



From Traditional Thesis Defense Questions to a Competency-Based Examination: Strengthening Practice-Oriented Management Education Through Business Collaboration



Andrzej Marcinkowski, PhD, Associate Professor
Faculty of Organization and Management, Lodz University of Technology, Poland
e-mail: andrzej.marcinkowski@p.lodz.pl

Abstract:

The Faculty of Organization and Management at Lodz University of Technology has a long tradition of close cooperation with business partners. This collaboration inspired a significant redesign of not only study programs content but also the final assessment process for undergraduate and graduate management students. Instead of the traditional model based on several randomly selected questions during thesis defense, the Faculty introduced a competency-based examination aimed at assessing integrated learning outcomes and students' ability to apply knowledge in realistic managerial contexts.

The poster presents the rationale, design, implementation process, and initial evaluation of this innovative assessment approach. The competency examination was introduced as a formal component of the degree completion process and contributes directly (in 20%) to the final study result. The examination consists of a written and an oral part. During a 120-minute open-book written session, students analyze a business case study and answer a set of questions classified into four levels of competency: basic, verification, analytical, and evaluative. The oral component is conducted by a two-member academic committee and focuses on discussion and verification of the student's written responses. A weighted assessment framework ensures that both foundational knowledge and higher-order analytical and evaluative competencies are systematically measured.

A key feature of the initiative is the development of original case studies by faculty members. Each case is peer-reviewed by academic colleagues to ensure quality, consistency, and relevance to learning outcomes. The cases are designed to reflect contemporary managerial challenges and emphasize interdisciplinary problem solving, decision-making, and critical thinking, competencies highly valued by employers.

The poster will also present evidence collected through student satisfaction surveys conducted immediately after the examination. Results indicate a low level of perceived irregularities and a generally positive evaluation of the examination process. Students particularly appreciated the practical nature of the assessment and its stronger connection to real business situations. Feedback from business representatives has likewise been favorable, highlighting the examination's ability to verify competencies that are directly relevant to professional practice.

The initiative is relevant to the CEEMAN conference theme as it demonstrates how management schools can strengthen the alignment between academic assessment and labour market expectations. The presented model offers a replicable framework for institutions seeking to move from knowledge-focused examinations toward competency-based, authentic assessment methods that better reflect the realities of managerial work.

Key recommendations for management educators include integrating authentic business cases into high-stakes assessment, using structured competency frameworks with transparent evaluation criteria, involving peer review in assessment design, and systematically collecting stakeholder feedback to support continuous improvement.

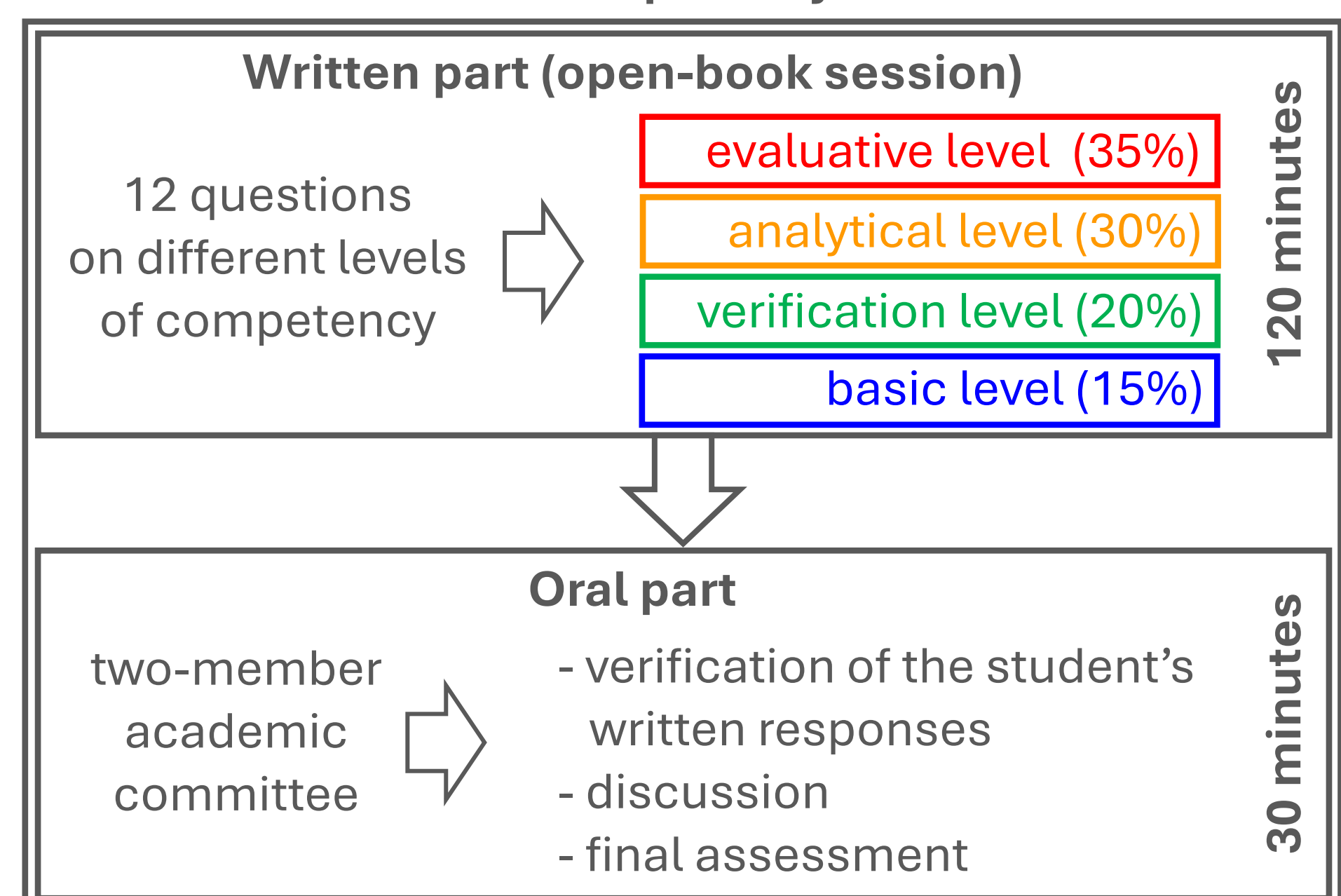
BEFORE THE CHANGE

The diploma thesis defence
1. The thesis presentation
2. Questions on thesis
3. Questions on whole study
4. Assessment

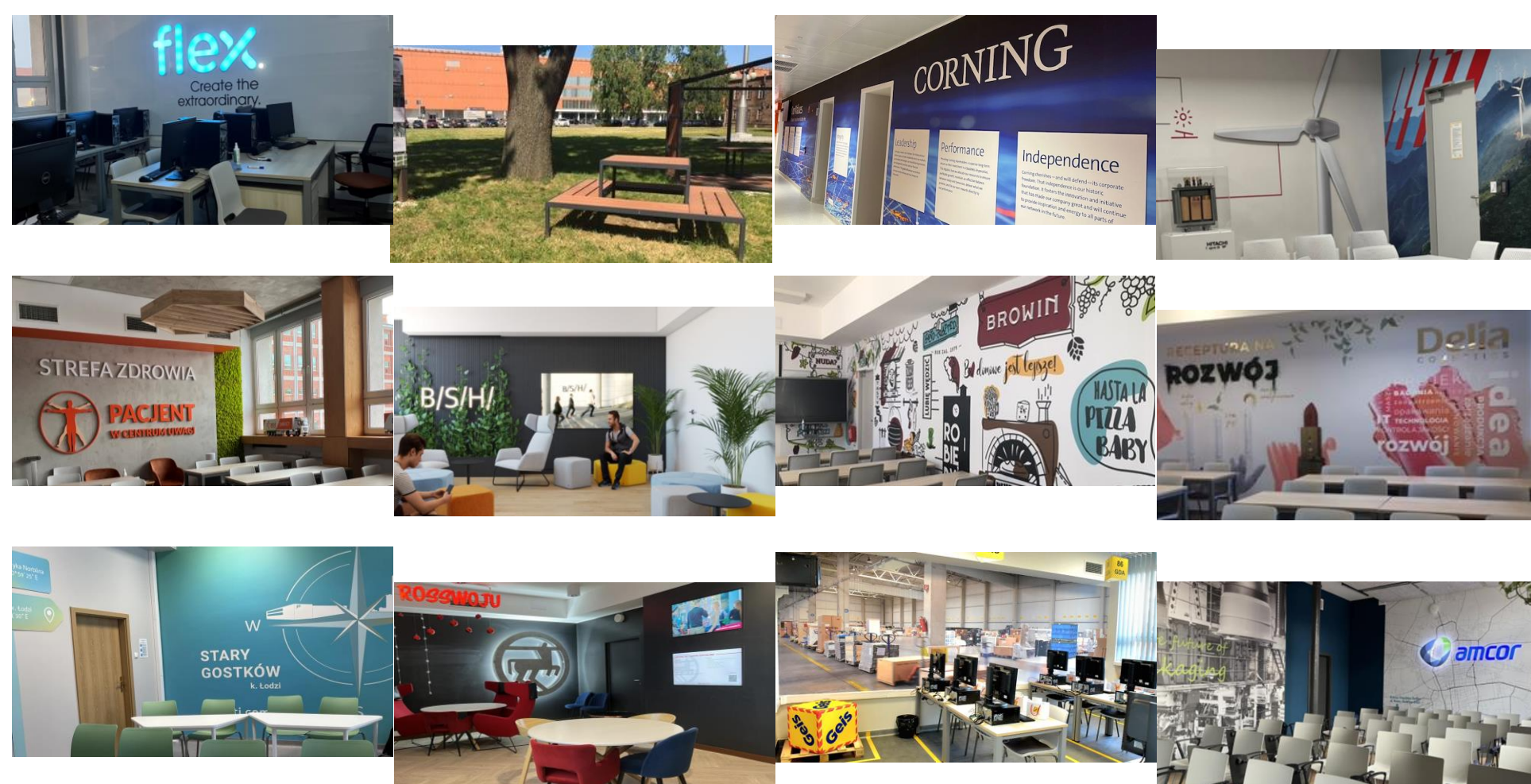
CURRENTLY

Competency-based exam 20%
The diploma thesis defence 20%
1. The thesis presentation
2. Questions on thesis
~~Questions on whole study~~
3. Assessment

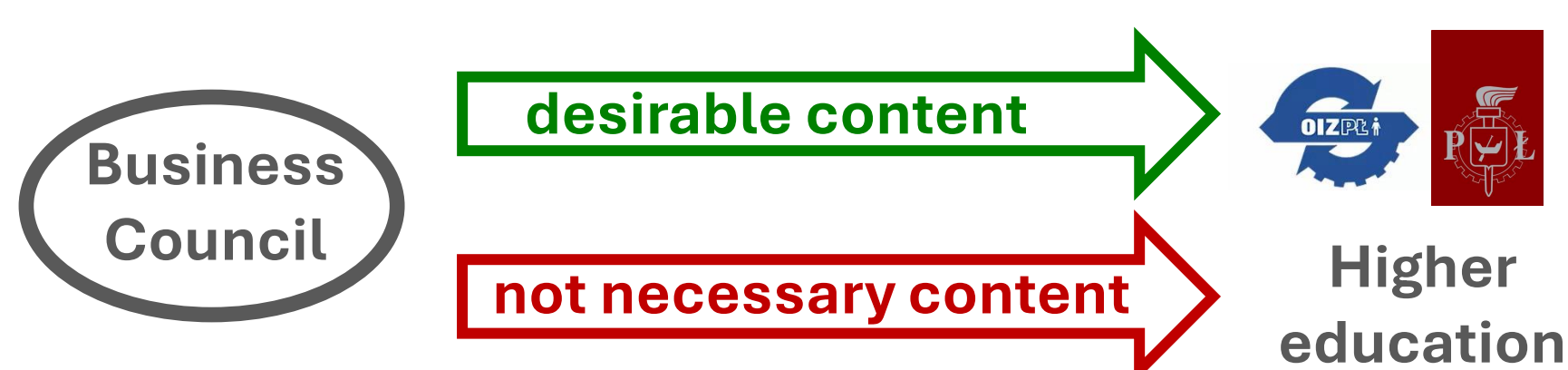
The structure of the competency-based examination



Business Council at the Faculty
– the platform to exchange experience
between the industry and the Faculty



Classrooms refurbished in cooperation with business partners



The feedback from a business representative:

This approach addresses one of the most significant challenges facing higher education today: how to effectively combine academic knowledge with the skills required in the business world. A competency-based examination enables students to demonstrate their practical readiness, whilst providing employers with clearer information about graduates' skills. This is an area that is certainly worth developing.

Piotr Ciebiada – Director of Social Media in Tower Group sp. z o.o.

Selected exam participant feedback:

A very pleasant topic. I liked that the company described in the task was a local business. The examination committee was great, and the overall atmosphere was very positive (...). I even wanted additional questions because I enjoyed it so much.

I think it is a great idea that the oral exams take place immediately after the written exam, so there is no need to wait.

Very good organization, which definitely helps reduce stress during the exam.

In my opinion, a competency exam is an interesting and practical way to test the knowledge and skills acquired during one's studies. The opportunity to tackle a real-world problem faced by a specific company allows us to see if we can apply our knowledge in practice, rather than just reproduce it in theory. This type of exam also fosters independence, analytical and creative thinking, and gives us a greater sense of preparedness for our future careers.