

# Education of Purchasing Professionals in Austria: Competence Based View

Volker Koch

**Abstract**—This paper deals with the education of purchasing professionals in Austria. In this education, equivalent and measurable criteria are collected in order to create a comparison. The comparison shows the problem. To make the aforementioned comparison possible, methodologies such as KODE-Competence Atlas or presentations in a matrix form are used. The result shows the content taught and whether there are any similarities or interesting differences in the current Austrian purchasers' formations. Purchasing professionals learning competencies are also illustrated in the study result.

**Keywords**—Competencies, education, purchasing professional, technological-oriented.

## I. INTRODUCTION

**I**NFORMATION regarding individual education is obtained from each of the examined web presences. Especially due to Austria's geographical limitations and content limitations on purchasing professionals' education, only a very specific sector is covered.

Interesting is when the question about the "perfect" purchaser education arises. What should be taught to form a purchasing professional? Here some issues: Successfully finding the right criteria for a comparison as well as measurable education subjects is only possible after careful consideration. The limitations should perfectly clarify the scope of the assessment in order not to distort the test results. To present a compact and meaningful result, similarities have to be found. This paper describes the research guiding questions (i) How does the education scenery for purchasing professionals look like in Austria? and (ii) What skills are taught in purchasing professionals' education programs?

The key concept of this issue are competences. By introducing this term, one can easily grasp an idea of what is being taught. This paper is intended to illustrate a glimpse of the first studies on the topic.

## II. THEORIES

There seems to be little empirical attention in the literature regarding the existing purchasers' education in Austria.

The literature used for the present study is related to the competencies subject. To enhance professionals' abilities, some knowledge needs to be acquired. With this knowledge, actions can be better implemented. Moreover, this knowledge is reused in relations that are relevant for decisions [1].

V. Koch is with the Graz University of Technology, at the Institute of Business Economics and Industrial Sociology, Kopernikusgasse 24/II, 8010 Graz, Austria (e-mail: volker.koch@tugraz.at).

According to Hurrelmann, competent people (i) accept responsibility for themselves and others, (ii) have a good control consciousness and (iii) can achieve an intention or a goal [3]. Knowledge provided in education will be later in their professional lives needed to self-organize and solve certain situations.

In order to enable the transfer from the conveyed knowledge to the resulting competence, the KODE-Competence Atlas is used [4]. "KODE is the abbreviation of Competence Diagnostics and Development. It is a process system with various development and competency determination tools" [1]. This transition from the education to the competences, which takes the knowledge acquirement for granted, enables a comparison between educations by comparing the skills taught. The KODE-Competence Atlas is shown in Fig. 1. It consists of a 64-part matrix. The first division shows the four basic skills, which are: Personal Competence, Activity and Action Competence, Socio-communicative Competence and Methods and Professional Competence.

These are common terms in practice. Only seldom primarily skills are mentioned in education, therefore an allocation of so-called mixed competences must also be possible. With help of empirical studies, the authors of the KODE-Competence Atlas have been able to logically assign these mixing skills. All 64 competences are defined with synonyms, explanations, and competence hyperboles. The classification using the Competence Atlas means that the focus is on this specific competence [5].

## III. METHODOLOGY

A specific target group of this work is not defined. However, the findings could be used for potential research of a better design of purchasers' education. Likewise, this work could serve as an internal discussion incentive for those responsible for the individual Austrian education institutes for purchasers.

To obtain information about the different educations, their websites were analysed. A personal contact with the different education institutions is omitted due to large distances. On this account, the gathering of online proved to be most effective.

Bringing different educations face to face was defined as the objective of this paper. Therefore, what is to be compared must be clarified. This first subdivision has emerged in basic education and advanced education. A comparison of studies with a multi-day negotiation seminar is not the target here.

Subsequently, the definition of education criteria takes place. These are divided into two groups. Quantitative criteria

are measurable and comparable, such as the duration of education. The other group is known as qualitative criteria [6]. The key to evaluating qualitative criteria is to consistently work up the problem of different names and synonyms for one same feature and apply a unitary term for all comparable alternatives. So, same content may be now taught in courses under different names. This is accomplished by using the KODE-Competence Atlas, which was explained in the second section of this paper, the theory part. In Fig. 3, the transfer is clearly recognizable. The education professional (1) is associated with a concept of the synonym Atlas (2). This

synonym is associated with one of the 64 skills by the KODE-Competence Atlas (3). From this skill, the basic competence (4) is finally determined. An example of this process is the education in the field of marketing. In the Competence Atlas, marketing knowledge is found as a synonym. This analogue is entered in the lower right quadrant of the Atlas. Therefore, marketing falls under the basic competence "Methods and Professional Competence". The competence designation can also be read as "Knowledge of the Market" [7].

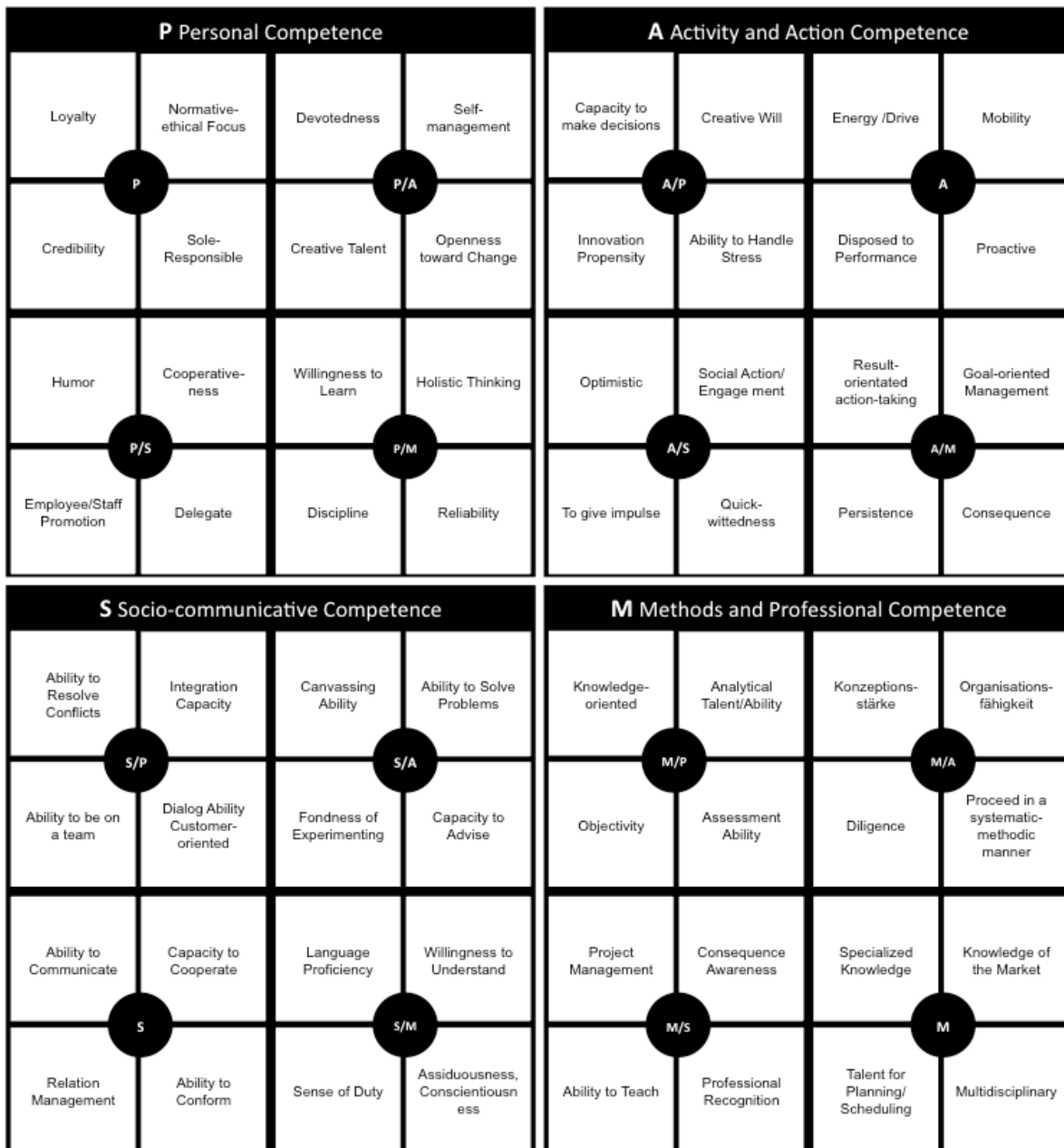


Fig. 1 KODE-Competence Atlas [2]

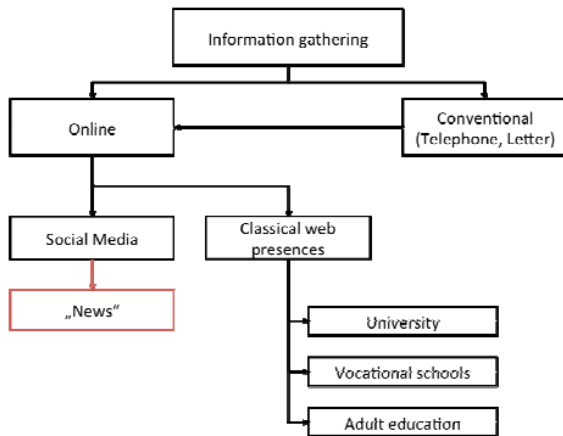


Fig. 2 Scope of research

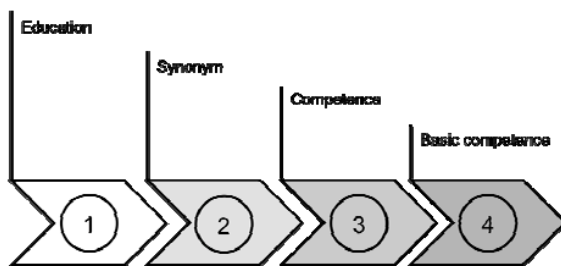


Fig. 3 Conversion procedure from education professionals to basic competences using the Competence Atlas

Since the procedure from step (2) on runs always the same, after several hundred education subjects were studied this step has been automated. Excel by Microsoft is used for the spreadsheet program. Due to the fact that only synonyms defined in the KODE-Competence Atlas are accepted, the data validation function of the program is guaranteed. Once a synonym is registered, the look-up and reference functions are called and both competences and basic competences are automatically completed. This procedure also takes place in a stored table where all matching synonyms are recorded according to KODE-Competence Atlas competence terms. In order to permit an international exchange of information of competencies' evaluation, synonyms, skills and basic skills are stored in English in the lookup function and the reference function.

Another benefit of using Microsoft Excel is the easiness to detect both criteria and different educations in a tabular form. This matrix classification criteria, which shows different educations in one same row, helps a quick finding and comparison. In addition, there is a control button that permits displaying or hiding specific educations. This feature allows direct comparison between interesting educations.

In the educations' matrix, the following criteria have been selected:

- Education institution
- Academic title
- Competencies
- Goals

- Target group
- Requirements
- Course particularities
- Content
- Holding
- Duration
- Hours
- Examination and graduation
- Contribution / Costs
- Education location
- Federal state
- Contact / Email Address

The great amount of examined education subjects warrants the results of the study. About 220 subjects in the basic education and 500 subjects in further educations have been covered and assigned according to the KODE principle of competence.

#### IV. RESULTS

As a result of this work, numerous bar charts are created to represent the most important skills for purchasing professionals in accordance with Austrian educations.

Fig. 4 shows the evaluated competencies' organized by the competence groups from the basic educations. As mentioned in section III, about 220 competencies are assigned. The analysis reveals that most of the educations' content is intended to boost Methods and Professional expertise. Mentioned as another important basic skill, Socio-communicative competence is enhanced. Particularly team skills and communication and language skills should be increased. Also worth mentioning is the need to target and focus on results, which is attributed to the Activity and Action competence. Personal skills are apparently rarely promoted in basic educations.

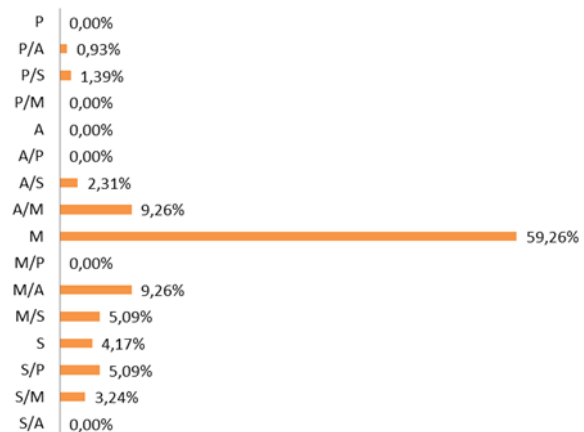


Fig. 4 Skills assessment in basic education

The evaluation of further courses provides much of the same result. However, one must specially be wary of: a course for better negotiating on the phone, improving communication abilities and enhancing fluency. On the whole however, all courses outweigh the basic professional skills.

The high professional percentage is due to the fact that different skills such as legal aspects about professional curiosity or SAP expertise (ERP software) are classified as technological skills. These two competences are associated with the Methods and Professional Competence.

Another significant outcome of the study is the bar graph in which all 64 skills are individually listed indicating the respective quantity. The bars of the expert group Methods and Professional Competence are presented, being the “M” group the greatest.

#### V. SUMMARY

The values obtained from this study can be broadly judged as not unexpected. Most of the skills can be classified as part of the Methods and Professional Competence. Since a purchasing professional requires a mix of commercial and technical knowledge, technical bases must be provided.

A positive element here is that it has been possible by using the KODE-Competence Atlas to compare different education subjects together. Due to the high number of investigated educations and thus associated skills, the results may well be considered as informed and meaningful.

As a negative aspect of using the KODE-Competence Atlas to analyse the landscape of Austrian purchasers' education, the excessive focus on Methods and Professional Competence could be mentioned. Since this involves a great amount of different fields of knowledge and it is strongly represented in the evaluation that no exact statement could be made on how these skills should be taught. This could be provided as a subsequent study matter. Was that to be the case, the division of the basic “M” competence into further skills would be a possible approach. In addition, a study of the purchasing professionals' educations in Germany would be interesting. Specially regarding that, when online searching, many hits in the literature come up from Germany. Through this study, the Austrian results could be better weighted or perhaps questioned.

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