asked me how I can put up with the French. I told him that the point was that we are as thick as thieves. When everyone is fed up, I know what is going to happen next. I am prepared for that and this comes as no surprise to me. I know it is going to be hard and I simply accept it as normal while others get nervous. Every nation has got its virtues and vices, also we, Poles. I have no negative recollections from working in Danone and Citroen. I knew I was speeding up my career progression and they were not able to offer anything interesting to me. In the linen yarn company the issue was probably more of generational nature. Speaking of Polsoft, collaboration has been progressing smoothly since I managed to win them over.

The experience of our postgraduate supports the assertion that cooperation with the French largely depends on winning their trust. Enrolling in a postgraduate programme and obtaining a French degree from the university in Lyon are very important components of this process. This puts our post-graduates on the same footing as the French. A prerequisite for establishing good relations is, of course, an excellent command of French, which is a bridge to excellent communication and to building real trust.

The French consider me a Frenchman. On many occasions, when my interlocutors learn that I studied in France, their perception of myself changes. My impression is that there are two nations for whom good command of their language helps a lot in collaboration: the French and Germans. Language is about building relationships. Through the language we acquire a similar way of thinking about certain matters.

This is an example of a postgraduate whose communication with the French business partners is excellent and who can draw the right conclusions from various business experiences.

Some time ago I was asked to list the core success factors in business and I mentioned team building skills and the ability to take advantage of arising opportunities.

10.1.2. Fascination with France and Paris. French language and culture as a platform for acquiring managerial knowledge in the tourist industry

In general, although the recruitment of students for the first edition of the programme was nationwide by nature, it took place largely by word of mouth among various Polish universities and among holders of a degree in Romance Studies, and French language teachers. In addition to French-speaking people with a degree in Romance Studies, people of various academic backgrounds, fascinated by France and French culture, were interested in the programme. Such motivation was especially true for female graduates of language studies, as philological faculties were usually strongly feminized.

Obviously, I decided to choose these studies to acquire managerial knowledge, but, most importantly, the opportunity to do it through the French language and culture. That was the crucial combination of components. France was like a dream to me. My adventure with France began when I was 15 and my aunt who lived in France invited me to Paris. Without this French link, I certainly would not have responded so quickly and positively to the advertisement. At that time, I immediately knew that it fitted me perfectly. When I came to Łódź to attend

classes, I realised that having a good command in French is one thing and having a good command of business French is something completely different.

When examining the motivations driving people with degrees in various fields of study to enrol in the programme, one can clearly see that all of them exhibit a lot of interest in France and the French. Their engagement with French business has been deeply rooted in fascination with the French language and a desire to get to know the country. This was also the case with this female post-graduate, whose history and professional career perfectly illustrate this thesis.

Today, when I look back at these studies I know they were critical for me. On the one hand, the programme extended my learning time and, on the other hand, it showed me the entire variety of approaches to business matters. It also reassured me that I was ready to work in an international setting. An internship in France and some weeks spent at the university in Lyon were relevant additional benefits. All the aforesaid components contributed to the very high added value of the programme. There was no single moment when I would feel uneasy or out of place. On the contrary, I felt like a duck in water.

Although the first edition of the programme was taught in the Polish-French language combination, significantly different from the current solution with French and English as principal languages of instruction, its main objective from the very beginning was to prepare managers to work in an international setting. Long before Poland joined the EU (in fact, 10 years before the accession), graduates of the programme had an excellent opportunity to prepare for work in an international environment. At that time, such approach was absolutely innovative. It was put in place as part of unique educational programmes, tailored to the needs of the participants.

These studies also made me aware of the fact that I enjoyed working in an international setting very much. They showed me that I was curious with other cultures which I wanted to explore. I think that had it not been for these studies, it would have been much more difficult for me to work at the international level. At the same time, the programme helped me, a person without any previous international experience, in building real confidence that this is something important to me.

The international profile of the studies and openness to other cultures were definitely the two distinctive features of this educational format. At the same time, the programme goal was to train managers who understand the various departments and functions of the company and are ready to enter into a dialogue with the people responsible for the implementation of these different functions.

From the very beginning, you were telling us that management is not about being an expert in each field. Details are to be taken care of by experts while you, managers, have to understand and learn certain processes. You have to take a holistic view and have knowledge of diverse managerial fields and functions.

This approach and philosophy have stayed with me until today. I can find in myself foundations for holding such a dialogue with experts. Even though I am not a financial officer, I know how to talk to experts in finance. This is something that I learnt from the programme and started practicing it immediately. Also today – when AI can be my first interlocutor – I consult its recommendations and comments with my experts. Then we discuss the details. For sure, it was all very helpful.

During my professional career I worked 2 years with a team in France in the field of “supplier solutions,” which also gave me a lot. Nothing could surprise me, and everything was much easier. I was familiar with the French law and I knew how it works. For me, a person without any experience, these studies opened up certain possibilities.

Our postgraduate's statement also emphasises the key importance of a good general managerial background, which has paid off in her 30 years of career and which still pays off today. As already noted above, in the first editions the postgraduate programme for managers was longer in terms of the hours of instruction, meaning the students had to adjust their professional and private life to this format.

What is your perception of French people?

In my opinion collaboration with the French is not easy. It is surely a big challenge. My view is that the French like complicating matters, which in fact are not complicated at all and should not be perceived as such. For sure, they also talk a lot about politics. The confirmation can be found in the role of trade unions and the omnipresence of strikes. They are always looking for a hidden meaning. I believe that the dry German pragmatism and French emotions represent two approaches, which in general are far from easy.

Our postgraduate's statement reflects her excellent knowledge of France and the French as partners. She is perfectly able to find a common language with the French, knowing well their strengths and weaknesses, as well as a specific style of communication and negotiation. She is also able to look at these cultural conditions in the context of cooperation with partners from other countries, especially with Germany or the Americans. This statement once again proves the excellent preparation of our postgraduates to work in an international setting.

I must also admit that at the same time I am really impressed by the French when it comes to their professionalism in hotel management. I deal with hotels in my daily work and I can see it very clearly. French hotel chains are very professional and innovative. To the French lifestyle is very important, even in budget hotels. I mean here taking care of adopted standards and offering a pleasant customer experience. This is something I like and appreciate very much. They pay a lot of attention to details. Another area is food and the French cuisine; dinner is always a great experience.

At the same time, our graduates are experts with extensive knowledge of selected sectoral markets in France, who are able to appreciate the unique strengths of French companies operating in these sectors. No doubt, one of such sectors is the hotel sector, in which the French have developed a unique competitive advantage, in their domestic market and internationally, where they operate through their hotel chains.

Long mutual trust building process. Our postgraduates also know how to win trust of the French partners, be it employers, partners, suppliers, or customers. Trust building process is long but it leads to fruitful cooperation.

I also have an impression that if you win trust of the French and they realise the value you bring in mutual relations, you can achieve a lot. The winning of trust takes longer and it is obligatory filled with frequent direct meetings and consultations. I experienced it in the post-Covid-19 period. This is particularly important in the hotel industry. These meetings must lead to further steps necessary to build confidence.

The experience of our postgraduates shows that winning the trust of French partners is a long-term process, in which direct contacts and different forms of consultation play a key role. The importance of face-to-face contacts is crucial in this case. Intensive direct communication is therefore very important.

Face to face interactions are absolutely fundamental. I do not know any business partners with whom I would not build mutual trust after two or three face to face meetings. With the French you need to maintain direct contacts. I do not know any French hotel chain with which we could develop strong ties without face to face meetings.

The rules of communication remained equally important in the post-pandemic period, as communication regained its previous form. Experiences related to the specifics of online communication during the pandemic have not become the new normal in this case. In the case of the French, this is undoubtedly the result of cultural differences.

In other countries, Covid-19 changed some standards and habits. Germany can be an example, where meeting on the Zoom platform often replaces a direct contact. The French came back to direct communication.

Our oldest graduates have a very solid body of knowledge, which they can use in subsequent positions, and in the future as part of independent training and consulting activities. Thirty years of managerial experience in an international setting in a selected industry gives them a unique competitive advantage, which they can perfectly discount engaging in various forms of consulting.

My outlook into the future in my company is positive. I am also considering launching training and consulting activities in business services. I am a long-distance runner and I am loyal to my employers. If I make changes, I make them within the same organisation between departments and roles.

10.1.3. From a graduate in IT to Key Account Manager in the banking sector

From the very beginning, the Polish-French MBA programme has created a very wide range of opportunities for its graduates in terms of choosing the target model of a managerial or entrepreneurial career. Due to the specificity of the cultural environment, this career very often developed in symbiosis with France, the French market, and French enterprises.

Coming back to my choice of the postgraduate programme, I must stress that it happened by chance. I think I was just in the right place at the right time. I owe the enrollment in the programme to my friend who taught me French when I studied at the Technical University. She also was a student of the first edition of our programme, she encouraged me to take up these studies.

For the first edition of the programme, word-of-mouth marketing and recommendations from friends played a very important role. The program was both completely new and innovative. At the same time, due to the requirement of good command of French, it was a niche offer targeting a narrow audience and it has remained such until this day. Word-of-mouth marketing is still an important channel of communication with potential candidates. In addition to being fluent in French, the candidate's availability and readiness to work very intensively during the course of studies are also very important, and that requires skills ensuring a well-balanced professional and private life.

On the Polish side, the first editions of the programme relied very much on the cooperation between universities based in Łódź: the University of Lodz and the Lodz University of Technology. This cooperation ensured attracting the best graduates of both universities having a good command of French, as well as people who had previously completed their education at local universities and had already been professionally active for several years. French language teachers from both universities played a major role in disseminating

information about the programme among the narrow Francophile community that they knew well.

I began our postgraduate programme immediately after receiving a degree from the Lodz University of Technology. With the benefit of the hindsight, looking at the 30 years that have passed I would say these studies were like a milestone in my life. They gave me very solid foundations on which I could build my further professional career.

This postgraduate programme was a perfect tool to support students in shaping their future and a great opportunity for entrepreneurial people. It allowed to foster the position of students in the labour market and enhanced their confidence. Over time, contacts with the business community and with top managers of key enterprises also became an added value. For our postgraduate, working on a new business project allowed him to build a wide network of contacts, which paid off over time.

For over six months of working on the Polish-French business project as a member of the French team I could participate in very high level meetings in Poland. When the Union of Polish Banks organised a visit to Lyon, I was asked to help in the preparations for the meeting. At that time, we met in Lyon with the Board of Credit Agricole where one of the directors was the father of my French colleague. One of my four French colleagues built a hugely successful career in business; he established a recruitment agency which now operates at the international level and reports millions in turnover.

The relationships established between our students and French companies, as well as their French peers planning to develop businesses in Poland, allowed our postgraduates to take advantage of new opportunities offered by the systemic transformation. For some of them, these French ties laid foundations for launching a very specific business activity in Poland in the form of a joint venture or a subsidiary of the French partner.

For me, the programme and experience gathered over several years after receiving the degree were decisive for my professional career profile. Later, when I got a job in IBM my biggest asset was a collection of business cards as a proof of my connections in different industries at the top decision making level. There were many top managers in my network.

The statement of our postgraduate is a confirmation of the importance and significance of networking and the level of trust associated with such connections, which is a vital component of relationship capital. During the transformation period, this component was absolutely crucial for developing various forms of cooperation.

For sure it was very helpful for my work in IBM and in other undertakings. In IBM these connections secured me the position of Key Account Manager for clients from the banking sector. Until today, in my job I combine my knowledge of the IT sector and the banking sector. It delineated my career path and clearly fostered my position.

In the 1990s, French companies investing in Poland required their employees to have a good command of French. Therefore, for the graduates of the first editions, fluency in French was a very important bargaining chip when applying for a job in French companies.

Having got their first job in a French company, a large proportion of our postgraduates were responsible for business development on the Polish market. Many of these French companies represented the broadly understood sector of big box retailers – such as the Castorama chain. For our postgraduates, the cultural context of functioning in a French-speaking environment has always been a great value in the workplace in Poland. This applied to communication in French, as well as certain customs and social contexts.

For postgraduates of initial editions employed in French retail chains, the requirement to work seven days a week was a big managerial challenge. Liberal regulations required the managers to work also on the weekends, which, no doubt, was a heavy burden.

For 18 months I have been working in a French company ATOS. My responsibilities are the same as previously in IBM. I manage outsourcing contracts with, e.g., Airbus. This is a completely international setting. However, when drafting an offer for BNP Paribas bank I did it in French and we had a conversation in French, too. I was a little nervous because since I left Castorama more than 25 years ago I have not used business French at all. Yet, when we started working on the offer everything came back to me very quickly. Now in Atos I work with a French client (Airbus) and a German client (Bayer).

The distinctive positioning of our postgraduates in the French language and culture still gives them a unique position in the labour market, even after 30 years. They are sought-after associates of leading French companies operating in Poland and neighbouring countries. One can say, that they owe this unique position in the labour market to our programme.

The programme allowed me to position myself within 12 months at the level that I surely would not have been able to achieve over five years or perhaps even ever. It offered me a very fast career progression and brought me to a completely different level.

The graduates of the first edition strongly emphasise the importance of being able to combine favourable external conditions related to the economic

transformation and a unique model of education, which allowed them to plan future career and make better use of emerging business opportunities.

No doubt, compared to colleagues with whom I studied at the Lodz University of Technology, after a year spent in the programme and the internship in France I came back to the labour market equipped with a completely different experience. I was much more self-confident and optimistic. I should also stress that I moved to Warsaw.

From the point of view of the values, it should also be emphasised that the students of the first edition, as well as the subsequent ones, overwhelmingly planned to use the acquired knowledge for the development of companies and foreign entities operating in Poland.

The programme gave me a real support or foundations for all my further operations. I also still have a strong appreciation for France and for the French people.

A very large added value of our studies, strongly highlighted by the post-graduates, consisted in building strong relations with France and the French. Mutual contacts have both a professional and social dimension.

At the same time, every postgraduate has a very personal view of the conditions of business cooperation with France and the working style of the French manifested when implementing various business projects.

Business collaboration with the French is not easy. I am a very orderly and well-organised person by nature. When we were about to open the first Castorama store, everything was designed and planned and after the weekend we learnt that a completely new idea emerged. In the past I was rather critical about such an approach, but today I see it as a strength rather than a weakness. In the past this change of plans irritated me while today I see it as positive. Their readiness for embracing change, flexibility in action, going against some stereotypes and challenging themselves is a real value.

From the comment of our postgraduate it follows that the beginnings of co-operation with the French could be compared to a planned chaos. Over time, however, it turns out that this chaos can be part of a more creative process and result in innovative solutions.

The French first choose what they are aiming at and then think how to do it. This helps them to go beyond certain stereotypes and get rid of ramifications. Over time I realised that such an approach gives them a lot of leeway and helps in achieving more. At that time, I believed that I needed more order. Today, many years later, I think that there is value in changing some aspects while preserving a more flexible approach to the entire process. Now, I believe that with some solutions you can experiment more.

10.1.4. From Romance Studies to Corporate Finance Analytics

The first edition of the programme in 1993 should always be seen against the background of the profound systemic changes that the entire economy and the education system were experiencing at that time. It was a very intensive time of economic transformation in Poland, which created a range of previously unknown career opportunities for the graduates of the programme. Since the precondition to enrol in the programme was a good command of French – understandably – there were many graduates of Romance Studies among the first participants. We could even say that they were overrepresented in the general student cohort, although programme organizers took great care to ensure a more diverse structure of the participants' education profiles.

As I obtained a degree in Romance Studies from the University in Lublin, I was looking for something that could offer me better prospects.

A large group of graduates in Romance Studies saw this unique programme as a chance to quickly find a place for themselves in the new economic reality.

It was important to me that the programme was taught in French. I did not want to be just a teacher of French, a language which unfortunately was losing its importance. At that time I already lived in Warsaw. I found a part-time job so that I could combine it with studies, which were very intensive then as classes were held every week on Thursday, Friday and Saturday.

When analysing the course of the first edition of the programme, all post-graduates recall its very high intensity, which excluded parallel full-time work or running their own business.

When I got a degree, I found a job in a French audit and consulting company and have stayed there until today. All my life I have been working in one and the same company; the only changes were between departments and positions.

The example of our graduate shows how, in those exceptional circumstances, postgraduate studies were a quick path to working in a French company.

I got a job in an audit firm because of having an MBA degree but also because I was fluent in French and had some knowledge of accounting and finance. Today, my good command of French is not so relevant within the company as everybody speaks and communicates in English.

In 1995, fluency in French was a prerequisite for getting a job in a French company but it is no more the case. At that time in Poland there were very few people with a good command of French ready to work in accounting and finance.

In the 1990s, French companies were almost exclusively looking for candidates who could speak French. Currently, fluency in French is no longer a prerequisite for getting an employment in French companies, which, as global entities, are looking for employees who speak mainly English.

In the audit firm I explored all different internal career paths. I also obtained a series of required certificates, completed training courses, and passed exams for accountants and certified accountants. My company also evolved as a result of mergers and acquisitions. Now it employs about 400 people, when I started working there were only 30 employees.

Apart from the effects of globalization, changes have taken place in French companies operating in Poland in connection with the increase in their scale and internal communication. M&A processes have led many French companies to the Anglo-Saxon management model, resulting from the processes of ownership transformations.

The programme gave me foundations in different fields needed for management purposes and was very helpful. At the beginning I shifted towards accounting. However, what really counts in a company are practice and learning from others. The programme also enhanced my self-confidence. Now I am more like an internal independent expert within the company.

Postgraduates of the first edition strongly emphasise the multitude of proposals that they could choose from at that time due to much smaller competition on the labour market. For candidates with good command of French, the employee market prevailing at that time gave access to a number of attractive offers from French partners.

In the 1990s a lot of things were easier to achieve than today (2024). At that time, there were fewer people having a good command of French. By working hard many people found themselves in totally new circumstances. From my point of view, the most important sources of professional development were and still are practice, working with people, and internal and external training courses. What works best is knowledge that must be constantly updated.

This strongly confirms the change in external conditions and development strategies initiated by foreign investors on the Polish market, including mainly French ones, in terms of the policy of recruiting managers who can speak French.

When it comes to cooperation with French people and French companies, all postgraduates strongly emphasise the importance of being fluent in French as an element of building mutual trust and direct relations. It should also be stressed that the current French generation of young managers, responsible for the development of companies on the Polish market, is more internationally oriented than their colleagues in the 1990s. French companies at that time highly valued good command of French by job candidates.

For me, a good command of French has always facilitated such collaboration. Although now the French are forced to speak English, they have always preferred

French as a language of communication. Speaking French also facilitates establishing relations.

Postgraduates working within French business environment on a daily basis can also see clear cultural differences that impact the work culture and corporate management style.

French work culture is different than the Anglo-Saxon one but it also evolves due to mergers and acquisitions with the Americans and internationalization of companies. Anglo-Saxon style is increasingly more present as a result of the dissemination of certain procedures and formalisation of processes. In my company we can even speak of overregulation. That is my perception of the direction of change. Formalisation comes also as an effect of regulations and the implementation of specific standards. We must observe certain rules and standards laid down by regulations.

10.2. Postgraduates from editions delivered between 2010 and 2015. Reflections 10 years after graduation

The division of our postgraduates into “academic year” groups is aimed at getting a picture of their structure, which obviously evolves, as well as changes in the business environment, where career development opportunities have been completely different for subsequent years of postgraduates.

A female postgraduate of 2014

Since the profile of the programme requires candidates to speak French, a very large percentage of our postgraduates have an earlier obtained degree in language studies, mostly in Romance Studies. Therefore, one can risk asserting that this French-taught programme attracts graduates of language studies with a degree in Romance Studies in a much greater proportion than any other postgraduate studies.

Our interlocutor also holds a degree in Romance Studies from the University of Warsaw (obtained in 2006). Graduates in Romance Studies – mostly women as this is one of the most female dominated subjects – are usually looking for additional postgraduate studies that would allow them to acquire a new specialization. She first completed postgraduate studies in film production organization in Łódź at the Lodz Film School and only later decided to enrol in the postgraduate Polish-French MBA management programme. Candidates with this profile usually decide to choose postgraduate management programmes having gained some previous experience of working in the education sector or private language schools.

Before starting postgraduate studies, I worked for a private language school in Warsaw as a French teacher conducting classes for corporate clients in their companies. That gave me an opportunity to reach out to many renowned French companies which invested in Poland and were based in Warsaw.

I also conducted language classes for the Polish employees of the French beauty retail chain Sephora in Warsaw. I had even the privilege to have one-to-one classes with the director of Sephora in Poland, who wanted to improve his language skills.

For female graduates in language studies, getting in touch with the French business environment often acts as an impulse to change their career profile in connection with the choice of the postgraduate Polish-French MBA programme in Management.

I got to like the French corporate environment so much that I began to think what I could do to work in Sephora not as an external French language teacher but as a fully-fledged employee. In my searches for a postgraduate programme I came across an advertisement of your MBA studies and I realised that I was a very good match for your candidate profile as a holder of a degree in Romance Studies, speaking perfect French.

The requirement to write a diploma thesis based on one's own experience of working in a French company also becomes an important stage in career planning for graduates in language studies.

I began studying and I can remember that one of the key requirements of a successful completion of the programme was a 3-month internship in a French company. This was my next encounter with Sephora, this time in a different role. After the internship, both sides agreed that the collaboration was so good that I can stay with them for longer.

When preparing to write my diploma thesis I knew that I would focus on Sephora and that I would work for them. My thesis compared the strategies of two competitors – Sephora and Douglas – in the Polish market and after the graduation it became obvious that I would work for Sephora in their Marketing Department. All these pieces fitted together very nicely and my career development path was coherent and very consistent.

This example confirms that a diploma thesis seeking to solve a specific problem in a company may often become a stepping stone to building a strong position of the author as this company's employee. Students writing their theses are asked to play the role of internal consultants who can get an insight on the company's problems. Whether specific outcomes are achieved depends, of course, on how much the company is ready to collaborate with an employee or intern in solving a given problem. Unfortunately, due to various internal

circumstances, some companies do not take advantage of this opportunity, which works to the detriment of the company and the postgraduate student writing the thesis.

I spent about 18 months in Sephora in the Marketing Department. Then a less joyful moment came when my boss told me that my skills (MBA degree) were too high for the Marketing Department where I could not expect to be promoted to a higher position. The company did not offer me any alternative pathways of internal promotion adequate to my higher MBA skills. Obviously, I could have stayed in Sephora but I would continue working at the same level of the corporate organizational structure.

The above comment shows that an MBA degree does not always paves the way to quick promotion within the company. This happens if the new qualifications are higher than the possible career path available within the company. The lack of opportunities for promotion when managerial aspirations are awakened may encourage the graduate to look for a new job. The results of our research show that the lack of prospects for internal promotion juxtaposed with enhanced self-confidence and trust in newly acquired knowledge, creates an incentive to start looking for a more attractive workplace. This is also confirmed by the example of our postgraduate's career (statement below). Obtaining a diploma becomes a specific catalyst of change, as it triggers readiness to act and stimulates the postgraduate's aspirations and expectations.

Finally, I decided to quit and start looking for a new job. I found it in a recording studio. I worked as a product manager and I was managing the work of the studio. Like in Sephora, I was managing a certain process. Each earlier job gives you skills that can be used at the current workplace. All the time we manage various different processes and projects and are faced with different challenges. But they are all complementary. In the recording studio we worked mainly with Koreans in English. Recently, these Korean investors bought two the biggest recording studios in Warsaw and specialise in dubbing films.

This statement clearly shows how one can creatively use their experience from postgraduate MBA studies and previous workplaces. We are talking here about the complementarity of different experiences and the ability to manage certain processes, regardless of the field of activity of the employer's company. This commentary also shows that we are now increasingly dealing with postgraduate careers, which are subject to continuous and faster evolution. This proves the increasing openness of our postgraduates to the search for new solutions that are relatively harmoniously related to the challenges of the labour market and their family situation.

Then I became a mother. Today, my son is 7 and after he was born there was COVID-19 pandemic. I shortly worked in a French publishing house as a proof-reader of literary text translations. This was my coming back to my linguistic roots, i.e., to French. My responsibilities also included acquiring translation rights to translate French literary works. Everything has been centred around France and managing French business projects from diverse fields. This was my come-back to the French literature (I got my degree in Romance Studies in 2006).

The analysis of the careers of our postgraduates shows that they are very deeply rooted in the French culture and language, as well as business, which determines their searches for new a job in connection with their principal area of activity. In the case of this particular postgraduate, we are also dealing with combining her own choices with forms of learning from experience acquired in different roles and contexts.

At present, I work for the Invisible Exhibition. I met the director of this project many years ago and last year she invited me to this collaboration. At the Invisible Exhibition I am back in project management. Part of this exhibition is an invisible space, which you enter with a blind or visually impaired guide.

There are 20 blind guides in our foundation. We are open 7 days a week from 10.00 am to 08.00 pm. Visitor groups entering the darkness of the Invisible Exhibition consist of 8 people. There is also an English version for overseas visitors. We are a branch of a project originating from Budapest. We were lucky to survive the COVID-19 pandemic but our parent company in Budapest went bankrupt. The branch in Prague also survived. We are proudly subsidised by the State Fund for the Rehabilitation of the Disabled (Polish abbr. PFRON) but otherwise we do not receive any subsidies. Our revenue suffices to cover the costs, we can continue working and that is very much heartening.

I should also mention our teambuilding sessions in the dark for companies. We have guides especially trained for such sessions. People are faced with challenges which are completely different in the dark. We perceive space with different senses. These teambuilding exercises in the dark take on a totally new meaning. Challenges for visitor groups are tailored to the specificity of their companies. When DHL had a teambuilding session, they were expected to pack parcels in the dark. A group from a medical company was asked to dress a wound in the dark and to do first aid to help one of them. In Christmas time we always decorate Christmas tree in the dark, which our visitors like a lot. When the tree is decorated, the guide takes it outside to show how crookedly baubles and Christmas lights were placed. They always like it.

I am also happy when people say that since I have joined the Invisible Exhibition teambuilding has been brought forward a lot. The same companies come

back with new employees. For teambuilding sessions we can have groups of 10 people. So, if we have, i.e., 40-people, we divide them into 4 groups. Our corporate clients have all the space of the Invisible Exhibition reserved for them. My role is to manage such projects.

The evolution of our postgraduate's career shows that having the first degree in languages and supplementing it with MBA management studies definitely stimulates the mobility and openness to taking on new managerial challenges. Managing the most complex processes can easily be translated into the ability to find oneself in very different industries. Mobility, openness to change, and the ability to manage projects and processes of varying complexity become key elements.

The described professional experiences exhibit a certain feature typical of some of the careers of our postgraduates. These people are characterized by greater openness and mobility, which is also related to their attitude towards professional life. We can also highlight their greater empathy and sensitivity resulting from their previous linguistic background. It also seems that engaging with French culture, the French lifestyle, and model of life favours attitudes of independence and changeability, which seem to be more natural for them. It seems that the model of studies associated with France also serves to liberate and consolidate all these values. This also affects the perception of the French as colleagues or superiors in the workplace.

From your experience, how would you describe collaboration with the French?

From what I recall from working with Sephora, everyone was afraid of the French because they were always our bosses. Even as Sephora Polska we were reporting to Sephora France. I always associate the French with authority, as we had to take their opinion into account even if we did not like their point of view. We were always a little bit afraid of them.

I worked for concrete French brands, not only with the Sephora Headquarters. My personal recollections of this collaboration are very positive. The only problem that I have always had on my career path is my being 'overskilled', i.e., having more skills than are necessary for a particular job. At my current workplace I have the same problem but I do not feel upset about it.

The above demonstrates that getting an MBA degree puts the employee at a certain level in the managerial hierarchy. Then, it is entirely up to the postgraduate to decide whether he/she is looking for positions corresponding to their skills or rather to positions that are slightly below their skills but correspond to the values and relationships that they cherish. At the formal level, when certain job offers are below the candidate competencies, we can

talk about being “overskilled” for a selected position. Sometimes, like in the case of our postgraduate, this “overskilling” allows us to achieve a high level of satisfaction with the work performed, regardless of the surplus of competencies.

In my current workplace as of March 2025 my scope of responsibilities will expand a lot. Due to the person taking care of financial and accounting matters of the Invisible Exhibition leaving the job, I will take over her responsibilities (issuing invoices and financial matters). Thus, I will gain more independence within our organisation and my scope of operations will expand.

I will be using all managerial competences acquired at the postgraduate programme in full. The longer I work the less I am afraid of new challenges. Postgraduate studies and my experience gathered in different companies help me to face various new challenges which I can embrace and adjust to them. I feel reassured that I can take up new challenges. This postgraduate MBA programme has taught me to successfully cope with new challenges.

Although I have always enjoyed teaching French, I also wanted to go beyond teaching and engage in other activities. I was looking for the field of activity where I could achieve career satisfaction. I am happy that I found this programme at the University of Lodz and approached it with full openness. I realised what I was looking for and eagerly entered into this new area. The programme made it clear to me that I wanted something more and that I managed to accomplish it.

This clearly shows that postgraduate studies allow postgraduates to significantly expand the area of their professional activity. They become more open to change and are able to embrace it. They are not afraid of change, but see it as a source of new fascinating opportunities.

10.3. The youngest postgraduates. Reflections one year after graduation

When looking at the postgraduates of the latest editions (2023/2024), we can see how their expectations evolve in connection with changes in the environment. Compared to the earlier editions, these postgraduates operate on an increasingly competitive labour market. This applies to both foreign companies operating in Poland, as well as state and international organisations, where a permanent position can be obtained following an extensive system of internal competitions.

In these highly competitive environment, the postgraduate MBA programmes are increasingly seen as a tool to strengthen self-esteem and a mechanism that prepares postgraduates for taking on new managerial challenges.

10.3.1. MBA studies as a self-esteem booster

People with a degree in languages – mainly women working in international companies – increasingly feel the need to supplement their language skills with managerial competences. Getting an MBA degree can help them overcome these deficiencies.

My decision to take up MBA studies was motivated by the promotion to the position of a manager of a dozen or more employees in the company where I was employed. I knew that these studies would enhance my self-confidence in this new role. I did not feel confident as a manager and I wanted to improve my self-confidence. First of all, I did not know much about many aspects of my company's operations and, second, I wanted to learn more about all aspects of team management. Earlier, in my company there were courses in team management but they were at a very basic level. I wanted to get some more in-depth knowledge. I also wanted to learn how to cope with crisis situations.

The need to constantly supplement knowledge through various postgraduate courses is something completely natural for the youngest generation of post-graduates. For them, the readiness to engage in a continuous learning process becomes a natural component of the modern corporate culture.

I found the description of the programme and the curriculum interesting together with a note informing that classes are conducted by Polish and French lecturers. Since at that time I worked with French-speaking clients, that was an additional argument in favour of doing this programme.

Surely, French clients are very demanding. One needs to use a lot of diplomacy when talking with them. They expect to get top quality service. They also want us to eliminate all errors, which – as we know – is practically impossible. I can remember that we had some contract arrangements on the scale of allowable errors but we could not invoke them because the client would be upset. Everything always had to be 100% perfect, no errors at all, although – as we know – it was impossible.

The French also prefer face-to-face communication to online contact. By the end of my work in this company, I finally managed to go to France and meet my client face-to-face. That was the only direct contact we had over 7 years. In direct communication managers, with whom we previously communicated only online, were much more open and cordial. They were also more willing to negotiate. Even though previously we were telling them the same online, they did not get it, while in direct contact it was completely different. The same arguments shared in face-to-face communication were received in a completely different way.

This statement by our young postgraduate coincides with the opinions of the postgraduates from the first editions, who stress the importance of face-to-face

contacts. It confirms that in the case of French clients, communication conducted exclusively in an online format produced a number of negative consequences, as it hindered the building of business relationships and reduced the effectiveness of this communication. Communication restricted to the online format during the COVID-19 pandemic and in the post-pandemic period also undermined the building of real relationships and mutual trust.

I also noticed that conversations between the French and foreigners are completely different from how they communicate among themselves. From what I observed, the relationship between two French people was always much better than between us and the French partner. In general, if any issues arose within our business relationships, it was assumed that their source was always on the side of the foreign partner. The division was always clear: France vs the rest of the world, regardless of whether the other company was American or Polish.

This observation shows that in the relationship between a French company and a foreign subcontractor, the stereotypical approach on the French side is always to blame the foreign partner or subcontractor for possible problems, and not the French subcontractor, even though he can also be a source of some misunderstandings.

The analysis of the comments and actions of the youngest postgraduates shows that they have a natural tendency to implement what they have learnt under the programme into daily practice of their company. They are looking for quick solutions and are ready to implement the solutions discussed in class in their company in a short time.

I enrolled in the programme hoping to get a broader perspective on corporate matters. During some sessions on human resource management taught by the French professors my impression was that the portion of knowledge provided to us sounds well in theory but the practice is different.

However, later I came to the conclusion that things look differently in my company and they should be improved. I was comparing these ideal scenarios with the reality of my company. Our sessions inspired me to engage in a lot of re-thinking and making comparisons with the current situation in our company. I can also remember that the approach to problems encountered in business was more humanistic.

The comment of this young postgraduate clearly testifies to the emergence of a new model of the student, who in an increasingly analytical way wants to transfer and apply in practice various principles and observations passed on to them in class. This type of postgraduate is also more inquisitive and demanding, which can lead to a more critical look at the functioning of their company and the relationships that prevail in it. The goal of the student is to compare the

solutions practiced on a daily basis in the company with model – or even ideal – solutions.

I also realised the well-known truth according to which all operations in a company start with a man. Watching certain behaviours and practices applied in my company filled me with some disgust as I noticed conduct that I disapproved of and which raised my doubts. When writing my diploma thesis I focused even more strongly on transition and change management in companies. I learnt what employee relations should look like in a company and how company should relate to its collaborators. In my opinion, it was all missing in my company. An additional issue that I addressed in my thesis was relocation of many positions and operations from Poland to India. My impression was that something is definitely coming to an end in my company but they do not inform employees about the threats and potential collective layoffs.

The statement of this postgraduate also shows that postgraduate studies, in the phase dedicated to research carried out with a view to write the diploma thesis, are part of a more in-depth reflection on the mechanisms of business operations and the principles governing employee relations. The writing of a diploma thesis can undoubtedly accelerate change and mark the beginning of a more critical look at the management model of the company in which the postgraduate works. It is both a time of reflection and a perfect moment to look at your company from a certain distance and from a new perspective. Such an insight can provide an inspiration for many people to take specific actions related to the remodelling of their own careers.

This is certainly an element of the employee's broadly understood internal transformation, which takes place as a result of their participation in the MBA programme.

In our American company operating in Poland, everybody was stressed and we expected managers to explain some issues to us because we felt we should be better informed. Besides, I also experienced very unprofessional behaviour (mobbing) of one of our employees. Our postgraduate programme improved my knowledge in this area and hence I was able to make an informed assessment of diverse conduct exhibited by my superiors and collaborators. I knew I was a valuable employee and I could not approve of certain behaviours.

This comment proves that postgraduate studies have a very positive impact on the self-esteem of our postgraduates. They become aware of their roles, as well as personal and substantive input into the company and its operations. In addition, their expectations of their direct superiors are also growing. Apparently, some companies are not ready to embrace such a change of mindset of their employees and for such re-evaluation of the organisation operating

model and relationships within it. This may or even must lead to a dissonance between the postgraduate expectations and the conduct of their superiors within the company. This is definitely part of the internal transformation of MBA graduates, who gain a new, more critical perspective on their own company that they did not have before.

The completion of this postgraduate programme acted as a booster of my self-esteem. When I reported the problem to my superior and to the HR department, my impression was that they did not react adequately. This mobbing incident had harmful effects on my mental well-being and I felt very upset. I gave the company some time but the issue was not resolved. In general, it was the source of my discomfort and helplessness as it was not properly addressed by my superiors. Being aware of standards that should be followed in such circumstances, I could not let it go on. Before the MBA studies I would have probably turned a blind eye on such a case as my self-esteem was lower and I was not aware of standards that need to be observed.

It seems that in the group of postgraduates of the latest editions of the programme, we can observe very clear changes in the attitudes of female managers, who are increasingly aware of their rights and demand that the company respect them. Postgraduate studies show them clearly what they can and cannot accept.

These studies helped me realise that I do not have to accept some behaviours practiced within the company because I know what proper behaviours and processes should look like. Undoubtedly, my self-esteem improved as a result of the programme and I have become more ready to fully enforce the rights to which I am entitled.

A critical assessment of the situation in the company came as a consequence of considerations triggered by the knowledge acquired during the MBA studies and research conducted to write the diploma thesis.

Three months after I had expressed my dissatisfaction I started looking for a new job. At that point I knew that I would be looking for a workplace that would be employee-friendly. My previous company employed almost 700 people.

Gaining more self-confidence as a result of the programme also has a positive effect on the readiness to embrace changes, including changing the industry.

I also knew that I do not have to limit my searches to the current industry. Having completed the MBA programme I was sure that I could work in any industry and did not have to stay in the translation business.

The statement of this postgraduate – with a degree in linguistics – shows her strong determination and readiness to change. In this comment, there is no hesitation or fear or uncertainty about the future course of action. Getting an MBA degree strengthened her self-confidence and readiness for change.

I decided to choose a job in a completely new industry and have become an insurance broker in a big international American company. I looked at the new industry through the lenses of my previous experience where I also acted as an intermediary between clients and insurance companies, however, in a different area of expertise. The company with which I work currently collaborates with many entities, including local authorities. This is an American company with an international team, which I very much wanted to join.

I feel well in an international setting. I changed a job after 7 years spent in the previous company. I also started working with younger people – ‘Gen Z.’ My team consists of 10 people and it is still expanding. I met many young people who are very interesting and valuable and I – as their boss – can learn a lot from them.

This statement highlights an important aspect of our program, which is co-operation with people representing different age groups and with different levels of professional experience. Studying together in such a diverse age and professional group allows postgraduates to find themselves much better in the professional environment in a similarly diverse team of employees. Knowing this category of colleagues also allows you to better accept them as members of your own team.

My diploma thesis focused on the transition. In my new company we also deal with transition but here everything is well planned and described. I feel completely safe. I know that the whole change is under control and is well described. This is something very positive.

At present, I am with a company that grows and develops fast. The company which I left was laying people off and reducing its operations in Poland. The new company has a very big HR department, which deals with training. Now I can see that there are companies, which want to win their employees’ loyalty and retain them just like we discussed it at HR classes.

In case of any unprofessional conduct in this new company I know that I can count on my boss to support me. Today, I am also better prepared and know how to handle any unprofessional conduct. I also know how to deal with unprofessional behaviour and how to prevent crossing the red line.

This shows the process and scale of changes that this postgraduate has experienced and, at the same time, consciously created. From an observer of certain processes, she has turned into a manager who consciously creates specific employee relationships.

I have more energy and positive motivation. I am learning new things and can develop in a new field. MBA degree gave me an impulse to embrace new changes which I did not plan before.

This international aspect is very important to me. We, Poles, tend to stick to various manuals and instructions. One could say that we need them in excess. Sometimes we stick too much to various rules which are only partly justified.

Our young postgraduate's comment also shows how well she can find herself in an international setting, smoothly changing one international environment to another and moving between foreign cultures.

How has the MBA degree changed the perception of yourself?

In my new company, the perception was very positive from the very beginning as my direct manager told me that she has a very good assessment of people like myself who not only work but continue developing and learning.

In my previous workplace the perception was not positive. Investing in yourself was not appreciated. Training budget was slowly reduced and people were gradually dismissed.

In the new company I am more independent, can submit proposals and impact their implementation. This is very inspiring because I can have initiative. I am aware of diverse ramifications but here I can see that I am appreciated and that my further growth is facilitated.

10.3.2. New generation of postgraduates seeking further career in between business and internationally oriented public administration

This new model of the postgraduate secures his future by acquiring subsequent degrees and diplomas and accumulating experiences. For this group of postgraduates, fluency in several foreign languages is increasingly complemented by their business experience in an international environment, and knowledge of international law.

I have a degree in linguistics (French and English). At present, I am completing a postgraduate programme in French law at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków. My decision to enrol in the MBA programme was motivated by the wish to develop and test myself. This postgraduate programme lies between the public administration at the EU and international levels and business. The choice of a concrete career path is on our side.

MBA degree is also very well perceived in recruitment processes, in which I take part. Having a Polish and French degree gives me currently a lot of advantage. If you look for a programme that 'makes a difference' this is for sure one that makes a clear difference. This is my personal opinion.

The opinion of this postgraduate confirms that some students choose our programme because they want to build a solid future image of themselves as candidates applying for certain positions. Having specific degrees in the fields

related to the international environment is undoubtedly an attractive aspect of the image of a candidate aspiring to new challenges, also in the public administration sector.

Young generation postgraduates can much more often be compared to explorers. They are open to acquire new business experiences and to experiment in their searches aimed at finding their own career model. They are ambitious and aspire to quickly progress to the management level. They are able to discount their good knowledge of the French market and their skills in the field of intercultural communication.

Having people with very different business experience in one student cohort was very interesting and inspiring.

For many students, MBA programmes are an important networking opportunity and time for building valuable connections. People who are open to new contacts and new acquaintances can appreciate the diversity of the group in terms of age, background, and business experience – they perceive it as an advantage.

Our postgraduate is an example of someone, whose actions are carefully planned and aimed at preparing him to build a successful career in diplomacy. A strong focus on contacts with France is complemented here by obtaining additional degrees in fields connected with international relations.

Today, I am 33 and like other postgraduates of our MBA programme I have very strong ties with France. For three months already I have also been working as a recruiter in an agency looking for employees for French employers. I have already completed over 40 recruitment processes for the French companies operating not only in Poland but also in the Romanian market. I am looking for the most talented candidates with the biggest potential.

As stressed by our postgraduate, the Polish-French MBA programme provides the postgraduates with a very broad and at the same time very complete view of business relations between our countries and the cultural setting of mutual cooperation.

My 10 years of working experience gathered from different companies collaborating with France have given me a broader perspective on many issues. In the first place, this programme allowed me to grow professionally and such growth requires a lot of awareness and practicing. It is not just about talent but, primarily, about hard work. The programme also exposed us to many fields that were completely new to us and that was very stimulating. During marketing classes we learnt about a number of marketing tools, which we can use later in various areas of activity.

When exploring the behaviour of the youngest postgraduates, we can clearly notice their motivation to pursue continuous self-development and self-improvement. Such motivation results both from setting more and more ambitious goals, as well as from increasing competition when applying for specific positions in business or public administration.

I am very strongly motivated to pursue on the self-development path. Everyone can take their career to the next level. For many of us individualism is a great opportunity but also a serious threat.

The postgraduate's opinion testifies to his determination to pursue specific goals. It also shows how much he is aware of rivalry in competitive recruitment when applying for the most attractive positions. Awareness of such rivalry results from his personal experience accumulated in a number of recruitment processes, especially in the multi-stage competitive recruitment procedure of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Our programme is one of a kind in Poland. When doing my MBA degree I saw my role as a motivator encouraging the rest of the group to act more effectively. I saw myself not only as a leader of certain projects but also as someone who helps other students in delivering certain tasks. I especially motivated colleagues who were less advanced technically. I mean here our collective presentations. I had to invest a lot of effort to bring some of our projects to a successful end but that was necessary at that time.

The aim of our studies is definitely to create excellent conditions for students to work in a small international student group. This is a natural environment for the formation of various types of leadership roles and the improvement of intercultural communication. At the same time, it is a good introduction to performing this type of role in other business situations and in competitive recruitment processes.

Our graduates make a narrow and very unique community of professionals prepared to collaborate with France and with French companies. They are people who value this collaboration and are able to inspire each other positively. They also know what they can learn from each other.

When it comes to working with the French people, I appreciate their entrepreneurial spirit which they nurture and cultivate. The French are also very good at promoting themselves, which was excellently demonstrated by the reopening ceremony of the Notre-Dame de Paris Cathedral admired and streamed globally. This was a double promotion exercise in the context of French-United States relations. Not only did the Americans contribute financially to the reconstruction of the Cathedral but they will be coming to visit it in the future. It is not just about reconstructing the symbol. It is about building society whose model is perceived

as attractive by foreign tourists. The French perspective and French culture have woven themselves into the very fabric of our lives. This seed is there and it grows. I believe that the French have mastered their ability to attract many individuals to their culture.

We can do a lot of business with the French people and we need each other. They often have incomplete knowledge of the Polish market, and we lack good knowledge of the French market. If we combine our knowledge of both markets and our resources, we can achieve a lot.

Conclusion

When looking at the careers pursued by the graduates of the postgraduate Polish-French MBA programme in Management, we can see, above all, the significance of the differentiation positioning of the course in the context of cooperation with France. The graduates of the programme are overwhelmingly enthusiasts of France, the French language, and French culture. These positive cultural relations lay the foundations of their managerial careers, most of which develop within various forms of business cooperation with French companies, as well as Polish or foreign companies focused on France and the French market. This is a very narrow group of people whose career choices and career plans have been largely determined by positive relations with France and the French language as a tool for communicating and building direct relationships between business partners, but also between employees working within a given company.

All the surveyed people are aware of a huge potential lying in business cooperation with France and French companies. A good knowledge of the specifics of business relations with French partners makes them experts in such collaboration. Getting a degree from a French university elevates their status to a much higher level and at the same time greatly boosts their value in the eyes of their superiors, French business partners, and customers. The many years of experience gained by the oldest postgraduates makes them now highly valued experts and consultants, who are increasingly in demand as managers of French business projects in Poland and overseas. This experience can pay off greatly in situations where they are selected by company owners or investment funds as managers of French companies requiring restructuring in the absence of succession on the French side.

The consistency in the delivery of this MBA programme allows subsequent years of postgraduates, also those originating from France and other French-speaking countries, to pursue managerial careers in French and overseas companies focused on the French market and interested in its further penetration.

Unlike other MBA programmes that are currently moving away from providing instruction in a foreign language, we believe that our unique advantage

Conclusion

lies not only in the transfer of managerial knowledge, but in the entire cultural context of this transfer, including the linguistic dimension resulting from the involvement of French lecturers and most of the classes being taught in French (60%) and the remaining part (40%) in English. The internationalization of the entire programme means that postgraduates naturally see their future in international business setting. This is all the more important because some French corporations, as a result of globalization processes, are increasingly adopting Anglo-Saxon models.

In addition to the fascination with France and the French language, the second important feature of our postgraduates is their ever-increasing mobility and openness to change. As is the case with the best MBA programmes, many postgraduates experience a kind of internal transformation during these studies. One of its aspects involves taking a new, previously unknown and more mature perspective on their career paths. This new perspective, which is the effect of being a part of the programme, allows them to re-visit their previous career choices and think about reformulating them for the future in the context of new challenges and managerial opportunities. MBA studies sharpen the critical view of many issues in our postgraduates, including the management style of the company in which they are employed. Postgraduates – especially younger people and women – gain more confidence and are ready to embrace change and face new challenges.

Thus, for most postgraduates, this MBA programme has become a kind of catalyst of change in their professional career path and prepared them for taking on new managerial and entrepreneurial challenges.

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Photo 1. A family photo of postgraduates and invited guests from Poland and France at the Jubilee Gala celebrating the 25th anniversary of the programme in Poland
(by Paweł Herzog)



Photo 2. A family photo of postgraduates and invited guests from Poland and France at the graduation ceremony of the programme edition 2024/2025. Standing in the middle from the left: Dr. hab. Andrzej Dubicki, Professor at the University of Lodz (UL) – Deputy Dean for Teaching Quality of the Faculty of International and Political Studies; Dr. hab. Krzysztof Pabis, Professor at the UL – Vice-Rector of the University of Lodz for Science Promotion; Dr Catherine Glee-Vermande – Director of Master 2 Management et Administration des Entreprises – MAE (Délocalisé à Lodz), Institut d'Administration des Entreprises (iaelyon), Jean Moulin Lyon 3 University, France; Prof. dr hab. Tomasz Domański – Head of the Polish-French MBA postgraduate programme in Management, University of Lodz
(by Paweł Herzog)



Photo 3. Postgraduates of the Polish-French MBA programme in Management celebrating their graduation
(by Paweł Herzog)



Photo 4. Graduation gala of the MBA programme
(archives of the Faculty of International and Political Studies)

Polsko-Francuskie Podypłomowe Studia Zarządzania typu MBA

Zajęcia po francusku
i po angielsku

Szansa na
atrakcyjną pracę

Dwa prestiżowe
dyplomy



Photo 5. Poster advertising the Polish-French MBA programme with a bridge symbolising the connection between the twin cities: Lyon and Łódź (graphic design by: Maciej Błażniak)



Photo 6. The latest poster advertising the Polish-French MBA programme in Management
(graphic design by: Maciej Błażniak)

The aim of this publication is to highlight the role of postgraduate MBA programmes in the advancement of professional career paths of graduates. The monograph is based on the results of the author's empirical research, conducted through interviews with a sample of graduates from the international postgraduate Polish-French MBA-type management programme (to be designated as an MBA starting in 2023). It is the only programme of its kind in Poland that offers the students the opportunity to receive a French Master 2 degree in management and a Polish certificate confirming the completion of the postgraduate MBA management programme. The programme is international *par excellence* and is delivered in a hybrid format – exclusively in French and English – by an international teaching staff. It is also the oldest programme of its kind in Poland, as it has been delivered continuously since 1993. Thirty-two graduating classes have already completed it. The programme harmoniously combines two key challenges of contemporary MBA studies: the digitization of online education and internationalisation. The author of this monograph has been the programme's initiator and director from the very beginning.

Professor **Tomasz Domański** heads the Department of International Marketing and Retailing at the Faculty of International and Political Studies, University of Łódź. He served for many years as the Faculty's Dean and Vice-Dean for Academic Affairs and International Cooperation (2000–2016). He is also the Director of the Polish-French MBA in Management, run in collaboration with the University of Lyon III in France. An advocate of the consistent internationalisation of the University and its openness to diverse communities. He was the driving force behind the extension of the educational offer of the Faculty of International and Political Studies with majoring in International Marketing, currently offered as a practical degree programme. He also authors numerous publications on marketing strategies, modern distribution channels, territorial marketing, cultural marketing, and university marketing.



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