



BUSINESS  
GRADUATES  
ASSOCIATION

INTERNATIONAL MBA SURVEY 2020  
**PART 1: EMPLOYERS**



## Introduction

The only thing that's constant in our changing world... is change.

Employers have now been discussing the war for talent, disruption, gig economy, the impact of digital natives, AI, humanising the data agenda, and the need for resilience – and agility – for a number of years. These trends aren't going anywhere any time soon, and they bring as much opportunity to the world of recruitment as they bring challenge.

In short, we've become used to being comfortably uncomfortable.

But what is changing – with growing momentum – is the impact that factors outside the business world are having on what we do.

Geopolitical volatility – not least the US dimension, the Sino-European relations, Brexit, and the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic – are making waves in the area of employment,

not just in tangible terms, such as visa implications on migrant workers, but also in intangible ways, including mental wellbeing and anxiety over economic uncertainty, or mistrust in leadership.

**'This is the largest sample of MBA employers and recruiters surveyed in AMBA & BGA's 53-year history, and looks at: MBA skills gaps, recruitment in volatile times, perceptions of business education and its effectiveness in preparing MBA graduates for the world of work'**

Another huge factor is the climate, sustainability, and social change agenda – MBA graduates want to be responsible leaders, working for organisations that are good

for societies and the planet. CSR is no longer a nice to have – but a strategic imperative.

Research from AMBA, published last year, highlighted that the most pressing issues facing business in the next five years are: innovation; sustainable technology; data and analytics; AI; equal opportunities; sustainable development; and social mobility. These trends are impacting recruitment and employment, but game-changing employers are devising solutions for the short and long term.

But how are employers reacting to the external factors outlined above – and how are these issues affecting the employment chances of MBA graduates?

AMBA & BGA surveyed 1,047 employers that have specific responsibility for placing MBAs in their businesses, to try and find the

answers to these questions and more. This is the largest sample of MBA employers and recruiters surveyed in AMBA & BGA's 53-year history, and looks at a variety of trends and issues including: MBA skills gaps, recruitment in volatile times, perceptions of business education and its effectiveness in preparing MBA graduates for the world of work.

I want to thank all the employers and recruitment professionals that took part in this survey for their time and for their candour. I also want to thank my colleague Ellen Buchan, Insight and Communications Assistant, for her skill in analysing the results and Tim Banerjee Dhoul, Content Editor, for his work on the report you're about to read. I hope you enjoy the findings.

**David Woods-Hale**  
**Director of Marketing and**  
**Communications, AMBA & BGA**

## Methodology and participant demographics

Between 27 March 2020 and 27 May 2020 AMBA & BGA conducted its largest-ever online survey of its 50,000 MBA student and graduate members, based in more than 150 countries.

As part of the research, the study polled 1,047 AMBA members who reported that they were decision makers in the recruitment of MBAs for the organisation at which they work. (Please note that in this report, we will use the terms 'participants', 'survey respondents', 'employers', and 'recruiters' interchangeably when describing this research sample.)

For each figure, the term 'responses' is used to describe the number of answers given, as participants were often permitted to select more than one option.

Of these employer participants, 80% were male and 20% were female.

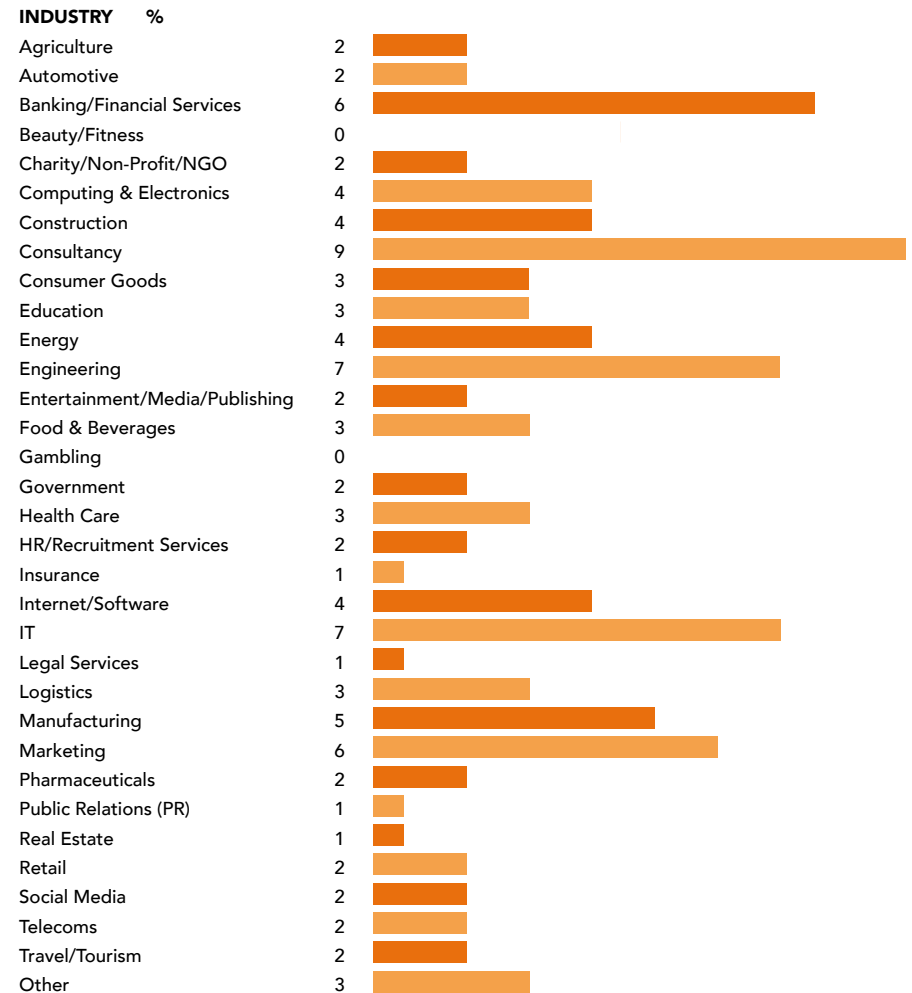
Their ages were most likely to be 35-44, with 43% of participants fitting into this bracket, followed by the age groups 25-34 (17%); 45-54 (26%); 55-64 (11%), and 65 and over (2%).

In terms of geographic location, 28% of respondents were based in Europe excluding the UK; 15% in the UK; 13% in Africa; 12% in Asia and the Middle East; 11% in Latin America; 8% in India; 7% in North America and the Caribbean; 4% in Oceania; and 2% in China (including Hong Kong, China).

Figure 1 shows the breakdown of industries in which the MBA recruiters surveyed operate.

It reveals a hugely varied spread of industry representation, with the most-represented sectors being consultancy (9%), engineering (7%), IT (7%), banking and finance (6%), marketing (6%), and manufacturing (5%).

**Figure 1.** For which sectors of the economy do you recruit candidates?  
(Total responses: 751)



# 1. Employer perceptions of MBA graduates

The survey explored recruiters' perceptions of Business Schools and the quality of candidates they have recruited from MBA programmes.

Broadly speaking, as outlined in Figure 2, employers surveyed hold a positive impression of Business Schools, with just under half (47%) classifying themselves as 'very favourable' and 40% saying they were 'fairly favourable' towards Business Schools. Just 2% of participants said they were either 'very unfavourable' or 'fairly unfavourable' towards Business Schools.

Participants were then asked how they rated the performance of the MBA graduates they have previously recruited. In terms of their qualities as employees, 16% rated the performance of MBAs as 'excellent', 52% rated their performance as 'good', 2% rated the MBAs whom they had recruited as 'fairly poor' and less than 1% rated MBAs as 'very poor' or 'terrible' (Figure 3).

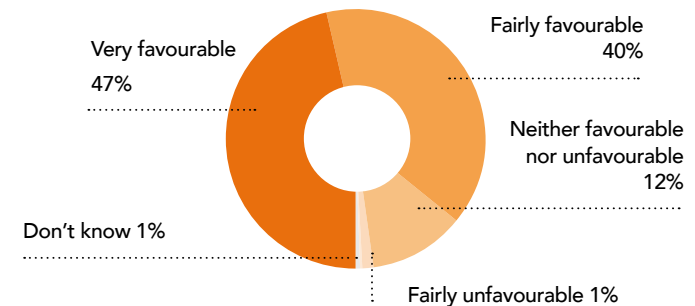
Employers were then asked about the performance of MBA graduate recruits against a range of criteria. Recruiters

polled were overwhelmingly impressed with the performance of their MBA colleagues (Figure 4).

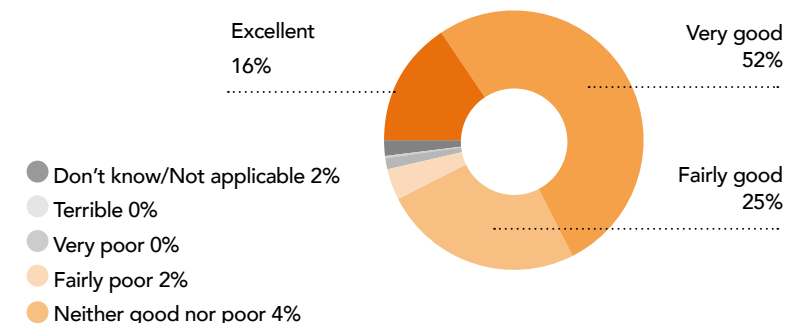
When asked if MBAs had the relevant skills to thrive within the survey participants' organisations, 30% 'strongly agreed' and 50% 'tended to agree' with the statement. A mere 4% 'disagreed' that MBAs had the relevant skills needed to succeed in their organisation. Respondents were also asked if they agreed that MBAs had the relevant skills to make a significant contribution to the wider economy in their respective countries. In another seal of approval, 31% 'strongly agreed' and 49% 'tended to agree' this was the case. Just 5% 'disagreed' with this statement.

In the final part of this section of the survey, employers were asked if they agreed that MBA graduates had the skills and capacity to become senior leaders at leading global businesses. In total, 45% 'strongly agreed' with the statement; 40% 'tended to agree' and 3% either 'tended to disagree' or 'strongly disagreed'.

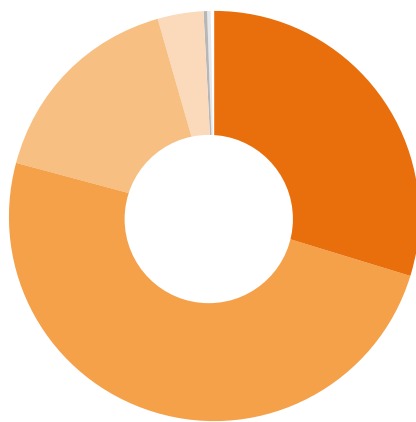
**Figure 2. How favourable or unfavourable are you towards Business Schools**  
(Total responses: 1,000)



**Figure 3. On balance, how would you rate MBA graduates in terms of being employees?**  
(Total responses: 849)

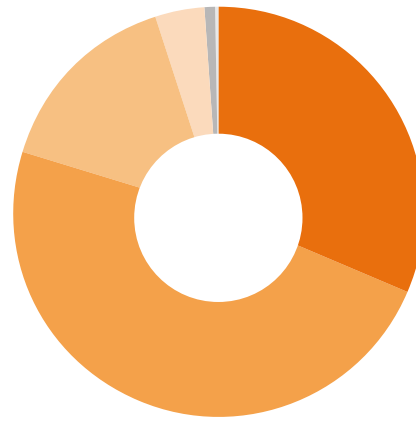


**Figure 4.** Do you agree or disagree that MBA graduates have the relevant skills for the following?  
 (Total responses: 855)



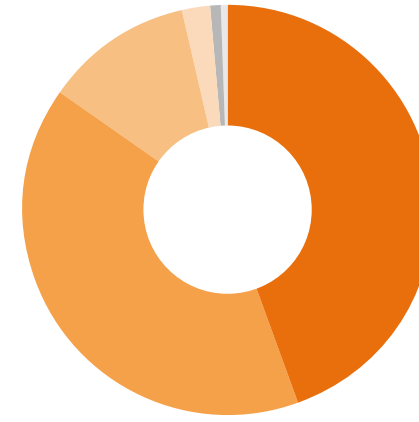
**To thrive at the organisation in which you work**

Strongly agree	<b>30%</b>
Tend to agree	<b>50%</b>
Neither agree nor disagree	<b>16%</b>
Tend to disagree	<b>4%</b>
Strongly disagree	<b>0%</b>
Don't know	<b>0%</b>



**To make a significant contribution to the wider economy in your country**

Strongly agree	<b>31%</b>
Tend to agree	<b>49%</b>
Neither agree nor disagree	<b>15%</b>
Tend to disagree	<b>4%</b>
Strongly disagree	<b>1%</b>
Don't know	<b>0%</b>



**The capability to become senior leader at a leading global business**

Strongly agree	<b>45%</b>
Tend to agree	<b>40%</b>
Neither agree nor disagree	<b>12%</b>
Tend to disagree	<b>2%</b>
Strongly disagree	<b>1%</b>
Don't know	<b>0%</b>



## 2. The MBA graduate's skillset

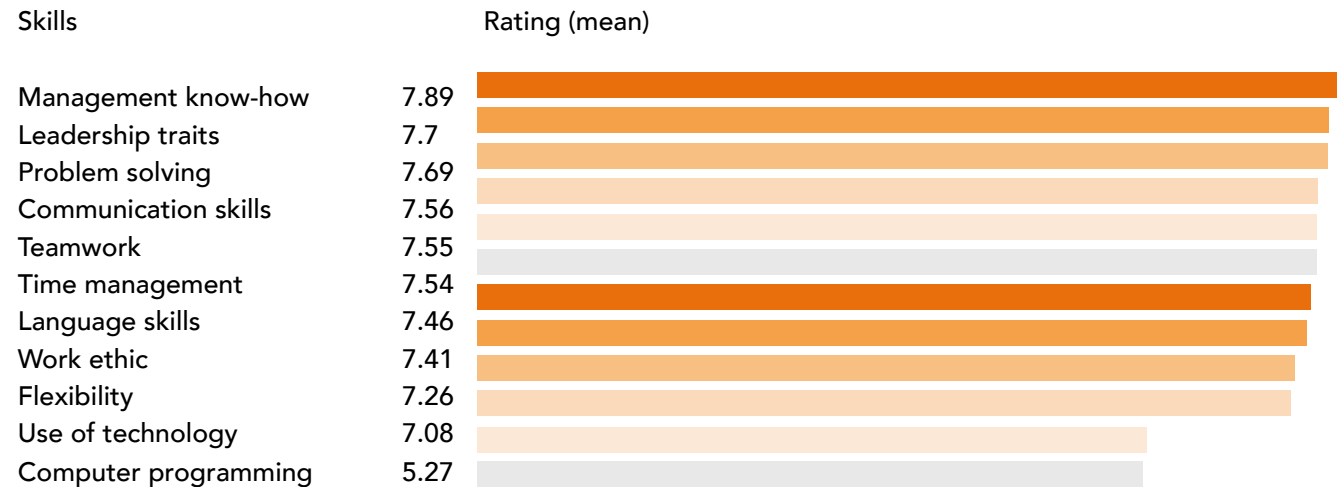
The next set of questions in the survey sought to explore employers' thoughts on the contribution MBAs make to organisations in terms of their hard and soft skills. It also investigated potential skills gaps in the MBA recruitment pool.

Participants were asked to rate MBA graduates with whom they had worked on a scale of 0-10 (where 0 is the lowest rating and 10 is the highest) across a range of skills. The resulting scores from respondents against each of these skills are outlined in Figure 5 – organised from the highest to lowest mean scores.

Participants were then asked how far they agreed with a range of statements relating to the performance of MBA recruits in their workplaces.

The results against these statements are shown in Figure 6. A third of survey respondents 'strongly agreed' with the statement 'MBAs have the skills that meet the needs of the

**Figure 5.** How would you rate MBA applicants in the workplace on a scale of 0-10 for each of the following?  
(Total responses: 749)



organisation', while 53% 'tended to agree' and just 3% 'tended to disagree' or 'strongly disagreed'.

A similar proportion of respondents (32%) 'strongly agreed' with the statement 'MBAs are good problem solvers', while 49% 'tended to agree'. However, fewer employers agreed

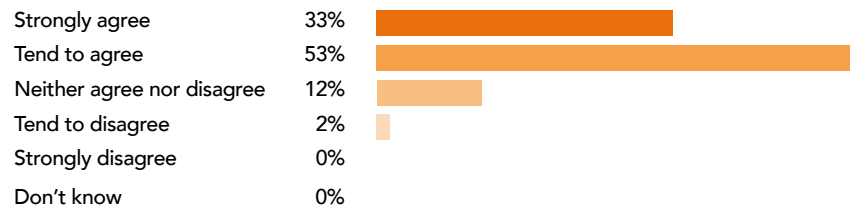
with the statement 'MBAs bring more benefits to organisations than non-MBAs'. Here, 29% were in strong agreement and 40% 'tended to agree'.

Fewer still (22%) 'strongly agreed' with the statement 'MBAs have adequate soft skills', although a sizeable 48% 'tended to agree'.

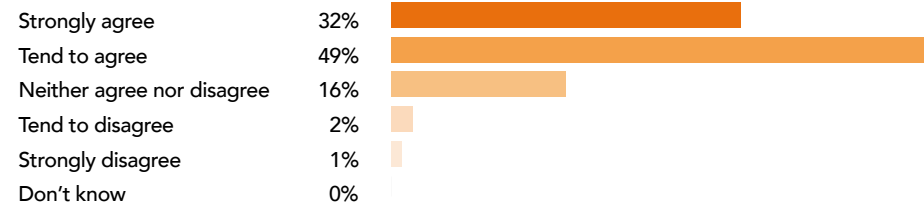
Even so, 7% of respondents either 'tended to disagree' or 'strongly disagreed' with the soft skills statement – the largest proportion of disagreement in this section. These results suggest that employers would like to see a little more from their MBA recruits in the area of soft skills.

**Figure 6.** To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about MBAs? (Total responses: 831)

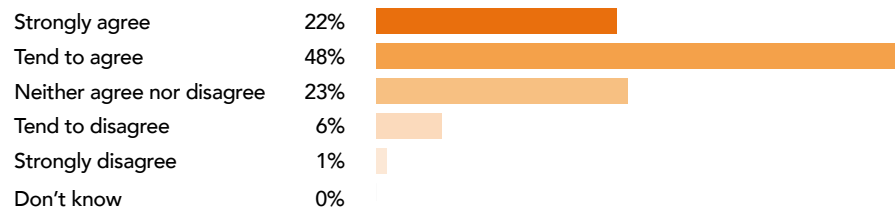
### MBAs have the skills that meet the needs of the organisation



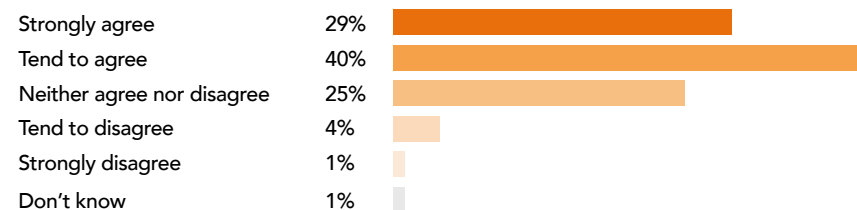
### MBAs are good problem solvers



### MBAs have adequate soft skills



### MBAs bring more benefits to organisations than non-MBAs



### MBA and technology

Looking at technological skills in particular, employers were asked how well they believe MBAs use AI, big data and augmented reality in their place of work. The results here, shown in Figure 7, were mixed. Data skills were the most commonly recognised (57% of respondents said MBAs use big data 'very well' or 'fairly well' at their organisation). But just 8% and 6% of respondents felt that MBAs are using AI and augmented reality 'very well', respectively. One in five thought MBAs use augmented reality 'not at all well' in their organisation.

## 3. Leadership approaches developed in Business School

How do MBA programmes affect individuals perceived approaches to leadership? The next section of the questionnaire asked participants to consider the teaching and learning at Business Schools and, in their experiences of MBAs, to what extent they believe Schools are producing leaders who:

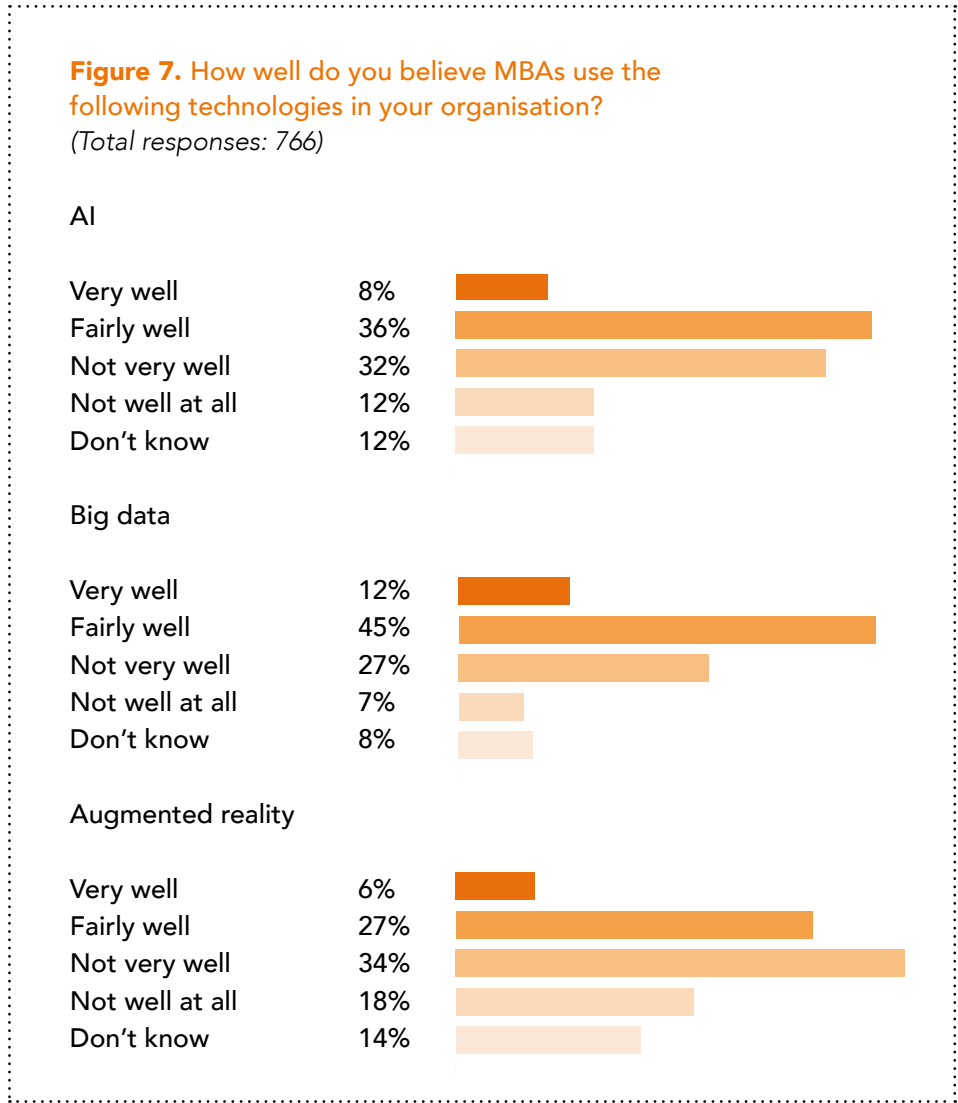
- Have mindsets focused on maximising profit

- Make decisions that consider environmental impact
- Believe in diverse workforces
- Prioritise their team's welfare
- Are mindful of those on lower incomes
- Have an international outlook

As Figure 8 (overleaf) shows, the employers surveyed were most confident that Business Schools are producing MBAs with an international outlook – 49% thought Schools are producing 'a great deal' of MBAs with an international outlook. In addition, 42% thought Schools are producing a great deal of MBAs focused on maximising profit.

Respondents were less confident that Business Schools are producing MBAs that are mindful of those on lower incomes (39% thought there is 'not a great deal' of this thinking among MBAs and 15% thought it does not exist at all). In addition, more than a quarter (27%) thought that Schools are producing MBAs that do not give a great deal of consideration – or no consideration at all – to prioritising their teams' welfare.

Diversity and environmental awareness provoked a more mixed reaction from respondents. While a sizeable 18% of respondents said Business Schools produce MBA graduates with



a great deal of awareness in terms of making decisions that consider the environment, a third (32%) thought that Business Schools do not produce leaders of this ilk a great deal, or not

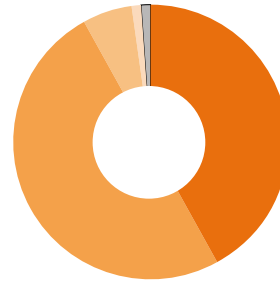
at all. Meanwhile, although 31% thought Business Schools are producing MBAs that believe in diverse workforces a great deal, 16% said this is not the case a great deal of the time, or not at all.



**Figure 8.** To what extent do you believe Business Schools are producing leaders with mindsets appropriately focused to each of these areas? (Total responses: 767)

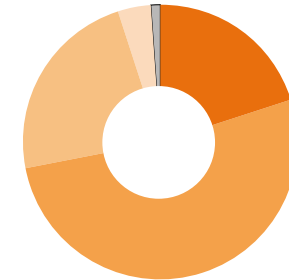
**Maximise profit**

A great deal	42%
To some extent	50%
Not a great deal	6%
Not at all	1%
Don't know	1%



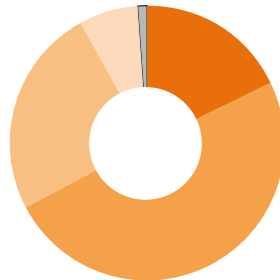
**Prioritise their team's welfare**

A great deal	20%
To some extent	52%
Not a great deal	23%
Not at all	4%
Don't know	1%



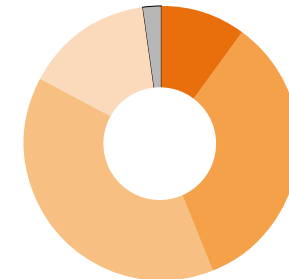
**Make decisions that consider the environmental impact**

A great deal	18%
To some extent	50%
Not a great deal	25%
Not at all	7%
Don't know	1%



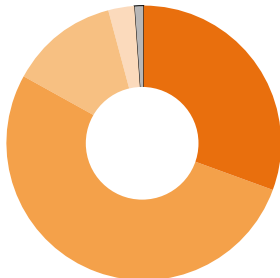
**Are mindful of those on lower incomes**

A great deal	10%
To some extent	34%
Not a great deal	39%
Not at all	15%
Don't know	2%



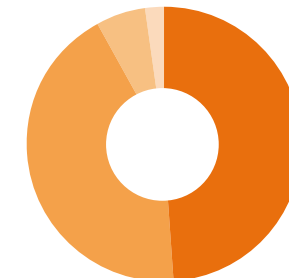
**Believe in diverse workforces**

A great deal	31%
To some extent	53%
Not a great deal	13%
Not at all	3%
Don't know	1%



**Have an international outlook**

A great deal	49%
To some extent	43%
Not a great deal	6%
Not at all	2%
Don't know	0%



Participants were also asked if they had worked with the same people both before and after these individuals had completed their MBA qualification. The 66% of respondents who answered 'yes' to this question were then asked the open-ended question: 'What differences have you noticed in people who have completed their MBA?'

This question threw up a spectrum of answers – both positive and negative – in the opinions of participants. Common themes that emerged in the findings included enhanced analytical skills; enhanced strategic skills (sometimes at the detriment of tactical execution); greater confidence; growth in communication and presentation skills; better problem solving; a holistic view of business; enhanced critical

thinking; greater focus on the task ahead / goal oriented; better decision-making; a global mindset; improved financial acumen (and a tendency to demand a higher salary); and agility and flexibility.

Some specific comments from survey participants included the following and have been separated into those we deem as being overwhelmingly positive and those with negative connotations which indicate potential areas for improvement:

**Employers on enhanced attributes of MBAs**

*'Understanding of business, finance, operation and a helicopter view of organisation. Great analysis and reasoning skills, good at*

*communication. Looks at bigger picture and focusses not only on short-term vision, but also long-term vision and the larger picture'*

*'Improved in critical thinking, problem solving, managerial functions, decision making, correspondence, teamwork, leadership and self-confidence'*

*'Increased confidence, more willing to contribute to discussions and solving of challenges'*

*'Broader view towards challenges and opportunities, better understanding of strategies, their connection to the business and how to implement them'*

*'They are more self-aware, conscientious in their decision making, and bring a holistic perspective to things'*

*'They are more self-aware. MBAs tend to increase confidence... the MBA develops them as people'*

*'More attention to detail. Spherical understanding of business and supporting functions. Focus on value creation'*

**Employers on potential areas of improvement for MBAs**

*'They became more confident, even outspoken, than they were before*

*completing the MBA. They also seem to expect to be consulted on business issues and do not expect to be asked to do lower cadre tasks'*

*'A demand for higher salaries, whether they are bringing more value or not'*

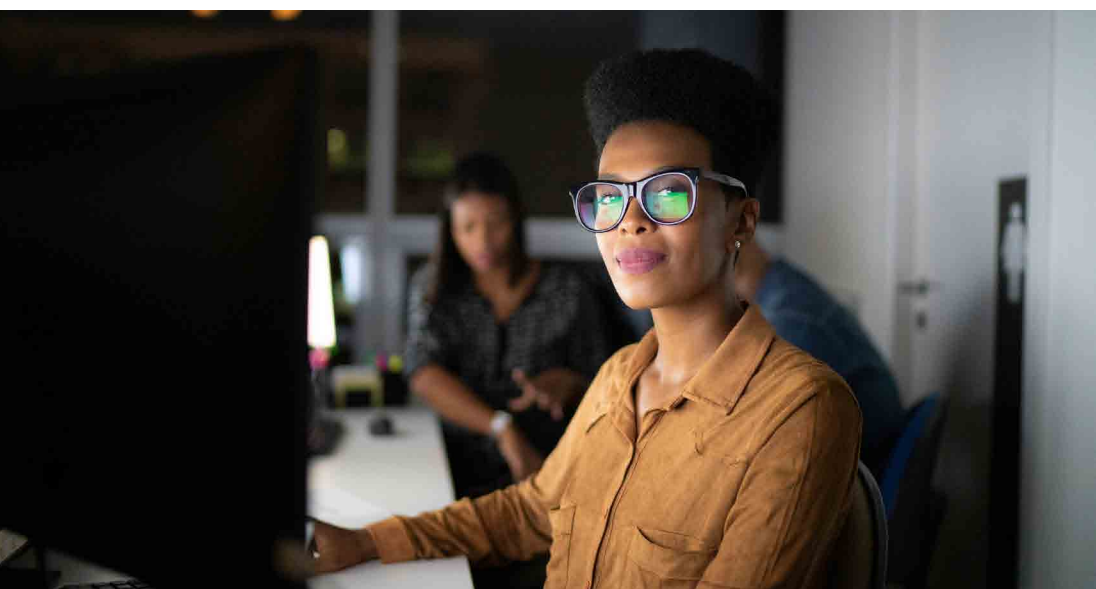
*'Sometimes, their new capabilities aren't aligned with the leadership capabilities needed'*

*'They tend to need to change their position after completion, otherwise frustration sets in'*

*'Depends on the [Business] School. Some just became arrogant; others matured and gained a broader perspective on the business'*

*'Very few MBA graduates are completely able to benefit from the newly acquired knowledge and to integrate their vital knowledge and new skills into the business they are working on'*

*'They tend to give a lot of ideas. They want to implement whatever they have learned. Sometimes that is not matching with the company strategy. It depends on the style of leadership that they are dealing with to embrace them or repel them'*



## 4. The MBA recruitment landscape and current challenges

The next section of the research sought to ascertain the current hiring environment for MBAs.

The survey was opened at a time when the majority of the world was beginning to implement lockdown measures as a result of Covid-19. The survey closed as restrictions in many parts

of the world were beginning to ease. This study therefore provides a unique snapshot into employers' plans for recruitment in light of, and in the wake of, the Covid-19 pandemic in terms of their MBA recruitment strategy.

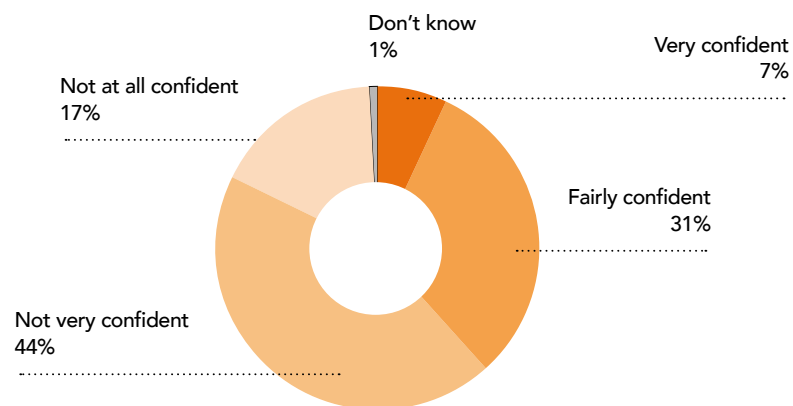
Survey participants were first asked for their opinions on the state of

the global economy. As outlined in Figure 9, confidence is low with more than six out of 10 employers (61%), stating that they were either 'not very confident' or 'not confident at all' in the state of the global economy.

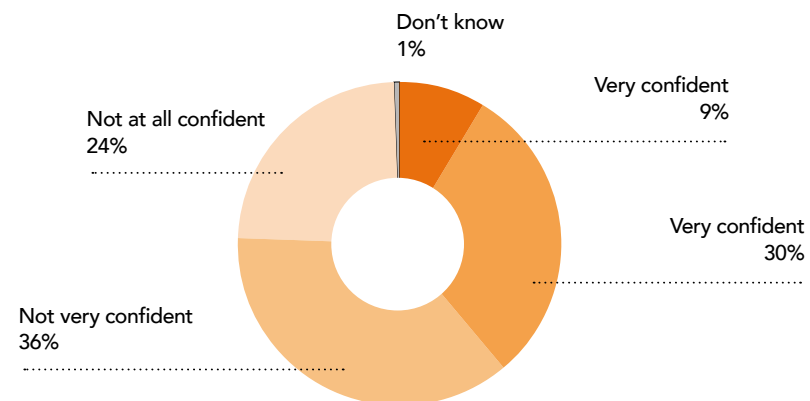
As Figure 10 demonstrates, when it comes to local/national economies,

survey participants did not have much more confidence in the economic performance of their own countries, than that of the global outlook: 39% said they were 'very confident' or 'fairly confident' in their country's economy at the moment; versus 60% who were 'not very confident' or 'not confident at all'.

**Figure 9.** How confident are you about the global economy at the moment?  
(Total responses: 763)



**Figure 10.** How confident are you about your country's economy at the moment?  
(Total responses: 752)



Participants were then asked: 'Approximately how many new positions have you been responsible for hiring in the past two years that have been relevant to MBA graduates?'

The study showed that the largest number of MBAs hired by a participant in the past 24 months was 500, and the lowest was 0. The mean number across all survey participants was 20.

When broken down into percentages, 96% of recruiters said they had recruited for fewer than 100 positions relevant to MBAs over the past two years; 2% they had recruited for 101-200 relevant positions; 1% said they had recruited for 201-300 relevant positions; 1% said they had recruited for 301-400 relevant positions; and less than 1% had recruited for more than 400 MBA-relevant positions.

Participants were asked how many applications they'd received from MBAs over the past two years. Again, there was a wide spectrum of answers, with the largest number of MBA applications reported being 1,000 and the lowest 0. The mean number of MBAs applying

for senior roles across respondents' organisations in the past 24 months was 93.

Putting a mean number of 93 applications in the context of the mean number of 20 jobs reported by the employers surveyed in this study demonstrates that competition is high even among high-performing MBA

candidates when applying for senior positions.

### MBA candidates in focus

Respondents were asked: 'Which of the following things stand out to you about candidates during the recruitment process for senior-level jobs?' from a list of skills and qualities. They were also given the opportunity

to answer the question in their own words.

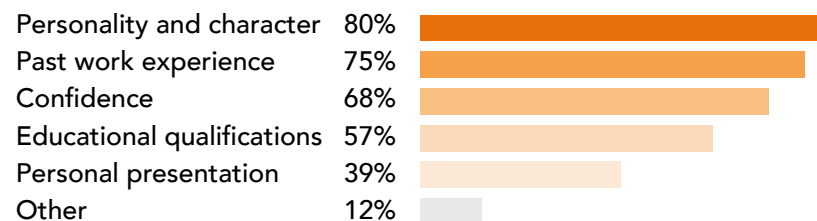
'Personality and character' was the top quality selected by respondents from the given list – 80% said this would stand out to them during the recruitment process for senior-level jobs.

This was followed by: 'past work experience' (cited by 75% of respondents); 'confidence' (cited by 68% of respondents); and educational qualifications (cited by 57% of respondents).

'Personal presentation' was deemed less important to recruiters and was cited by just 39% of respondents. The full findings are outlined in Figure 11.

Among those selecting 'other' attributes, participating employers listed a wider range of qualities that stand out to them in the recruitment process, such as passion, attitude, empathy, humility, subject matter expertise, sensitivity to diversity, language skills, preparation, and common sense.

**Figure 11. Which of the following things stand out to you about candidates during the recruitment process for senior level jobs?**  
(Total responses: 758)



About the same as last year 16

## 5. Looking to the future

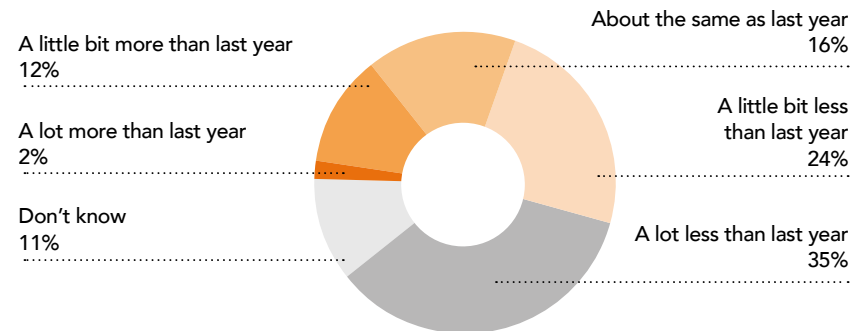
Considering the continuing volatility and uncertainty caused by Covid-19, the question: 'Do you envisage your organisation hiring more, less, or about the same number of management leaders in 2020 compared to 2019?' unsurprisingly paints a picture of recruiters moving to a strategy of conservatism, projected cost cutting, and recruitment freezes.

However, while more than a third of survey participants (35%) think they will be recruiting 'a lot fewer' management leaders than 2019, 14% think they will be recruiting more management leaders than last year and 16% believe their recruitment of MBA-relevant roles will be the same as 2019. These results are displayed in Figure 12 shows.

Following this question, respondents were asked to elaborate on the reasons for giving their answer in an open-ended question.

**Figure 12. Do you envisage your organisation hiring more or less or about the same number of management leaders in 2020 compared to 2019?**

(Total responses: 760)



Among those planning to recruit higher numbers of management leaders over the course of 2020, compared to 2019, reasons included:

- Scaling up to address challenges brought forth by the Covid-19 pandemic
- Start-ups with ambitious

growth plans

- Critical plans already in motion that require increased headcount
- The need for more innovation
- Preparation for economic upturn
- Expanding needs in light of new technology
- The organisation is unaffected

– or positively affected – by the pandemic

- Need for strong managers in an increasingly competitive environment
- A pipeline of new projects that show no evidence of slowing down.

Among those planning to cut back on the recruitment of management leaders this year, compared to last year, reasons included:

- The Covid-19 pandemic and associated economic uncertainty – this was the dominant reason across the board
- Fears over economic slowdown
- Global oil and energy stagnation
- Dynamic changes to the business
- Focus on core business survival rather than growth
- Disinclination to hire and train 'expensive' talent
- Moving from globalisation to localisation.

## 6. The longer-term picture

In light of the Covid-19 crisis, the survey asked respondents to consider the longer-term strategy for recruitment of MBAs, with particular reference to the importance placed in a range of aspects.

The results are shown in Figure 13. The most important factor among

survey participants is 'accreditation of the MBA' – 46% of participants said this is 'very important', and 41% cited it as 'fairly important'. This was followed by 'internationalisation of the MBA', which was classified by 35% as 'very important'.

The sample was divided on the importance of an MBA programme's

format – in terms of classroom, online or blended delivery.

Although 36% classified this as being 'very important', 33% said this aspect is either 'not very important' to them, or 'not important at all'.

Factors of lesser importance to participants, in terms of what

responding employers will look for in MBA recruits, include the country in which the MBA was completed and the type of MBA completed (i.e. full time, part time or executive) which were cited as being either 'not very important', or 'not important at all' by 31% in each case.

**Figure 13.** When you recruit MBAs in the future how important will each of the following aspects be for you?

(Total responses: 761)

	Very important	Fairly important	Not very important	Not at all important	Don't know
Business School ranking	27%	48%	21%	4%	0%
Prestige of the Business School	26%	49%	20%	4%	1%
Accreditation of the MBA	46%	41%	10%	3%	1%
Country in which the MBA was completed	25%	43%	26%	5%	1%
Internationalisation of the MBA	35%	45%	16%	2%	1%
Aspects completely excluding the MBA	30%	46%	18%	3%	3%
The format of the MBA (classroom / online / blended)	36%	31%	25%	8%	1%
Type of MBA completed (exec / full time etc.)	26%	43%	25%	6%	1%
Specialisation of the MBA	23%	49%	25%	3%	1%



## 7. Challenges for business: the role of MBAs

Participating employers were asked about challenges in the recruitment landscape, and whether they felt the MBAs of tomorrow would have the right skills to address these challenges.

- MBA graduates are well prepared for the fast-moving pace of business
- MBA graduates are only motivated by money

A 'lack of skills' was the most commonly-cited hurdle to recruiters – 53% stated that this is a major issue for them. 'Lack of creativity' was cited by 47%.

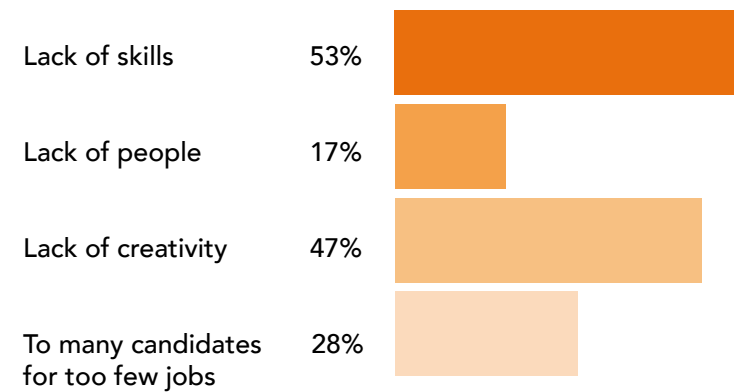
Employers that participated in the survey were then quizzed on their overarching views of the fundamental role of MBAs in this challenging recruitment landscape – by asking if they agreed or disagreed with the following statements:

- MBAs have good soft skills

As figure 15 demonstrates, more than three quarters either 'strongly agreed' or 'tended to agree' that MBA graduates are well prepared for the fast-moving pace of business. Meanwhile, 66% either 'strongly agreed' or 'tended to agree' that MBAs have good soft skills. However the sample was divided when it came to whether or not they believed MBAs are only motivated by money – while 44% 'strongly agreed' or 'tended to agree' this was the case, 23% either 'strongly disagreed' or 'tended to disagree' and 34% were undecided.

**Figure 14: What do you think are the main issues in the employment market?**

(Total responses: 730)



**Figure 15: Do you agree or disagree with the following statements about MBAs?**

(Total responses: 735)

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree
MBAs have good soft skills	16%	50%	26%	7%	1%
MBA graduates are well prepared for the fast-moving pace of Business	21%	57%	16%	5%	1%
MBA graduates are only motivated by money	10%	34%	34%	17%	6%

## Conclusions

The results of this survey provide both good news and areas for improvement for Business Schools and their MBA graduates.

Employers polled in the research are overwhelmingly positive about the value of an MBA from a reputable Business School when looking for senior managers. In terms of the quality of MBAs recruited by survey participants, 16% rated MBAs in general as 'excellent' and 52% rated their performance as 'good'.

When asked if MBAs had the relevant skills to thrive within survey participants' organisations, 30% 'strongly agreed' and 50% 'tended to agree' with the statement. In addition, 31% 'strongly agreed' and 49% 'tended to agree' that MBAs had the relevant skills to make a significant contribution to the wider economy in their respective countries.

Employers polled were also confident that Business Schools

are producing MBAs with mindsets focused on maximising profit (42% thought Schools are producing 'a great deal' of MBAs focused on this); and 49% thought Business Schools were producing 'a great deal' of MBAs with an international outlook. There was consensus, too, among employers that MBAs have the skills and qualities their organisations need in order to continue to grow and thrive, albeit with much more difference in their opinions regarding the ethical approaches of MBAs in terms of issues such as diversity, empathy and sustainability.

In spite of these encouraging findings, and in light of continuing global uncertainty and volatility, employers that participated in this study also revealed their worries about the recruitment landscape of tomorrow. There was an overwhelming lack of confidence in the future of both global and local economies, with most survey participants taking a conservative – and in some cases

pessimistic – view on their upcoming recruitment plans.

With the volume of senior management opportunities predicted to decline in the near future, competition for these leadership roles is likely to grow fiercer as a result – and 28% of employers that participated in this survey said that there were currently too many candidates for too few jobs.

A lack of skills and a lack of creativity

among those applying for roles are viewed by employers as being the two biggest issues facing the current recruitment market. These are areas that Business Schools and their cohorts will want to address collectively to ensure graduates are prepared for the roles they want – and that they are enabled and empowered to demonstrate their skills in creativity, innovation, emotional intelligence – and ultimately, their value to an organisation – from day one.





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