



Kseniia Selkälä

Enhancing Recruitment Services and Solutions with Intelligence

A Case Study of JobGo International's Competitive
Intelligence Tools and Methods

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Abstract

Author(s): Kseniia Selkälä
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Seija Mikkonen, Senior Lecturer

The competitive recruitment market requires constant adaptation and innovation for agencies to thrive. This study examines the theoretical foundations and practical tools related to competitive intelligence (CI) and explores their potential to improve recruitment services and tools.

The case study focuses on the small international recruitment agency JobGo International (JobGo), which is gradually recovering from the economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic.

To explore how JobGo International leverages competitive intelligence tools and methods and how its results and insights enhance its recruitment services and solutions, the study evaluates CI-related processes in JobGo based on open industry sources, secondary data, and semi-structured interviews with company employees. The assessment uses theoretical foundations and general competitive intelligence tools to analyze the current state and identify areas for improvement.

The main results of assessing the impact of CI on the company are narrowing the range of services, improving ATS with artificial intelligence, and supporting sales with battle cards.

Based on its findings, the study concludes with recommendations to improve competitive intelligence in organizations. These include setting effective goals for CI, maintaining the consistency of processes, creating the necessary communications and tools, and applying the insights gained to achieve success.

Keywords: competitive intelligence, recruitment, product management

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Glossary

CI	Competitive Intelligence
CIA	Competitive Intelligence Alliance
HELA	Henkilöstöala HELA RY, Finnish Recruitment Industry Association
JobGo	JobGo International Oy
SCIP	Strategic Consortium of Intelligence Professionals
VCA	Value Chain Analysis
WEC	World Employment Confederation

1 Introduction

According to BoldData, a business intelligence dataset provider, there are more than 1,100 employment agencies in Finland and almost 300,000 in Europe (BoldData 2023). Such a competitive density requires the inclusion of comprehensive market research in product strategy development (Banfield, Eriksson & Walkingshaw 2017).

The business landscape is dynamic, and the speed of change is rapid and dependent on the world's situation (Andersen 2022). A striking example of this dependence was the COVID-19 epidemic, which also affected the recruitment industry (ILO-OECD, 2020). Employment agencies were under pressure from both sides, from customers who not just stopped actively recruiting staff but also cut jobs, and from candidates who were no longer interested in changing jobs (Anderton, Botelho, Consolo, Dias da Silva, Foroni, Mohr & Vivian 2021).

High-frequency labour market indicators: hiring rate and job postings

(year-on-year growth rates, percentages)

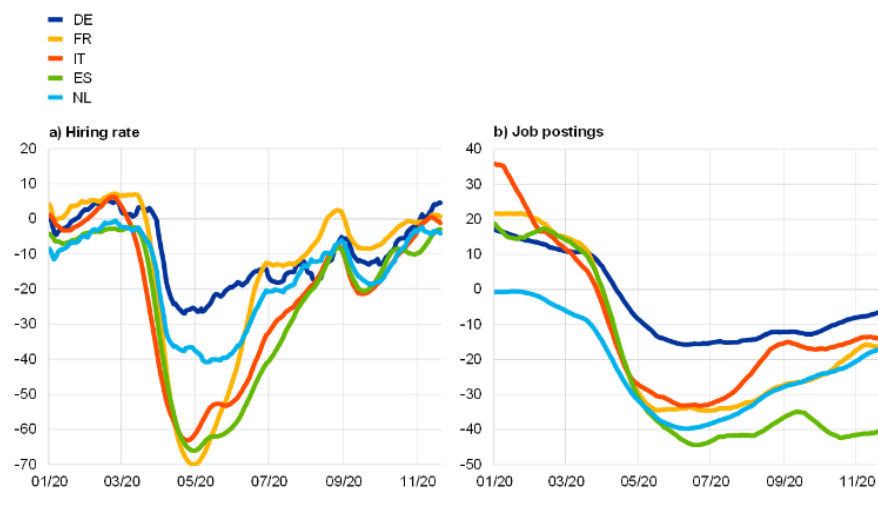


Figure 1. Impact of COVID-19 on the employment market (Anderton et al. 2021)

However, those changes did not stop new market entrants. They are constantly emerging and proposing new solutions and innovative business models. For example, gig economy platforms like Fiverr or Upwork have noticeably changed how companies source talent for short-term projects (Kempton 2023).

However, it has not only been the changes led by new players that have had an effect on the market. According to a report by Bullhorn, as cited by Statista (2023), these are the main challenges for the firms in the recruitment sector:

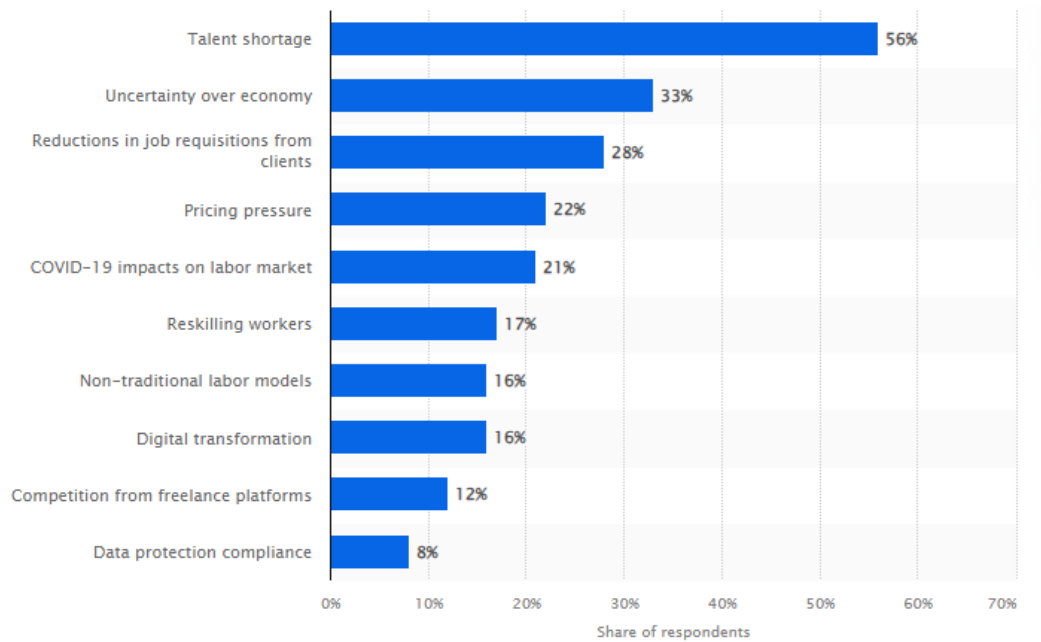


Figure 2. Main industry challenges for staffing firms in 2023 (Statista 2023)

The shortage of qualified personnel requires both innovative recruitment strategies and efforts to compete with competitors for professionals. Economic uncertainty and limited customer budgets force recruitment agencies to adapt their pricing models and service offerings, which, along with competition from freelance platforms, requires increased efficiency, profitability, and awareness of these factors of other market players.

However, digitalization has also a positive side - it provides tools and technologies for automating tasks, including tracking trends and changes in the competitive environment (Saikkonen 2024).

With the trending data-based business decision-making, the rules of the game have been modified (Nenzhelele & Pellissier, 2014). Thus, modern international B2B companies require a strong CI-based strategy to ensure they are aware of the competitive landscape.

For the purpose of this thesis, this means understanding competitor tools and strategies for attracting top talents and new clients, retaining current customers, tracking industry innovations, taking into consideration changing market trends, such as the increasing

demand for remote and hybrid work options, as well as monitoring changes in candidates' preferences and requirements for new jobs (The Crox Group 2022). The combination of these insights allows agencies to take actions to optimize service and product lines, moving forward while maintaining business growth.

This study is based on the example of the activities of JobGo International, a small international recruitment agency. It will show JobGo's CI strategy, analyze their approach to gathering competitor intelligence and translating data into actionable insights, as well as consider how they use them to influence service and product development.

Through the assessment of JobGo's Competitive Intelligence processes and results, valuable lessons for other industry players will be identified and areas for improvement at JobGo will be identified.

2 Research Objective and Thesis Structure

This study focuses on a comprehensive analysis of the impact of competitive intelligence on product decision-making at the recruitment agency JobGo International. The study aims to answer the following research question: "How does JobGo International leverage CI tools and methods, and how are the its results and insights used to enhance their recruitment services and solutions?". To address the research question, the contents and structure of the thesis are as follows:

- The first part of the study presents the research question and the structure of the thesis.
- The second part introduces the subject of the study and its importance within the context of the chosen case.
- The third part is dedicated to the methodology, with descriptions of, and justification for the research methods employed. This helps to understand how the work on the case study was organized and what sources it is based on.
- The fourth part of the study focuses on the case study company, JobGo International Oy, and its approach to CI. Related processes and results, as well

as challenges and limitations, are shown to better understand the competitive intelligence role in JobGo International.

- The fifth part of the study includes the summary of results and findings of the considered case and its comparison with the theoretical frameworks.
- In the final part, there is a discussion of the practical benefits of the study, as well as conclusions and recommendations based on the results.

The study's primary objective is an analysis of how intelligence affects the services and product line, using the example of the recruitment agency JobGo International. Furthermore, it looks at the CI-related processes and chosen tools, as well as limitations in their implementation and application.

3 Subject of the Study

3.1 Competitive Intelligence Definition

According to Crayon's multi-industry research, more than half of all companies see an increase in competition (Crayon 2024).

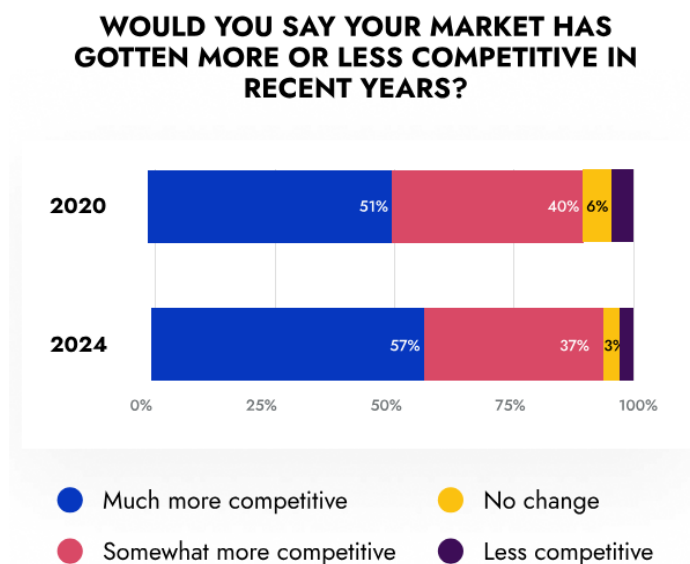


Figure 3. Changes in the market competitiveness 2020 vs. 2024. (Crayon 2024)

Hence, this study is focused on the analysis of applying a certain approach to creating or strengthening a competitive advantage in the context of increasing competition (Semrush 2023).

According to Judah Phillips, CI can be considered a comprehensive process that involves identifying, collecting, synthesizing, and analyzing data from various external sources. Its result is not only information about direct competitors it covers the entire business environment – customers, consumers, sales trends, financial data, etc. (Phillips 2013). By analyzing this information, businesses gain valuable insights that can be used to make informed decisions.

The Society of Competitive Intelligence Professionals defines CI as a discipline that strengthens organizations. It allows businesses to understand their past, present, and future competitive environment. Through ethically gathering information and employing analytical techniques, professionals, applying competitive intelligence, provide crucial insights that empower strategic growth and increase revenue opportunities while minimizing risks (SCIP 2022).

There is an important nuance that Charlotte Håkansson and Margareta Nelke highlight. They recommend not to confuse competitive intelligence with competitor intelligence. They call the second one "the investigation of the competitor instead of the full range of impact factors affecting our business environment." (Håkansson & Nelke 2015).

CI is a powerful tool focused on strategic use (Fuld, 1995), and it has a thousand-year history, first described in "The Art of War" by Sun Tzu (Calof & Wright 2008) (Fleisher & Bensoussan 2007).

3.2 Topic Significance

Small-sized international B2B companies, which often lack the extensive resources inherent in larger market players, require effective strategies to ensure their existing market share and growth (Doole & Lowe 2008). By collecting and analyzing information about competitors, such companies can gain valuable information for making informed business decisions. Consequently, competitive intelligence (CI) is important in achieving business goals.

Studying a real-life example allows us to understand better how CI brings benefits. Through detailed analysis, this practical study will provide a practical illustration of the theoretical foundations related to CI. The specific actions and results of a real agency's work can be extended to the needs of other companies. In addition, findings and recommendations can be applied to small businesses.

4 Methodology

4.1 Research Methods

This study is based on a specific case, which helps readers become comprehensively acquainted with the practical application of competitive intelligence within a small international company.

4.1.1 Case Study Format

The format of a case study is a research strategy that supposes an in-depth study of a unit of analysis by using several data collection methods, with the focus of its methodology on contextual study (Priya 2020).

In case studies, a clearly formulated research question acts as a guide that defines the analysis unit, acts as a basis of the study, and directs all actions taken. As a result, an appropriately defined research question ensures focused study, maximizing the value of case analysis (Yin 2009). In this particular case, the research question implies the application of a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. The qualitative research methods implemented in the study included small-scale semi-structured interviews based on open-ended questions, as well as analysis of employed CI tools and document analysis (Barclay 2018) (Yin 2017).

4.1.2 Data Analysis Techniques

The most suitable approaches, such as narrative analysis and triangulation, were applied to analyze data in this study (Mertova & Webster 2019) (Denzin 2009).

The task of narrative analysis is to interpret the experience shared by the study participants. In the context of this case study, semi-structured interviews enable to build a holistic picture of CI processes in the company and use competitive intelligence tools and methods to improve our services and recruitment solutions. This approach allows to identify the themes and patterns of the case study (Mertova & Webster 2019).

Triangulation is the practice of using multiple data collection methods to form the integrity of a study. In this case, triangulation was achieved by combining the results of semi-structured interviews with an overview of internal documents and publicly available secondary data on the subject of competitive intelligence. The comparison of information and data from various sources made it possible to get a comprehensive understanding of JobGo's practice regarding competitive intelligence. According to Norman K. Denzin, this approach makes it possible to increase the reliability of qualitative research by reducing the subjective interpretation of data (Denzin 2009).

4.1.3 Role of the Author in the Study and Ethics in Data Collection

One key characteristic of qualitative research is the close connection between the researcher and the participant throughout all study phases (Whitehead 2020). Thus, this type of research partly defines the role of the researcher as a participant (Simons 2009).

In this case study, the author acts as a partially involved observer and interviewer. Some historical data related to the company is based on the researcher's experience as a former employee of JobGo, the subject of the case study (UCL 2023). Compared to an outside researcher, this position affects the ability to observe how competitive intelligence activities are integrated into business processes (Yin 2017) (Whitehead 2020).

On the other side, this position requires compliance with high ethical standards in the process of data collection and processing, as well as in the distribution of the results obtained (Yin 2017).

The practical case of competitive intelligence is a sensitive research topic. Conducting this kind of research requires researchers to assess and manage associated risks and consequences carefully. This includes considering the impact on individual researchers, participants, applied tools, and information security measures taken. To minimize

possible negative impacts, the researcher must suggest potential risks and determine how to minimize or manage them effectively, as well as coordinate research steps with participants (UCL 2023). One more key point related to ethics in this research is the protection of the participants' privacy to avoid undesirable consequences and bothering, regardless of the source of concern identity (Yin 2017).

5 Literature Review

This chapter will cover the concept of competitive intelligence, from historical information to classical and modern tools and methods.

5.1.1 Historical Development of Competitive Intelligence

Although the term competitive intelligence (CI) appeared less than 100 years ago, the basic principles of studying competitors and applying the knowledge gained have ensured the success of various business ventures for hundreds of years (Maune 2014). Researchers consider CI's development by studying available sources ranging from early texts to scientific works in the second half of the 20th century and the latest developments in recent years (Maritz & Du Toit 2018).

To demonstrate the earliest examples of the necessity of knowing enemies and using competitive intelligence, it usually refers to ancient manuals on military strategy and, in particular, to quote the work of Sun Tzu "The Art of War", created in the 5th century BC, in China (Calof & Wright 2008). In this case, CI activities are meant to get intelligence on the movement of an enemy army, its strengths, and weaknesses by collecting and processing actual information and developing effective strategies for fighting and achieving victory in a business field (Fleisher & Bensoussan 2007).

Compared to previous periods, the 20th century became a breakthrough in the development of competitive intelligence methods, going from basic information collection to standardized methods and approaches (Calof & Wright 2008). The growth in the number and scale of market players and the constantly evolving business environment required consistency and structuring in the analysis of competitors and markets (Nenzhelele & Pellissier 2014).

Harvard Business School Professor- Michael Porter played one of the most influential roles in the development of modern CI. His publication in 1979 in the Harvard Business Review introduced the concept of the Five Forces, which is still relevant. (HBS 2024) This analysis provides a competitive microenvironment understanding based on an analysis of Competitive Rivalry, Powers of Supplier, and Powers of Buyer, as well as Threats of Substitution and Threats of New Entry (Fleisher & Bensoussan 2002).

A little earlier, in the 1960s, SOFT analysis was developed, nowadays better known as SWOT. This technique allows evidence-based assessment of planning problems such as Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (Puyt & Wilderom 2023).

The concept of the SWOT analysis and "Five Forces" framework, along with other analytical tools, such as PESTLE, GE and BCG Matrixes, Scenario Analysis, Ansoff Matrix, etc., formed the basis of generally accepted competitive intelligence methods (Fleisher & Bensoussan 2002).

The further growth in the popularity of competitive intelligence since the early 1980s has been reflected in the literature – a number of works have been published indicating that CI is recognised as a separate organisational function, as well as a separate field of research (Maritz & Du Toit 2018).

In addition to classical CI tools and techniques, Craig S. Fleisher and Babette E. Bensoussan in 2007 presented an updated approach to analysis in a competitive environment, for example, combining STEEPLE/PEST and Porter's 5 Forces to Industry Analysis "The Nine Forces", or expanded the capabilities of analytics by explaining such tools as ACH (Analysis of Competing Hypotheses) or Corporate Reputation Analysis. (Fleisher & Bensoussan 2007) As well as in 2017, Stéphane Gorla offered a time-tested but not so widely used mix of standard elements and more creative approaches: benchmarking, 5W & 1H, DKCP method, Ishikawa diagram, TRIZ approach, etc. (Gorla 2017).

Towards the end of the 20th century, professionals specializing in working with information about competitors were increasingly distinguished in organizations. They and their departments were tasked with systematically collecting, analyzing, and disseminating information about competitors (Maune 2014). This shift was driven by several factors, including:

- Increased competition due to the globalization of markets. (Fleisher & Bensoussan 2002)
- Technological development and achievements based on the emergence and spread of personal computers, databases, and the Internet.
- Recognition of the strategic value of competitive intelligence and the growing need for resources and expertise (Maune 2014).

It is worth noting that the practice of competitive intelligence has changed significantly since the time of Tzu's treatise. And although the very idea of competitive intelligence remains unchanged, variations in the methods and tools have undergone some development (Fleisher & Bensoussan 2007).

5.1.2 Key CI Terms and Frameworks

The main purpose of conducting competitive intelligence is to better understand the industry and the competitive environment. This will allow for making effective decisions and forming strategies that contribute to achieving a competitive advantage and surpassing competitors in performance (Fleisher & Bensoussan 2002).

CI structure is shaped as a cycle that implies consistency (Fleisher & Bensoussan 2002). This systematic approach focuses on providing operational information, which in turn affects the response options available to the organization (Maritz & Du Toit 2018) (Fleisher & Bensoussan 2002).

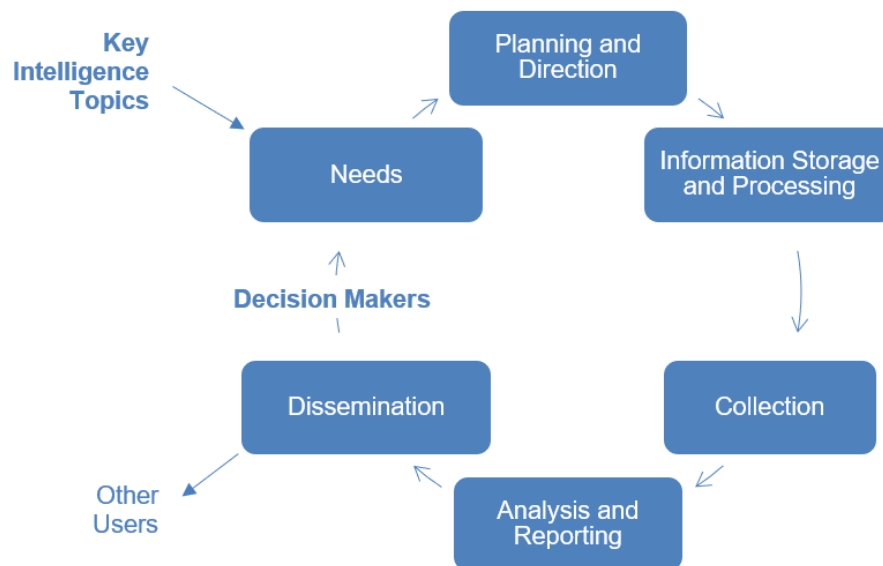


Figure 4. Intelligence cycle (Fleisher & Bensoussan 2002)

Each stage of the competitive intelligence cycle requires information, and its required type depends on the value, goals, and plans (David 2011).

Alex Walton from CIA expresses that work with the CI cycle “technically” can be started from anywhere, but the logical entrance point is Needs identification. He also notes the necessity of reviewing previous experience and results if you have already been through one or a few cycles. Then, when all the preparatory work or analysis is completed, the Planning and Direction, as well as preparation for Information Storage and Processing, stage can begin (Walton 2023).

The next big step is related to information Collection. It is particularly constant because once you have started it, it does not stop either during the processing and presentation of old information or even during other stages (Walton 2023).

Data processing, Analysis and Reporting require a structural approach. Frameworks and well-posed questions help to extract usable intelligence. Dissemination of the gained insights to other users is important regardless of the finding scale. This encourages the strengthening of the maximum number of business decisions with data (Walton 2023).

The end of one cycle is the beginning of the next one. This is the point at which previous actions and their results can be analyzed, and the next stage can start — identifying actual needs and preparing to collect new data.

Rachel Maritz and Adeline du Toit summarized that competitive intelligence comes from:

- Direct and indirect competitors
- Customers and clients
- Suppliers
- Technologies
- Complex databases (SCIP 2022)
- Environment
- Possible commercial opportunities

(Maritz & Du Toit 2018)

Consequently, according to the Strategic Consortium of Intelligence Professionals, competitive intelligence allows organizations to increase revenue opportunities by properly embracing these sources while reducing strategic risks (SCIP 2022) .

Craig S. Fleisher and Babette E. Bensoussan identify several groups of "classic" analytical methods used in competitive intelligence:

- Strategic: BCG growth/share portfolio matrix, GE business screen matrix, Porter's 5 Forces (Industry analysis), Strategic group analysis, SWOT analysis, Value chain analysis
- Competitive and Customer: Blind spot analysis, Competitor analysis, Customer segmentation analysis, Customer value analysis, Functional capability and resource analysis, Management profiling
- Environmental: Issue analysis, Macroenvironmental (STEEP) analysis, Scenario analysis, Stakeholder analysis

- Evolutionary: Experience curve analysis, Growth vector analysis, Patent analysis, Product life cycle analysis, S-curve (Technology Life Cycle) analysis
- Financial: Financial ratio and statement analysis, Sustainable growth rate analysis, Strategic funds programming

(Fleisher & Bensoussan 2002)

Advanced analytics and data tools of CI are not just studying an isolated business environment, they help to collect and interpret data of various scales, from macro to micro, inside and outside the organization (Maritz & Du Toit 2018) (Darcy 2012).

Macroenvironmental analysis, known as a PESTEL. The acronym implies the following components: Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Ecological and Legal. Its expanded version – STEEPLE, also contains an Ethical element (Makos 2024).

Each aspect is considered within the frames of the particular case; however, there are identified the main guidelines:

- According to Craig S. Fleisher and Babette E. Bensoussan, POLITICAL factors include the ability to influence the political decision-making process, the activity of regulatory authorities, the nature of government and decision-making structures, the policies of political parties, the existence of property protection laws, public opinion, voting levels, and trends.
- The economic aspect covers the balance of payments, foreign exchange reserves, GDP growth rates, income distribution levels and ranges, interest rates, inflation rates, and small business lending levels.
- SOCIAL factor includes fertility and mortality rates (population aging), the cultural level of citizens, ideological characteristics, income differences between social strata, the percentage of the population in economic and social segments, types of trade union organizations and value systems of social classes.
- TECHNOLOGICAL factor is related to capacity, the number of colleges and universities in the region, the rate of improvement of processes or products, the

pace of technological change, available patents, the presence of technology clusters and research and development budgets.

- ENVIRONMENTAL or ECOLOGICAL factors include air and water quality, the level of environmental regulation, pollution levels, processing capabilities, energy sources, the stage of evolution of the product life cycle, and the interchangeability of raw materials.
- LEGAL factors include the ability to influence political decision-making, the activity of regulatory authorities, the nature of government and decision-making structures, the policies of political parties, the existence of property protection laws, public opinion, as well as the level and trends of voting.

(Fleisher & Bensoussan 2002)

- ETHICAL covers corporate social responsibility (CSR), diversity and inclusion policies, ethical supply chain practices, fair trade, ethical sourcing, and marketing practices (Business Documents 2024).

Elements of STEEPLE analysis impact the daily operations, projects, and strategy in general of a small international recruitment agency. The data obtained from it helps to navigate both new and current markets and assess the business and competitive environment from different angles.

One more key CI technique to apply is **Competitor Analysis (Porter's four corners model)**. Craig S. Fleisher and Babette E. Bensoussan summarize that this analysis, reflecting the strengths and weaknesses of both potential and direct competitors, provides a proactive and reactive strategic context, identifying opportunities and threats.

Profiling competitors meets four main objectives: to identify competitive plans and possible strategies for their implementation; to consider their likely reactions to initiatives coming from a competitive environment; to determine whether the strategy corresponds to their real capabilities; and to find weaknesses in the current and projected position (Fleisher & Bensoussan 2002).

Michael E. Porter defined four diagnostic components for the Competitor Analysis framework, which facilitate making a data-based predictions: “future goals, current strategy, assumptions, and capabilities.” (Porter 1998).

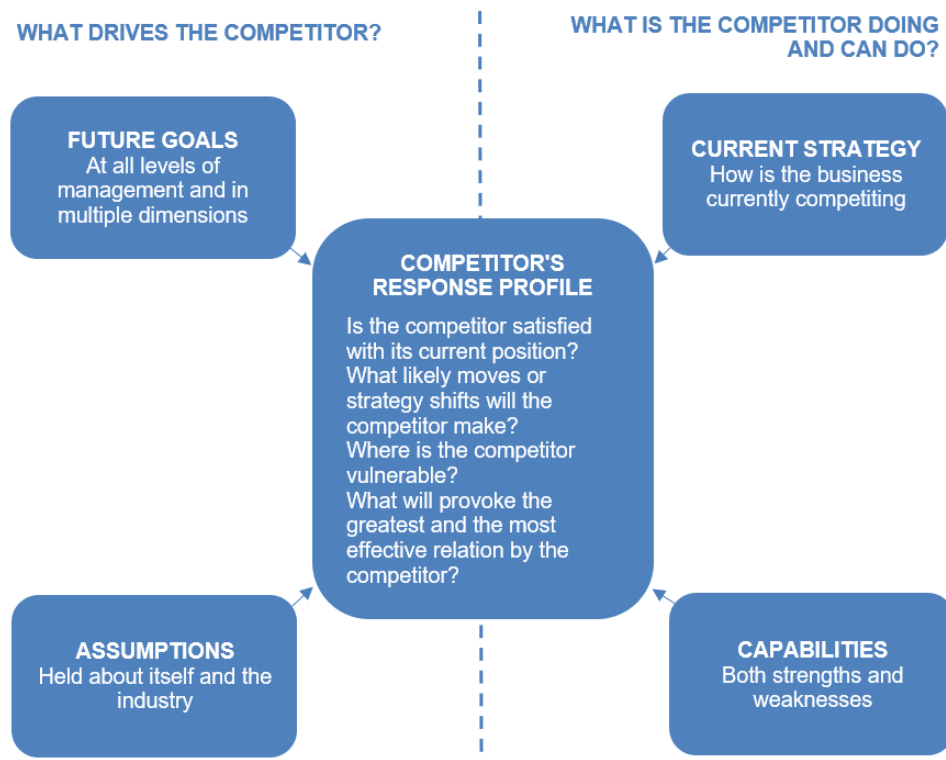


Figure 5. Framework for Competitor Analysis (Porter 1998)

Porter presented a structured method for collecting data on competitors, including background information, products/services, marketing, human resources, operations, management profiles, socio-political aspects, technology, organizational structure, CI potential, strategy, consumer value analysis, financial profile information. This model is designed to predict future strategic steps, allowing you to effectively develop both defensive and offensive strategies based on historical data, among other things. This proactive approach allows analysts to anticipate the reaction of competitors and adapt strategies accordingly, taking into account changes in the competitive environment (Fleisher & Bensoussan 2002).

To get the full picture of the recruitment business battlefield, it is important to determine all the competitors - direct, indirect, potential, and substitute. (Tunç 2023) This approach in working with Competitor Analysis allows businesses, such as small agencies, to take

into consideration the maximum benefits of Intelligence and take a proactive position (Sharp 2009).

Understanding the affecting business forces can empower a company to rapidly orient on the landscape of its industry and secure its strategic position while maximizing profitability and minimizing possible competitive threats. **Porter's Five Forces** technique is used to determine the possible optimal positioning where the influence of the forces is minimal (Porter 2023).

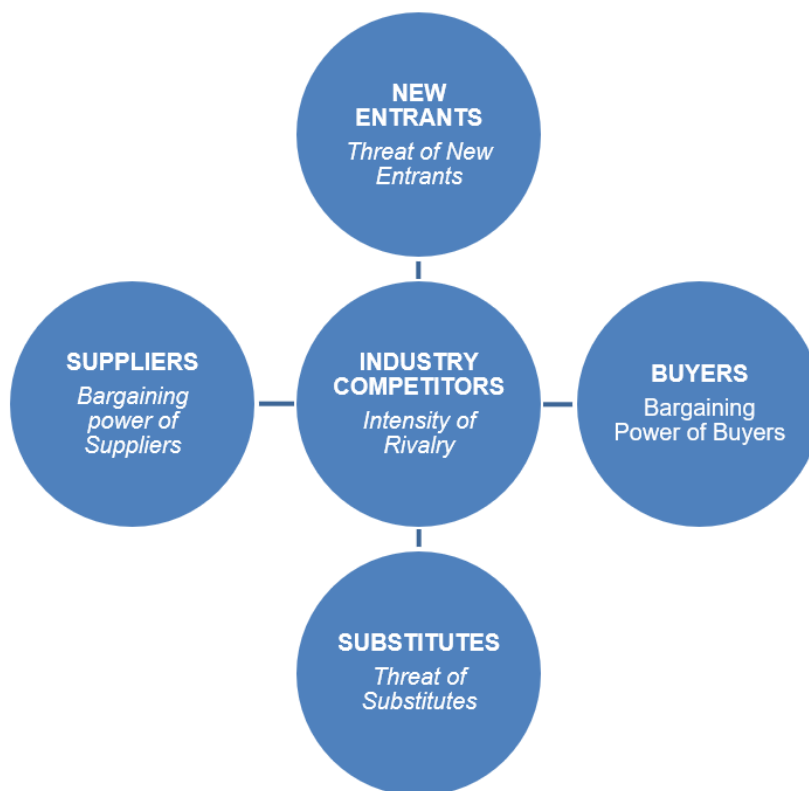


Figure 6. Porter's Five Forces

According to Michael Porter, the ratio of these five factors varies from industry to industry - profitability depends on the dominant competitive force or forces that determine strategic decisions. And it is not always easy to determine the main force. The dynamics of the industry consists of a combination of various (economic and technical) factors affecting the effectiveness of each of the competitive forces (Porter 2008). Periodical application of the Five Forces analysis lets the recruitment agency navigate the current situation, considering the business's wide geographical spread.

A **SWOT** analysis allows the company to assess the situation more broadly and is used to assess the quality of an organization's strategy alignment with its internal strengths and weaknesses, as well as external opportunities and threats.

The first step of SWOT is to identify, analyze and rank strategic environmental issues combining internal strengths and weaknesses, and external threats and opportunities. The second step is identifying SWOT (S/O, W/O, S/T, W/T) variables and developing a strategy to improve compliance. The general SWOT model implies a step-by-step movement from defining, analyzing and ranking problems to defining variables and developing strategies, the ultimate goal of which is to improve competitive advantage (Fleisher & Bensoussan 2002).

		INTERNAL	
		STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
EXTERNAL	OPPORTUNITIES	Strengths / Opportunities <i>clear primary concerns</i>	Weaknesses / Opportunities <i>potential alternatives</i>
	THREATS	Strengths / Threats <i>easy to justify and respond to</i>	Weaknesses / Threats <i>possibly significant risk</i>

Figure 7. SWOT matrix

The SWOT matrix allows companies to develop strategies aimed at prioritizing the development and support of strengths, indicates the direction of work to eliminate weaknesses, helps to see and use opportunities, as well as prevent or minimize possible threats.

The small company with international operations can respond to changes in time by scaling the focus from the macro to the microenvironment (Maritz & Du Toit 2018).

H. Igor Ansoff suggested that a marketing growth strategy can be implemented by adjusting a product or market, and that choosing one of the approaches leads to a division of the strategy into four sectors: market penetration, product development, market development or diversification. (Joshi 2023) In his work, Ansoff emphasizes the importance of taking into account the risks associated with this, the availability of resources, capital needs and a personal assessment of the state of the market and the company when choosing a growth strategy. Over time, the traditional Ansoff model turned into an extended 3x3 **Growth Vector matrix** (Fleisher & Bensoussan 2002).

MARKET OPTIONS	EXISTING MARKET	Market Penetration	Product Extension (e.g. variants/imitations)	Product Development (e.g. line extension)
	EXPANDED MARKET	Market Extention	Market Segmentation/Product Differentiation	Product Development / Market Extention
	NEW MARKET	Market Development	Product/Service Extension & Market Development	Diversification
		PRESENT PRODUCTS	IMPROVED PRODUCTS	NEW PRODUCTS
PRODUCT ALTERNATIVES				

Figure 8. Growth Vector Matrix (Fleisher & Bensoussan 2002)

Through an analysis based on the Growth Vector matrix, it is possible to predict the company's development potential and identify market opportunities or gaps. This approach allows companies to make proactive strategic decisions. Similarly, competitive intelligence helps to anticipate competitors' actions and market expansion (Fleisher & Bensoussan 2002).

Small firms, as a JobGo, in comparison with large and medium enterprises, attract the highest customer volume but hold the smallest market share. They can invest some budget in R&D, but survival depends on their fighting capacity in the competitive market.

So, understanding the competitive environment is crucial for effective strategy development. It involves analyzing competitors' actions, strengths and weaknesses, and identifying potential market opportunities for use (FasterCapital 2024a).

Analyzing the elements of the company's value chain offers valuable insights into business operations' components. The company can enhance customer benefits and increase its share by optimizing value creation at each stage. Understanding the value creation process in a particular company allows to understand its competitive advantages better (Stobierski 2020).

According to Michael E. Porter, all operations within a company's value chain can be divided into:

- Primary activities
- Support activities.

The primary activities directly relate to creating a product or providing a service, including inbound logistics, operations, outbound logistics, marketing and sales, and after-sales service (Fleisher & Bensoussan 2002).

Additional measures are aimed at improving the efficiency of the main activity, creating a competitive advantage. These include procurement, technological development, human resource management, as well as development and maintenance of the firm's infrastructure (Stobierski 2020).

Value Chain Analysis (VCA) is a concept that allows bringing the internal key capabilities of a company in line with its external competitive environment, the purpose of which is to optimize the allocation of resources and identify economic advantages. It identifies the key value-creating activities in the company (Fleisher & Bensoussan 2002).

FasterCapital considers two points of view on VCA - from customers, which aiding in their assessment of worth and value for their investment, and from business, which defines opportunities for cost reduction, operational enhancements, and heightened customer satisfaction (FasterCapital 2024b).

Value Chain Analysis serves as a strategic tool to assess a company's current position in its industry and identify opportunities to enhance its competitive advantages, thereby increasing its share of industry profits. The process begins with an analysis of the value chain within the company and then expands to an external competitive analysis within the framework of the industry's value system. Then, these two analyses are combined (Fleisher & Bensoussan 2002).

The VCA process requires the next steps:

- Definition of the firm strategic business unit
- Identification of the critical value-creating activities
- Conducting an internal cost analysis
- Conducting an internal differentiation analysis
- Mapping out the industry profit pool (define parameters, estimate size and distribution)
- Vertical linkage analysis
- Iteration

(Fleisher & Bensoussan 2002)

Tim Stobierski notes that typically productivity growth in one of the secondary activities can benefit at least one of the primary activities (Stobierski 2020).

Based on the results of this analysis, a small B2B company will be able to streamline its work processes, optimize resources and recognize options for outstanding on the market.

Since the research question concerns the impact of competitive intelligence on services and product lines, a tool such as the BCG (Boston Consulting Group) Matrix must also be mentioned.

Built on a combination of the Experience Curve and the Product Life Cycle, this tool helps managers of multi-product businesses to diagnose corporate strategy by offering an analytical framework, guiding resource allocation, and analyzing competition.

Visually BCG Matrix is presented as a screen with four fields with assessed business units according to the appeal of the industry they operate in and their comparative competitive standing. Depending on their position, recommended to apply different strategies (Fleisher & Bensoussan 2002) (Reeves & Moose 2024).

		MARKET SHARE	
		HIGH	LOW
GROWTH	HIGH	<p>Star</p> <p><i>Earnings: high, stable, growing</i></p> <p><i>Cash Flow: neutral</i></p> <p><i>Strategy: invest for growth</i></p>	<p>Question mark / Problem Child</p> <p><i>Earnings: low, unstable, growing</i></p> <p><i>Cash Flow: negative</i></p> <p><i>Strategy: analyze</i></p>
	LOW	<p>Cash cow</p> <p><i>Earnings: high, stable</i></p> <p><i>Cash Flow: high, stable</i></p> <p><i>Strategy: milk</i></p>	<p>Pet / Dog</p> <p><i>Earnings: low, unstable</i></p> <p><i>Cash Flow: neutral or negative</i></p> <p><i>Strategy: divest</i></p>

Figure 9. BCG Matrix (Fleisher & Bensoussan 2002)

Roggio notes that owners or marketing specialists of small companies may have difficulty understanding the market share of their businesses as part of the BCG Matrix analysis. However, this can be determined by conducting a study of the public data of a more significant market player and correlating the indicators (Roggio 2014).

5.1.3 Digital CI Tools and Other Solutions

The modern tech environment allows professionals involved in CI processes to use various direct sources, such as news platforms, market reports, website change

monitors, social media, funding tracking tools, event catalogs, and conceptual analytical laboratories, to obtain comprehensive Competitive Data to process it into Intelligence (Black 2024). Valona highlights the difference in approach to data collection according to the company performance - Global Average and World Class companies (Kärkkäinen, Mäkinen & Dorofeeva 2024).

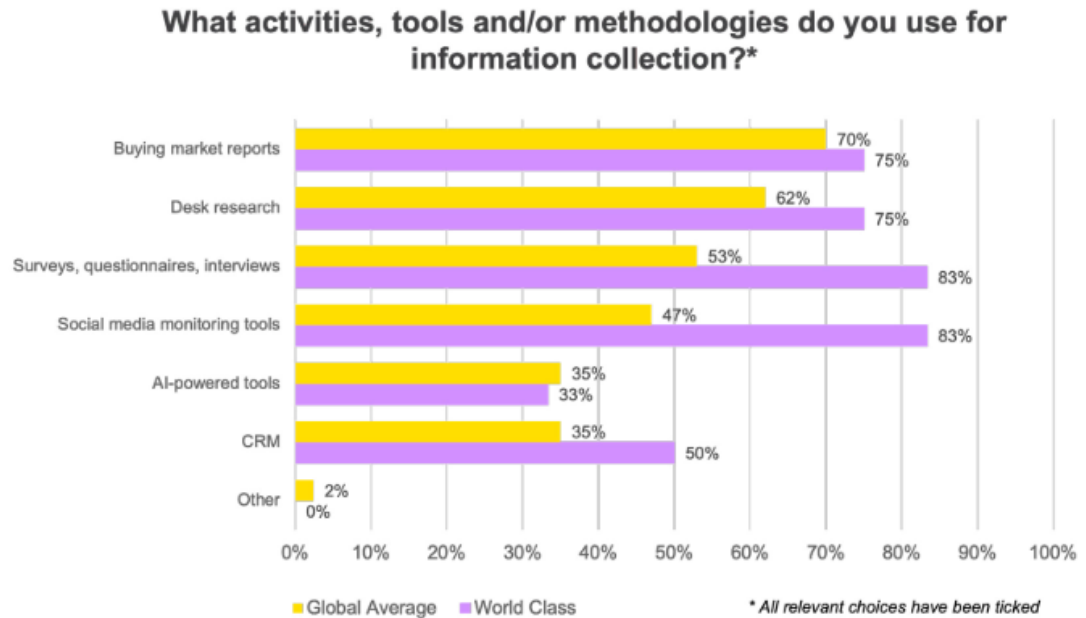


Figure 10. CI data collection sources and methods (Kärkkäinen et al. 2024)

Contemporary CI solutions include digital tools and programs that operate on both principles, classic frameworks, and new solutions that keep up with the times, allow companies to collect, process, and distribute information faster.

Competitive Intelligence Alliance (CIA) in their report 2023 distinguishes the following types of digital tools:

- Competitive Intelligence Platforms (e.g. Klue, Crayon, AuroraWDC FirstLight, Contify, Sprinklr, SimilarWeb, Intelligence2day, Owler, Evaluateserve Insightsfirst). Over 67% of companies participating in the survey use CI platforms; at the same time, the rest of the respondents apply tools in other categories to gather their data.
- Market Intelligence Platforms (e.g. Pitchbook, AuroraWDC, Digimind, Innova Market Insights, S&P Market Intelligence). CIA forecasts the blurring of the

boundaries between competitive intelligence and market intelligence software, due to the versatility of the solutions offered on the market.

- Social Listening Tools (e.g. Brandwatch, Sprinklr, Meltwater, Inoreader, Mention, Hootsuite, BuzzSumo, Talkwalker, TweetDeck). These tools have a narrow focus on gathering information - primarily across social media and suit better industries that actively apply social media and influencer marketing, and do not have a big CI budget.
- CRMs (e.g. Salesforce, Hubspot, ZohoCRM, Freshsales, Oracle NetSuite, Copper). 75% of respondents apply CRMs in their CI tech stack, this is due to the capacity of the systems and the ability to integrate with other tools.
- Sales Enablement Platforms (e.g. Highspot, Confluence, Seismic, Showpad, Guru, Outreach). These platforms provide the distribution of information between teams, as well as allow tracking of the impact of content and in general dependence of CI on sales and revenue.
- Conversational Intelligence Tools (e.g. Gong, Chorus, Jiminny, ZoomIQ). Internal data source, which follows almost every customer interaction (email, chat, phone), allow to gain and manage data, and alert users in case of important topics including in real-time.
- Win/Loss Platforms (e.g. Clozd, DoubleCheck, Qualtrics, Primary-Intel, Dovetail, Salesforce). Gathering buyer feedback programs, aimed to find key decision drivers and deliver relevant win/loss data that helps see where the company loses revenue to competitors.

(Walton, King, Johnstone & Pusceddu 2023)

According to the Valona research, 2023 can be called an experimental stage in the application of AI in competitive intelligence. In the report authors also present the importance of human touch in the current stage of AI development: based on their data optimal split between technology and human support in CI-related processes is 50/50 (Kärkkäinen et al. 2024).

Chase Hughes, the CEO of ProAI, notes that many CI solutions based on artificial intelligence are already available in the market. There are large language models (LLM) for ongoing data gathering and analysis, e.g., tracking competitor profiles and their product reviews or monitoring new market entrants and partnerships. AI-based Extensions are also integrated into search engines to optimize the search experience and simplify the compilation of thematic reviews.

Hughes warns of the need to comply with ethical and legal standards to avoid possible risks. Plus, he supports Valona's point of view regarding the necessity of involving people in the analysis, verification, and interpretation of data collected by AI (Hughes 2023). This, in turn, determines a likely path for the development of AI-based tools in competitive intelligence in the near future (Fuld & Company 2023).

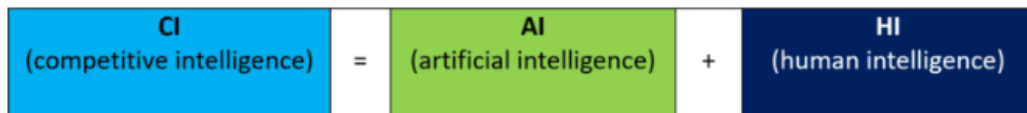


Figure 11. Winning formula of approach to competitive intelligence. (Fuld & Company 2023)

Despina Gavoyannis from Ahrefs recommends monitoring and testing the latest developments and technological solutions in the field of CI. In particular, she shares some of the tools and methods that can help to simplify CI processes in the company and lead to better results:

- Analysis of organic competitors' clients - their online location, purchase decision-making process, and general preferences.
- Keeping competitor playbooks – e.g. to find the similarities in competitors' content management and patterns of audience reactions to them.
- Listening to and monitoring competitors' marketing and communications materials to determine their Flagman products and services and related customers' experience.
- Evaluation of competitors' historical data - to find patterns in corporate behavior.

- Listening to key figures of competitors' teams - understanding C-Suite executives and important people for your competitors' processes is crucial.
- Evaluation of price and value positioning - by application SEO-analytical and AI-based solutions it is possible to track prices (from different open sources) or find values that you lose out to competitors in demonstrating to customers.

Today's consumers are highly informed about their options - in just a few clicks they can compare alternatives (Gavoyannis 2024). That once again highlights the importance of competitive intelligence as a business growth accelerator, helping to reach the target audience and stand out among others.

5.1.4 A Brief Overview of Best Practices

The publications (blogposts, whitepapers, reports, etc.) of Valona Intelligence are a good example of comparing the approaches to competitive intelligence of global average and world-class companies. They clearly divide the statistical data into two groups, which suggests the effectiveness of one approach or another (Kärkkäinen et al. 2024).

The division between these two groups is due to the indexing of six key success factors:

- Focus
- Organization
- Process
- Tools and AI
- Deliverables
- Culture

(Kärkkäinen et al. 2024)

Valona Intelligence Framework assumes that on a scale from 1 to 5, Global Average companies show a medium performance under these factors, and World-Class companies are close to the maximum (Kärkkäinen et al. 2024).

Hence, when considering benchmarking CI of World-Class companies, then they are distinguished by indicators, such as variety and quality of intelligence collection and storage tools, level of application in CI new technologies such as Artificial Intelligence, added value in intelligence deliverables, and contribution of employees not directly related to CI-processes to producing intelligence - all of them can be found in Appendix 2 (Kärkkäinen et al. 2024).

Experts in competitive intelligence assume that around 80% of the information needed to understand competitors already exists within the company (Agarwal 2006:310). Thus, applying best practices of competitive intelligence while using full capacity of internal resources will lead to the World-Class results level.

5.1.5 Warnings in Competitive Intelligence

A company can face some possible dangers and difficulties during competitive intelligence processes. Some of them may be related to the tools or methods applied:

- Insufficient investments in automating AI tools within the limits of man-hours can negatively impact the quality of information analysis and processing.
- The untimely and incorrect addressing of the distribution of relevant key information can have a negative impact on sales results or product management.
- The inability to apply the insights gained to practice makes all efforts to collect and analyze information meaningless.
- The lack of clear KPIs can prevent an objective assessment of the return on investment in competitive intelligence.

(Kompyte 2019)

Craig S. Fleisher and Babette E. Bensoussan note, that even strengthened by sophisticated CI tools and techniques, organizational decision-making procedures can be spoiled by the impact of the following factors:

- Escalating commitment: Unreasonable increasing resources commitment to the project based on an individual's inability of critically thinking.
- Group thinking: Cases when striving for harmony wins critical thinking.
- Illusion of control: Overestimation of the control ability of particular individuals.
- Prior hypothesis bias: The tendency to pay attention to the data supporting the chosen viewpoint.
- Reasoning by Analogy: Underestimating sophisticated problems based on using simple analogies.
- Representativeness: Generalizing data from small samples to entire populations.

(Fleisher & Bensoussan 2002)

One more important element of competitive intelligence is collected data, and related to this concern is the ethics of its collection (Vij 2012).

In his interview with SCIP, Dr. Avner Barnea highlighted the importance of transparency and understanding the difference between ethics and legality of data collection — the ethical framework is tougher (Mackey 2019).

John F. Prescott defined the SCIP Code of Ethics as a standard in the CI industry (Prescott & Miller 2001). This code of conduct includes the following points:

- Professional development
- Legal compliance
- Transparent in all CI processes

- Desire to avoid conflicts of interest
- Being honest and realistic
- Promotion of the Code of Ethics
- Actions within the company's strategic framework

(SCIP 2024)

5.1.6 Impact of CI on Product Management

Ben Ronald from Klue highlights that CI to the product team is the same important as how, for example, to the sales (Ronald 2023). Aqute Intelligence research shows that competitive intelligence is used by 82% of software product management, at least in the planning stage (Aqute Intelligence 2024).

According to Tshildzi Eric Nenzhelele and René Pellissier, "CI is a strategic tool and aid in decision making." (Nenzhelele & Pellissier 2014:94). Max Rehkopf from Atlassian defines Product Management as a function guiding every step of a product's lifecycle: development to decline or, in some cases, revival (Rehkopf 2019).

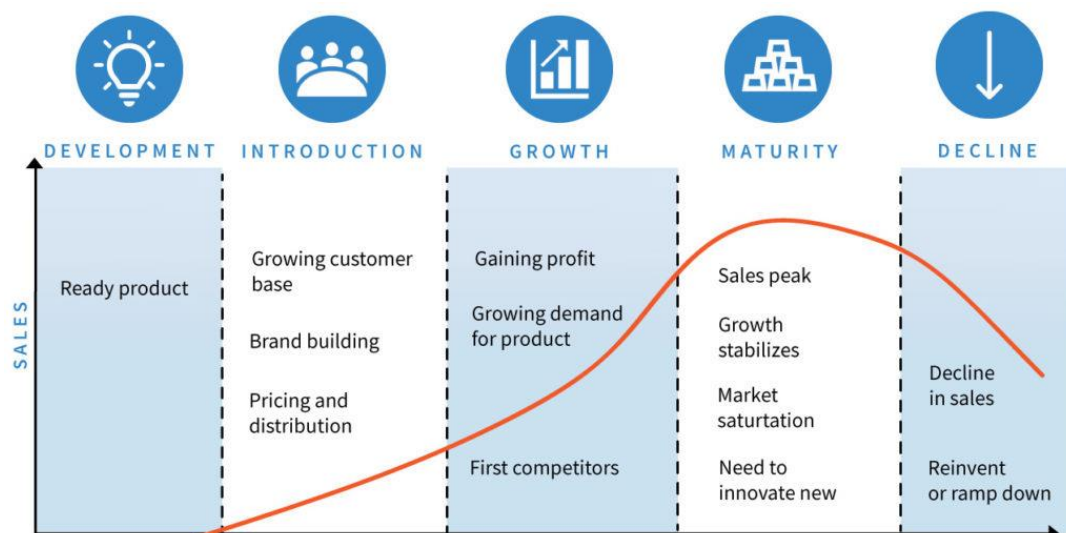


Figure 12. Product life cycle (Kaisanlahti 2023)

Within the framework of this case, product (and service) management assumes the influence of competitive intelligence both from the side of working with clients and candidates. Hope Nzewi et al. summarize that competitive intelligence allows organizations to see the market's changing needs, evaluate competitors' plans, and adequately respond to them with appropriate strategic steps to gain a competitive advantage (Nzewi et al., 2021).

How competitive intelligence empowers Product Management:

- Identifying opportunities for outstanding
- Improving cost-efficiency
- Enhancing existing services
- Calibrating pricing strategies
- Staying ahead of the competitors' products

(Aqute Intelligence 2024)

According to Melissa Perry, the best decisions in product management are based on identifying real problems. Consequently, a process of those problems identification, and finding the way how teams can solve them to further the business and achieve the strategy is the key, and directly related to CI output (Perri 2018).

6 Case Study Analysis

6.1 Company Introduction

JobGo International Oy is a recruitment agency based in Helsinki, Finland. The company was founded in 2013, and over the past ten years has grown into an international provider of recruitment services, working with various businesses in Europe and Asia.

6.1.1 Organizational Structure

JobGo International has the horizontal structure of a collaborative work environment. The hierarchical levels are minimized, and this helps optimize internal communications and increase the flexibility of processes within the organization.

The team includes specialists in various fields:

- Talent Acquisition professionals: The core team responsible for recruiting the right candidates according to the clients' needs.
- Marketing team: Focuses on both building a brand and promoting JobGo services to potential customers, as well as using modern digital marketing technologies to attract candidates.
- Sales and Business Development team: Helps establish relationships with new customers and effectively manage existing accounts.
- IT specialists: Developers with various specializations ensure the smooth operation of the JobGo technology infrastructure, including the Applicant Tracking System (ATS) and other recruitment tools.

With the current scale of the company's business, this structure allows optimally build internal and external processes, supporting revenue growth and meeting customer needs.

6.1.2 Business Model

JobGo International operates on bundled payments and fee-for-service models, in other words, they offer recruitment service packages or a "success fee" approach. This approach gives clients a predictable cost structure and an understandable recruitment experience. The specific fee structure could vary depending on the service provided (e.g., digital headhunting or executive search) and the seniority level of the position. Those options allow the company to generate revenue by charging clients flexibly, depending on their needs. In addition, JobGo may also offer retainer agreements for clients with ongoing recruitment needs (McGee 2021).

6.1.3 Services and Expertise

JobGo International follows a holistic approach to recruitment. The combination of innovative technologies with the experience of in-house and freelance experts allows them to achieve high results.

The product line includes the most popular recruitment services and solutions:

- Digital headhunting: A team of experienced recruiters conducts targeted searches to identify and attract highly qualified candidates aligned with specific client requirements. This service is based on the individual approach with a deep understanding of the client's company needs.
- Digital headhunting: A team of experienced recruiters conducts a targeted search to identify and attract highly qualified candidates in accordance with the specific requirements of the client company.
- Direct search services: JobGo uses state-of-the-art digital solutions and a data-driven approach to provide a pool of talent through various channels, including social media and professional platforms.
- Executive search: Proven experience allows a recruiting agency to effectively identify and attract senior managers and highly qualified leadership talents.
- Candidate Tracking System (ATS): JobGo offers an ATS developed by in-house specialists that supports effective candidate management, communication, and collaboration between talent recruiters and hiring managers.

(JobGo 2024)

6.1.4 Technology Innovation and Human Approach

JobGo International focuses on a hybrid approach to recruitment, strategically combining the power of technology with the value of human experience. A candidate tracking system (ATS) within AI elements serves as the basis for the full-circle recruitment process, allowing effectively finding high-level talents, establishing contact with them,

and managing the process at any stage (JobGo 2024). However, such a technological infrastructure is only the foundation. The main role, so far, is occupied by a team of recruitment and marketing professionals. As a result, a balance of innovation and personalized service based on experience and professionalism allows JobGo to meet diverse customer's needs and achieve successful recruitment results (JobGo 2024).

6.1.5 Global Reach and Local Orientation

Although JobGo has international recruitment projects in its portfolio, its focus remains on the Nordic market, partially giving preference to international companies with offices in Finland, as well as in Sweden and Norway.

The legal location positions JobGo as a European recruitment company, emphasizing an understanding of the regional nuances of this talent market. In addition, Finnish roots are reflected in the emphasis on ethical recruitment methods and the desire to develop positive working relationships with both clients and candidates, following the trends of the human resources culture of the Nordic countries (Thomsen 2023).

6.1.6 Clients

JobGo International works with a broad range of clients across various industries. Given comprehensive service offerings, they target:

- International corporations looking for highly qualified narrow-profile specialists
- Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) looking to expand their workforce
- Startup companies requiring specialized skills and expertise

The green shift, industrial, and financial sectors deserve special mention, as the most ambitious and significant projects for the company.



Figure 13. An example of JobGo International's clients. (JobGo 2024)

The company's website might showcase successful placements or client testimonials to provide a clearer picture of its target clientele (JobGo 2024).

6.1.7 Summary

JobGo International is a good example of a small enterprise that is operating in a global talent attraction environment. A comprehensive set of services, a balanced combination of technology and human experience, as well as a commitment to quality, make them a valuable partner for companies looking for talented specialists in various industries and locations. Due to the constant monitoring of the market and competitors, as well as the focus on building long-term relationships with customers, the company is recovering step by step after the negative impact of COVID-19 (The Crox Group 2022), which is reflected in financial indicators, among other things.

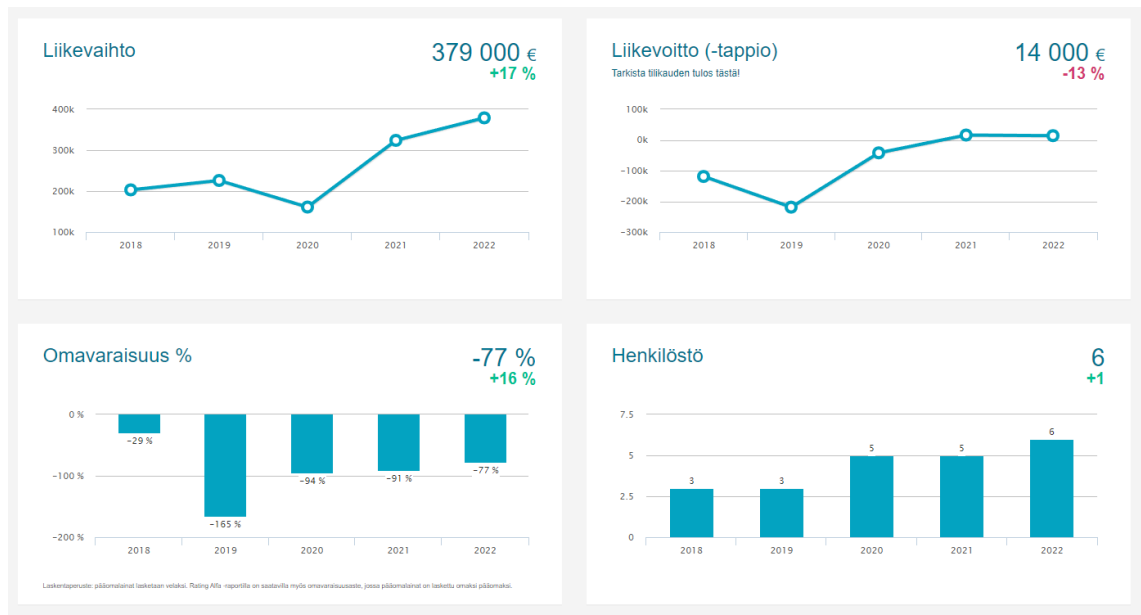


Figure 14. Financial results of JobGo International Oy in 2018-2022 (Asiakastieto 2024)

Thus, this example of competitive intelligence processes and results will be considered through the prism of business growth in the last couple of years when the company implemented the current approach to CI activities in addition to other business decisions.

6.2 Company's Competitive Position in the Recruitment Market

JobGo International operates in the international recruitment market, which is currently under the positive influence of technology development and the growing need to attract talented specialists to developing sectors of the economy. With a variety of product and service offerings, JobGo International focuses on two key areas:

- **Recruitment Services:** JobGo is focused on specific recruitment niches, including those based on industries and recruitment methods.
- **Candidate Tracking Systems (ATS):** ATS is a software solution that helps recruiters at all stages of recruiting a specialist. Introducing artificial intelligence-based solutions into its ATS helps JobGo stand out more actively in the market.

Consequently, the company competes both in the recruitment market and in the market of progressive B2B SaaS solutions. This position requires increased and constant efforts

to correctly analyze the competitive position among recruitment agencies and ATS suppliers, including those that offer similar artificial intelligence functions.

HELA, Finnish Recruitment Industry Association, notes the ongoing decrease in the net sales in the recruitment services market in Finland (HELA 2024). That is, in turn, leading to increasing competition, which puts pressure on companies such as JobGo, whose home market is one of the revenue drivers.

According to data from G2, the world's scale tech marketplace, there are indexed 544 Applicant Tracking Systems and just under 50 of them are niche (G2 2024).



Figure 15. G2 Grid® for Applicant Tracking Systems (ATS) (G2 2024)

ATS from JobGo is not included in this grid, but, in theory, it would take a place in the Contenders/Niche section.

6.3 Competitive Intelligence Processes in JobGo International

Effective competitive intelligence (CI) relies on the Intelligence cycle (Figure 4) - a structured, consistent process for gathering, analyzing, and disseminating information to inform strategic decision-making.

In the JobGo case study analysis, logically following each point of the cycle from Needs to Decision Making ensures an understanding of the processes and allows for consistently assessing applied methods and tools and their impact on service and product lines.

Since the initial stage of the competitive intelligence cycle at JobGo International cannot be precisely defined, this case study is being considered within the last two years, when documented clear objectives and follow-up activities in the field of CI are available.

Semi-structured interviews with employees, as well as analysis of internal documents and secondary data, became the basis for describing competitive intelligence processes in JobGo. The list of interview questions is given in the Appendix 1.

6.3.1 CI Planning and Direction

At this stage, the team's main task is to define clear goals and the scope of CI activities. This may include identifying gaps in their own services or researching competitors in specific target markets (e.g., Finland, Germany, FinTech, or Green Shift).

Strategic sessions are regularly organized to achieve these goals. There, JobGo International conducts brainstorming sessions or workshops. As a sources to gain a more complete understanding of its current market position, there can be applied information gathered on business events or secondary data, such as industry reports. The desired result of the activities of this stage is a well—defined set of CI goals and an up-to-date list of competitors in each target market.

6.3.2 Data Collection

JobGo International gives priority to cost-effective data collection methods. The company monitors updates on competitors' websites and social networks (e.g. LinkedIn), as well as in industry groups and organizations. Free social media listening tools, despite

limitations in functions, are used together with Google Alerts configured for competitor names and related keywords in English and Finnish. In addition, JobGo International employees have subscribed to industry periodicals and newsletters. Although paid competitor monitoring tools (such as SimilarWeb or Kompyte) offer advanced features, the company prefers free alternatives due to the proven negative trade-off between cost and cost.

Through these methods, JobGo International strives to collect up-to-date information about competitors' activities and industry trends. This includes data on competitors' services, pricing strategies and marketing tactics, as well as an assessment of their changes.

6.3.3 Analysis and Insights

JobGo International holds both, regular scheduled and team meetings "on occasion", to share, discuss and analyze the collected competitive data.

To organize, consolidate, and visualize information, the team uses Google Workspace tools (Google Drive, Google Docs, and Sheets, as well as Google Chat and Google Meet), partially Hubspot, and other optimal solutions for a specific task (for example, a customer satisfaction survey by Google Forms — see Appendix 3).

The main purpose of this stage is to use analysis to identify possible gaps, areas for improvement, and potential opportunities to benefit from competitors' weaknesses. As a result, the presentation of the received practical information and insights through the analysis of competitors to all participants of the CI process.

6.3.4 Reporting & Action

JobGo International prepares quarterly reports summarizing the main data, conclusions, and recommendations obtained during the CI process. These reports are presented at quarterly or semi-annual team meetings to facilitate discussions and brainstorming sessions to develop new strategies. Then, action plans are formulated aimed at possibly countering competitors' strengths, exploiting weaknesses, and taking advantage of identified opportunities.

Reporting tools such as Google Sheets or Miro are used to provide clear and concise reports on competitor analysis.

The intended result of this stage is a set of effective strategies for updating the product line, a team focused on a new direction, as well as a clear and concise report on the analysis of competitors.

6.3.5 Continuous Monitoring

JobGo International integrates competitive intelligence-related tasks into the daily work of its sales, talent acquisition, and marketing teams. This approach supports the spreading and exchanging of information within the team through daily meetings and updates of working files.

Regular monitoring of competitors' websites, social media platforms, and industry publications and collecting customers' feedback are conducted automatically and manually.

Quarterly scheduled CI review meetings aim to assess progress, identify adjustments that need to be made, and adapt strategies based on newly received information.

So, through constant monitoring, JobGo International strives to maintain constant awareness of competitors' activities and industry trends, which allows regular adjustments to CI strategies and product lines.

6.3.6 Product Line Update Process

JobGo International applies a consistent approach to optimizing its line of services and products based on CI process data. This process involves several steps:

- Comprehensive analysis: Identification of the need to improve the range of services and solutions based on the analysis of competitors and unsatisfied customer needs.
- Prioritization of tasks: Assessment of supply/demand in the market, taking into account the current strategy, determining the feasibility and expected profitability

of eliminating identified needs or launching new projects, including human resources capacity.

- Preparation of work: Development and refinement of concepts based on the needs identified during the analysis stage. Depending on the scale of the changes, the approval of the Board of Directors may be required.
- Prototype and testing (optional, depending on the project): This item includes product development according to the MVP (Minimum Viable Product) concept. (Doyle, Button & Boosr 2023) Next, user feedback is collected through sales and talent acquisition groups (using Google Forms). The feedback data then forms the basis for further improvement of the JobGo line of services and products.
- Integration and launch: At the end of the testing cycle, a new service or product is brought to market, adapting the update of internal systems and related processes. The necessary staff training is provided to ensure a successful full-fledged launch.

As practice showed, the deadlines for the implementation of the tasks of this stage can vary from a week to a year, depending on the complexity of the innovation being implemented. The expected result at this stage is a clearly defined and implemented concept that takes into account the identified market needs, improved service offerings based on user feedback, as well as the successful launch of new services and products with clear value propositions.

In summary, JobGo International demonstrates a data-driven approach to competitive intelligence, using a combination of free and inexpensive tools and resources as effectively as possible. Constant attention to economic efficiency and periodic monitoring allows them to be aware of both competitors' activities and industry trends, while simultaneously making strategic decisions aimed at gradually improving their market position.

6.4 Impact of the Human Factor on CI Insights at JobGo International

John Horn, in his interview with Emma Parry, emphasized the influence of professional background on the approach to work in the CI field. He revealed the value of storytelling

skills for the person involved in the competitive intelligence process, compared with the ability to present charts and spreadsheets. Horn also highlights the necessity of attracting people with different points of view and other differences (genders, cultures, education, etc.) to increase the quality of competitors understanding (Parry 2023).

JobGo International team is diversified and multicultural, and presented up to 10 countries and nationalities in different periods. Team members are skilled and qualified, and have a different work experience from undergrad to more than 20 years in the industry. According to Hord, these factors have a positive impact on CI processes and results (Parry 2023).

7 Results and Findings

7.1 Results of the CI Activities in JobGo International

As a result of the competitive intelligence processes set in the company, a few significant product-related strategic decisions can be mentioned.

Through a combined analysis and benchmarking of competitors, it became clear that they focus on a narrower niche. At the end of 2022, it was decided to reduce the range of services and prioritize a direct search of passive candidates.

The sharp increase in popularity of artificial intelligence-based solutions in 2023 led the company to decide to implement this technology in their ATS. It opened the need for constant monitoring of competitors for launching similar or alternative developments.

It is worth mentioning that insights obtained based on CI influenced the approach to product presentation on the company's website and landing pages, the strategy of online presence, and marketing tools for interacting with customers (email marketing, chatbot, etc.)

An additional outcome of competitive intelligence is competitor profiles based on the Battle Card principle, which are used in sales if necessary. They include:

- Competitor Name

- Company and Solution Overview
- Direct Competitor Updates / News
- Basic Facts: Location/Branches, Size, Year Founded, Finances, Key Customers, Key Products, Pricing Model
- List of Competitor Strengths
- Strengths Response to Win
- List of Competitor Weaknesses
- Relevant Cases / Customer References
- Date of the Last Update

For example, it helps the sales manager overcome objections or offer better payment terms than competitors.

7.2 Findings vs. Theoretical Framework Analysis

As the study showed, the sequence of competitive intelligence processes in JobGo correlates with the Intelligence cycle both by stages and by the principle of consistency.

Various STEEPLE factors were considered by JobGo when developing strategical steps, for example:

- Political: because of events on the world stage, companies in some sectors impose restrictions on hiring employees with a certain nationality;
- Economical: impact of COVID-19 on financial health of customers and competitors;
- Social: generally accepted norms in different countries or regions, cultural features, labor migration process;

- Technological: impact of tech environment development made by AI, web3, blockchain, shifting from desktop to mobile, etc., that affects the company, customers, and candidates/applicants
- Environmental: companies of the trending and rapidly developing Green Shift sector and other sustainability-oriented businesses prefer estate partnerships with companies that share their values not only in words
- Legal: the need to know the legal aspects inherent in each country where the company is presented, e.g. must have a legal entity registered in a particular country to access the recruitment market, following GDPR in the recruitment process
- Ethical: maintaining a balance between equal treatment of each candidate and following customer requirements

Regular JobGo's strategic sessions and workshops included in the agenda elements of Competitor Analysis (Porter 4 Corners), particularly Future Goals and Current Strategy.

Analyzing rivalry with an approach similar to Porter's Five Forces helped the company to identify the more suitable niche options in working on service and product line updates.

Instead of fully using SWOT elements, JobGo applies them to the compilation of Battlecards, analyzing both competitors and themselves.

The principles of both the Growth Vector Matrix and BCG Matrix have played an important role in the AI-based development of ATS and in narrowing the product line. They provided an understanding of market changes and an assessment of the opportunities associated with the product line, taking into account the company's capabilities.

In the last two years, JobGo's financial performance has grown smoothly upwards, including through optimization based on evaluation of the Value Chain Analysis segments, such as Technology Development, Human Resource Management, Operations, Marketing and Sales, and Customer Service focus.

Utilizing CI data also allowed JobGo International to make informed decisions regarding product development (ATS and deleted services). This data-driven approach in Product Management, in comparison with making decisions based on assumptions, reduces the risks and strengthens product competitiveness.

7.3 Comparison of CI at JobGo with the Best Practices

As was detected earlier, best practices can be defined in two ways: either as recommendations from experienced CI professionals or as indicators related to the competitive intelligence processes of World-Class companies.

Based on Valona Report 2023 (Kärkkäinen et al. 2024) data and information gained from the study of the case company, it can be concluded that:

- Intelligence collection tools applied partly match World-Class companies' choices and partly (in CI automation) not
- JobGo's level of application in CI new technologies such as Artificial Intelligence is closer to Global Average "Experimenting and testing", but also tends to be added to the toolkit
- Added value in intelligence deliverables level, depends on a particular topic, may vary from Conclusions to Advisory
- The contribution of employees not directly involved in CI processes reaches its maximum at the stages of goal definition, team analysis, and determining the direction of action. In addition, the company supports the culture of sharing interesting business-related findings. Hence, JobGo is closer to World-Class company practices at this point.

In summary, it can be concluded that human resources-based CI processes in the case company are closer to World-Class companies, but technology-based ones require improvement if they want to achieve better results.

7.4 Advantages of CI Practices in Case Company

The following advantages of using competitive intelligence in JobGo International can be highlighted:

- Data-based reasons for making certain strategic decisions in product management, sales and marketing
- A clear understanding of the direction in product development and the application of innovations
- A better understanding of the market that affects sales results and customer relationships
- Improving economic efficiency through sound decisions and good market orientation

In general, competitive intelligence at JobGo is one of the methods of gaining a competitive advantage, developing a future-oriented product offering and sustainable growth in the recruitment market.

7.5 Challenges and Limitations for the Company

The case study also shows which challenges and limitations should be considered in CI practices:

- The possibility of making erroneous conclusions (for example, due to incomplete data due to limited resources) can negatively affect the correctness of strategic decisions.
- Price-effective policy can limit the scope and depth of CI activities, potentially affect the quality of insights received, as well as reveal the need for additional investments.

- The introduction of new methods of competitive intelligence into an already established cycle can cause resistance, both from human resources and already familiar technologies.
- The ethical boundaries of information collection are somewhat blurred and it may be tempting to replace them with legal ones that are broader.

It's important to note that these are both based on practice and potential limitations of CI processes in JobGo International.

8 Discussion

8.1 The Practical Benefits of the Study

The JobGo case study provides practical and theoretical information about competitive intelligence (CI) with a focus on small businesses in the field of recruitment services:

- A real example of CI practice: The study shows how the rational application of CI methods leads to strategic decision-making, product development, and improvement of marketing efforts
- The value of a variety of frameworks: This case is an example of the effective combination of classical CI methods elements and modern tools
- Data-driven decision-making: It is a real example of data-driven strategic decision-making
- The value of consistency and adaptability: The case draws attention to the importance of consistency in the Intelligence cycle, which allows the company to be aware of both industry changes and trends, as well as the reaction of competitors to these changes

As a result, highlighting the practical application of CI in action can serve as a valuable resource for other B2B companies of different scales and industries and perhaps encourage them to consider their implementation

In addition, this study is intended not only to show the importance of competitive intelligence in business strategy development but also to emphasize the unifying factor that connects participants in various activities within the same company.

8.2 Limitations of the Study

The biggest limitation in this study is information sensitivity. This fact imposes great restrictions on the possibility of mentioning and processing accurate data, specific figures, and some nuances in the work.

For the same reason, the author was prevented from including some information from the other companies. Out of 38 direct requests and invitations to participate in interviews or statistical surveys in companies similar to JobGo International, only 1 organization responded and indicated that they don't use competitive intelligence tools on a regular basis but only occasionally study competitors.

In turn, considering the data of only one company in the case affects the final conclusions and the ability to apply the knowledge gained in other organizations.

8.3 Key Recommendations to the Company

Based on the reviewed frameworks and the company's practice in the field of CI, the following recommendations are aimed at expanding the capabilities of JobGo:

- Expanding the area for setting goals. While JobGo's approach to CI-based service/product development is effective, expanding the scope of Needs can also positively impact it. This may include a deeper analysis of the company's and competitors' current positions based on classic frameworks or modern tools, various time frames, or meeting the company's needs that are not obvious at first glance.
- Data collection optimization. Constantly monitor and test new CI tools, prioritizing cost-effectiveness and capacity. To increase efficiency, a narrow focus should be placed on monitoring key financial markets.

- Increasing the efficiency of analysis and the value of CI insights. Explore the feasibility of using advanced data visualization tools (such as Tableau) to improve reporting and simplify analysis. Apply measurable performance indicators of competitive intelligence in JobGo and compare them with available competitor data.
- Data-driven solution implementation processes improvement. Simplify the processes of applying practical information to update the services and product line. Test the best practices of implementing findings into all company processes.
- Constant improvement. In addition to collecting information, analyzing, and distributing CI insights directly related to recruitment activities, organize constant monitoring of the competitive intelligence field to identify new methods, tools, and technologies.

Following these recommendations, JobGo can develop its competitive intelligence processes that facilitate future data-driven decision-making, product line innovation, and, in general, sustainable growth in a competitive recruitment environment.

9 Conclusion

In this study, the application of competitive intelligence (CI) methods was considered using the example of a small international recruitment agency, JobGo International. Analyzing the information obtained from company documents, statistics, and semi-structured interviews with employees based on theory determined how CI can positively influence strategic decision-making, product development, and marketing strategies in the recruitment field.

Using competitive intelligence results, JobGo identified the need to narrow the list of services offered and focus on the direct search for passive candidates.

Another solution in the product strategy was to strengthen the Applicant Tracking System (ATS) with artificial intelligence, increasing their offer's value.

CI insights also influenced the strategy of online presence, customer interaction tools and the presentation format of products on the company's website, increasing the level of customer orientation.

Competitive intelligence also helps JobGo's net customer growth — competitor profiles (Battle Cards), in addition to understanding the market, have expanded the capabilities of the company's development specialists.

In general, constant monitoring of the market situation has allowed JobGo to take steps aimed at adapting to market requirements and possibly avoiding costly mistakes.

This case study supports the importance of competitive intelligence (CI), particularly in the international recruitment industry. This study aims to inspire other companies to consider introducing or improving their practices in this area by demonstrating the practical application of CI and revealing its potential benefits.

The study highlights key points such as the value of consistency and cyclicity in CI processes, the types of aspects of the company's activities that CI can positively impact, and the timely identification of market signals and actions based on them aimed at sustainable development.

Despite the fact that this study provides valuable practical information, further ones are needed to explore a wider range of CI implementation. Among the priority areas, it is worth highlighting the impact of competitive intelligence on financial indicators, for example, company revenues, profitability, and market share. It also makes sense to study CI practices in companies of different scales, structures, and localization. Special attention should be paid to delving into the ethical aspects of competitive intelligence in practice, particularly data collection methods and compliance with confidentiality rules. Research in these areas will provide more comprehensive guidance to companies considering the possibility of implementing or improving their CI practices.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Interview Questions

List of the interview questions (for the Marketing Team)

General background:

- Please, introduce yourself and briefly describe your role at JobGo International.
- Based on your experience in the last few years, how would you describe the competitive landscape and situation, and company position in the market?

Marketing view on Competitive Intelligence in JobGo:

- What specific CI tools and methods does JobGo utilize to gather and analyse information about competitors in recruitment services?
- What sources JobGo utilizes to gather competitive data on AI recruitment solutions?
- How do you work with gained data? Do you have scripted processes or planned periodic data updates? Do (or did) you apply special software (data collection, data processing, or data visualization)?
- How do you prioritize and evaluate the reliability of information obtained from different sources?
- How does JobGo International integrate competitive intelligence (CI) into its overall marketing strategy?

Impact of CI on Service and Product Development:

- Could you elaborate on how the insights gained from CI are used to inform the product development and marketing of JobGo's recruitment services and AI-powered solutions?
- How does JobGo ensure that the information and insights gathered through CI are effectively communicated and utilized by various teams involved in service and product development?
- Can you share any specific examples of how CI has directly impacted the development of a particular service or AI-powered solution at JobGo?
- Could you please, in general, assess the efficiency of the insights gained from CI influencing the development and improvement of JobGo's recruitment services?

List of questions (for the Business Development Team)

General background:

- Please, introduce yourself and briefly describe your role at JobGo International.
- Based on your experience in the last few years, how would you describe the competitive landscape and situation, and company position in the market?

Gathering competitive data:

- Do you use specific tools or methods to gather competitive data on other recruitment providers?
- Could you, please, elaborate on the types of information you typically collect through your Competitive Intelligence efforts (e.g., pricing models, features, customer reviews, market share), and about measures aimed at staying informed about competitor offerings and market trends? (e.g., industry reports, social media monitoring, email subscriptions, competitor websites, attending events)?
- How do you work with gained data? Do you have scripted processes or planned periodic data updates? Do (or did) you apply special software (data collection, data processing, or data visualization)?

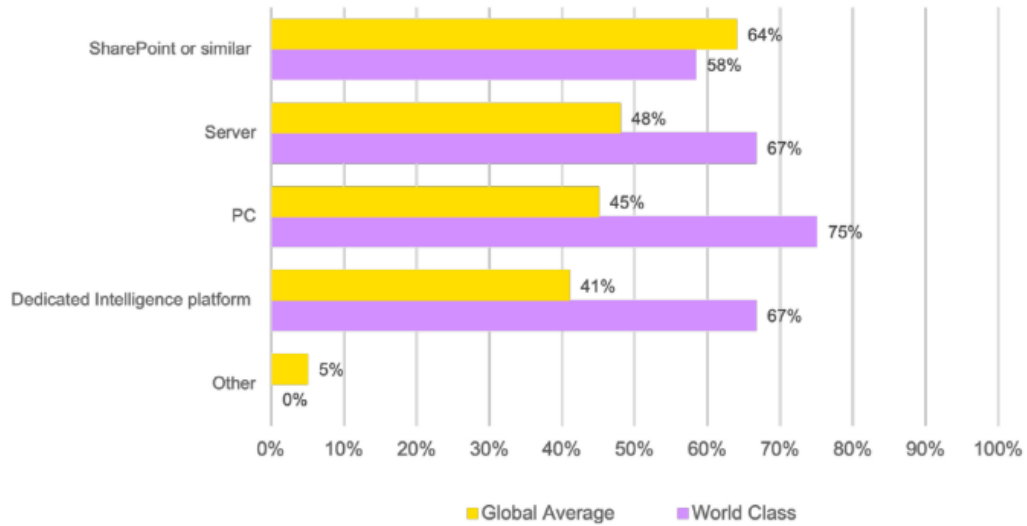
Impact CI on Service and Product Development:

- Based on your experience, did the insights and information gained from Competitive Intelligence impact the actionable strategies for differentiating JobGo's products and services from competitors during your sales presentations and interactions?
- Have you encountered any specific situations where your knowledge of competitors directly helped you secure a deal or address client concerns regarding other solutions?
- Based on your experience in the past few years, how would you describe the limitations in gaining Competitive Intelligence for JobGo International (e.g. not enough systematic approach, limited tools, lack of human resources, etc.)?

- Do you have a vision of further improving JobGo's Competitive Intelligence practices to better empower sales and maximize effectiveness in a competitive market?
- As an experienced sales professional how would you assess the role of insights from Competitive Intelligence in the growth and development of JobGo International?

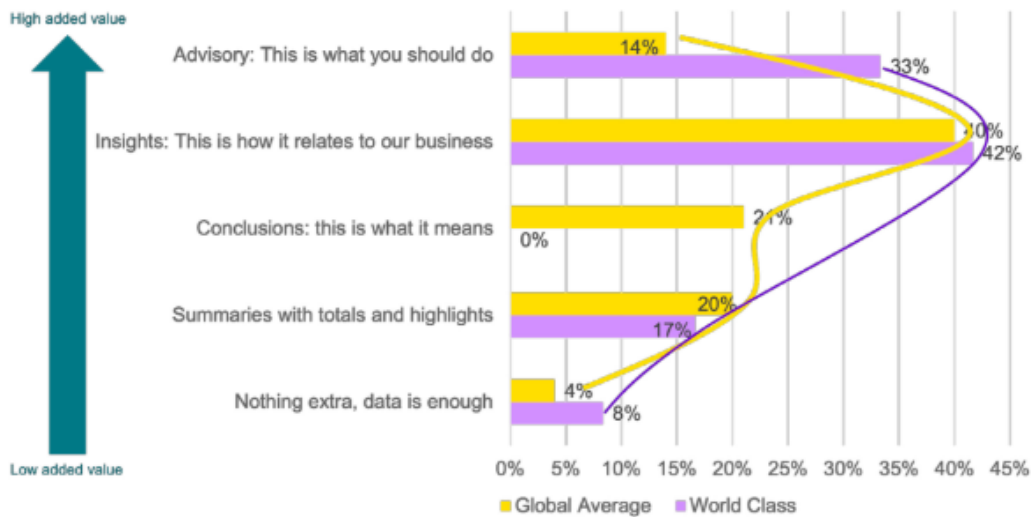
Appendix 2. The Key Indicators in the Approach to Competitive Intelligence of Global Average and World-Class Companies in 2023

What tools and / or methodologies do you use for data storage?*

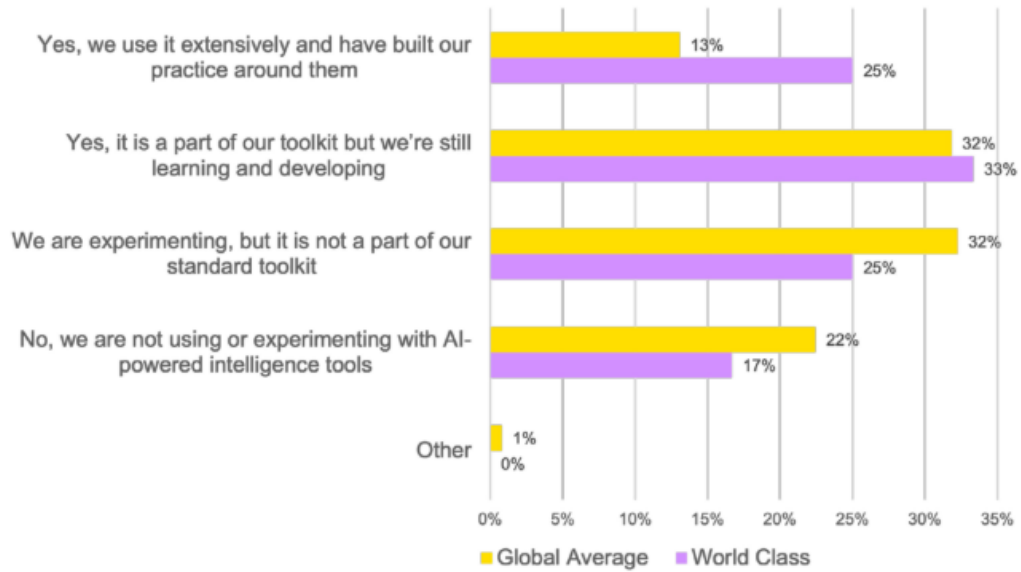


* All relevant choices have been ticked

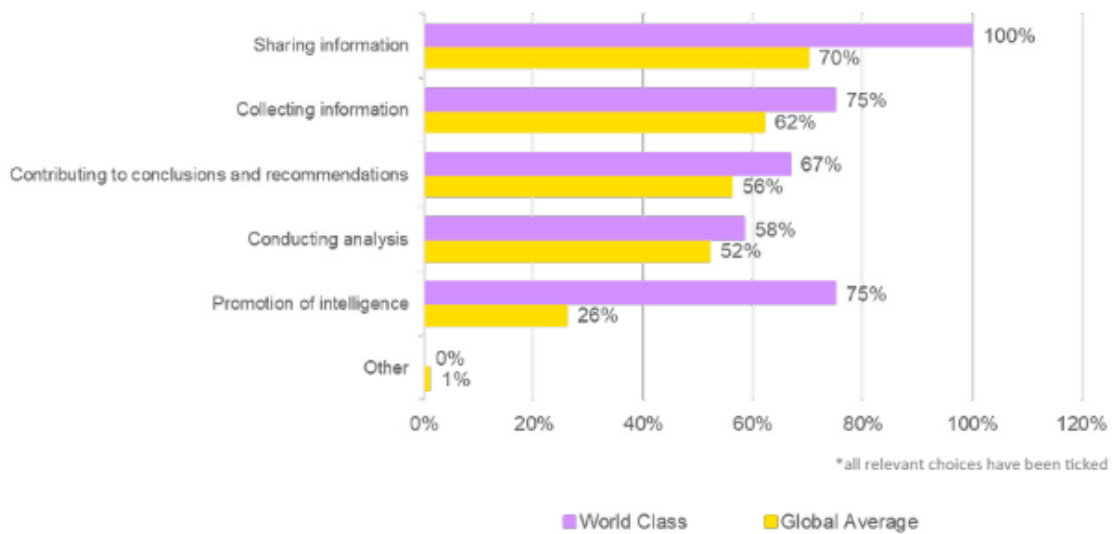
What do you expect from your intelligence Deliverables?



Do you currently use AI-powered technology for intelligence?



Do people from other business units/departments contribute to producing intelligence?*



(Kärkkäinen et al. 2024)

Appendix 3. Google Forms for the Customer Satisfaction Survey

Hiring Manager Satisfaction Survey

It will take only 3 minutes.

** Indicates required question*

1. Please, write your name, company and position *

2. During your initial contact with JobGo, how satisfied were you with the information received about the recruitment process? *

Mark only one oval.

- Very dissatisfied
 Dissatisfied
 Neutral
 Satisfied
 Very satisfied

3. Based on the job description you submitted, how satisfied were you with the accuracy of the job posting? *

Mark only one oval.

- Very dissatisfied
 Dissatisfied
 Neutral
 Satisfied
 Very satisfied

4. How satisfied were you with the quantity of applications/resumes? *

Mark only one oval.

- Very dissatisfied
 Dissatisfied
 Neutral
 Satisfied
 Very satisfied

5. How satisfied were you with the quality of the candidates? *

Mark only one oval.

- Very dissatisfied
 Dissatisfied
 Neutral
 Satisfied
 Very satisfied

6. How satisfied were you with the timeline of the recruitment process from JobGo's side? *

Mark only one oval.

- Very dissatisfied
 Dissatisfied
 Neutral
 Satisfied
 Very satisfied

7. How satisfied were you with the overall assistance the recruiting department provided you throughout the hiring process? *

Mark only one oval.

- Very dissatisfied
 Dissatisfied
 Neutral
 Satisfied
 Very satisfied

8. How likely are you to recommend JobGo to a friend or a colleague? *

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

9. Do you have any suggestions for how the JobGo team and/or process could have been better? *

10. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience with JobGo? *
