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BUSINESS ETIQUETTE AS A TOOL FOR INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC RELATIONS STUDENTS' SOFT SKILL DEVELOPMENT

***Summary.** Business etiquette and protocol awareness help create an efficient business environment, which enhances productivity and cooperation. Successful application of business etiquette norms helps companies achieve a desirable result and implement a specific purpose. Furthermore, knowledge of cultural peculiarities and specific national etiquette features enables one to predict partners' reactions and attitudes to a business offer and overcome communication hindrances internationally. The paper elaborates on the significance of business etiquette and protocol for the development of the soft skills of the students of international economic relations programs. This research is relevant since the literature review revealed a need for more research on how business etiquette and protocol knowledge and skills affect competence in international economic relations. The analysis of the recent studies clearly showed the growing interest in the role of business etiquette and protocol in improving the soft skills of the students of economics and business*

programs; however, there needs to be more research in the international economic relations area. The paper's primary focus is the course program Business Etiquette and Protocol developed by the author; the course is intended for the fourth-year students of the international economic relations program of West Ukrainian National University. The course's main objective is to develop students' abilities and skills to communicate efficiently and provide professional activity in the field of international economic relations. This research informs the existing literature regarding the role of business etiquette and protocol in developing soft skills for future graduates of international economic relations and the need to include this subject in the curriculum. The prospect for further research is to specify which business etiquette skills the prospective employers expect to see from the graduates of international economic relations programs to meet the changing demand of the job market.

Key words: *business etiquette and protocol, soft skills, international economic relations, business communication, intercultural communication.*

Statement of the problem. International economic relations of Ukrainian companies develop rapidly. Companies expand and strengthen contacts with foreign partners. Recent tendencies show that business etiquette and protocol knowledge becomes essential to facilitate relationships with potential investors in Ukrainian business, enter the international business arena and establish long-term contacts. Norms and rules of conduct help create mutually beneficial, respectful, and harmonious relations in international business. Business etiquette and protocol are tools used by business executives to build partnerships when creating international joint ventures and improve global economic ties. Hence, competence in business etiquette helps avoid potential business communication mistakes, and compliance with the rules of business etiquette and protocol confirms the partner's professionalism and serious approach to cooperation. The recent tendencies show that communicative competence and moral and ethical

literacy in business relations are essential components of professionalism. Students rely on hard skills and subject knowledge. However, they also must develop abilities to communicate and create a positive impression on business partners since mastering the basics of effective business culture communication is essential for productive cooperation in international economic relations. Students of international economic relations need knowledge of etiquette since it becomes one factor in maximizing profit and a tool for managing a business reputation internationally.

Analysis of recent research and publications. International business etiquette is a set of customs, rules, and norms of behavior both in the official and unofficial environment. Eyring and the American Society for Training and Development [6] postulated that business etiquette and protocol knowledge are essential nowadays. Furthermore, the study of Eyring [6] provided evidence that manners drive success in business [6, p.1].

These studies resonated Nicolau et al. [16] research; the authors emphasized the importance of business etiquette for the business environment and concluded that training in business etiquette strengthens interpersonal business relationships. Finally, it is worth mentioning the scholarly publication of Bass [4]; the researcher stressed the importance of teaching business etiquette, arguing that it gives professionals a competitive advantage and helps improve productivity and efficiency.

Some researchers emphasized the significance of business etiquette and protocol as a part of the curriculum for economics students. For example, Hrehová and Bednár [7] concluded that training programs for future entrepreneurs for international assignments should include business etiquette and other intercultural knowledge.

The qualitative research of Nicolau et al. [16] resonated with the previous study; the authors indicated the significance of etiquette knowledge and skills. Furthermore, the researchers underlined the undeniable benefit of such training,

concluding that good practice with business etiquette improves interpersonal business relationships. Moreover, researchers McGuigan [14] and Mausehund et al. [13] stressed that the selection of resources for Business Etiquette classes should comply with students' needs.

Increasingly, researchers focus on the significance of intercultural aspects of business etiquette and protocol for the international business environment. For example, Kunkel [9], Okoro [17], Mukherjee and Ramos-Salazar [15], Hrehová and Bednár [7], Islam [8], Lazorchak [11] and Krasnicjka [1; 2] indicated a definite interest in the topic and developed studies of intercultural etiquette issues.

Moreover, Mukherjee and Ramos-Salazar [15] concurred that cross-cultural business etiquette is essential for international managers and stressed the importance of training in universal competitiveness. The need to form universal human competence was raised at the World Economic Forum in Davos, where it was noted that due to rapid changes and the development of new technologies, people's values have changed.

The literature review indicated that researchers and practitioners in business etiquette conclude that business etiquette and protocol skills ensure the development of soft skills. Thus, Pamela Eyring, a director of the Protocol School of Washington, argued that "Learning about etiquette, practicing techniques, and putting them into action in a business setting will result in soft skills sure to improve your company's bottom line" [6, p. 1]. In addition, a multiple-case study by Dean and East [5] provided evidence that soft skills are of paramount importance [5, p. 17].

It is worth mentioning that Vandana Sharma [19] concluded that along with the field knowledge, the graduates are assessed on soft skills; the researcher stressed that soft skills increase the employability quotient of graduates [19]. Another study by Chiara Succi and Michaela Wieandt postulated that graduates lack soft skills. However, they stressed that soft skills increase individual

employability [20]. Majid et al. provided evidence that "Soft skills are important for seeking jobs as well as for a productive, successful, and fulfilling career" [12, p. 7]. Against this background, Andrews and Higson [3] maintained that to meet the constantly changing demands of the job market; universities should provide students not only with hard business-related knowledge and skills but with soft skills as well [3, p. 420].

The literature provides evidence that business etiquette and soft skills are closely intertwined and interrelated.

Formulation of the purpose. The research aims to substantiate the need to create and improve professional culture via compliance with business etiquette rules for international economic relations students. The paper discusses the structure and design of the course Business Etiquette and Protocol intended for the fourth-year students of the international economic relations program of West Ukrainian National University developed by the author.

Research results. Knowledge of intercultural aspects of etiquette is essential for developing business ties and creating efficient business relations between Ukrainian and foreign companies. The ability to behave correctly and adequately is one of the main components of the long-term success of a business person in the international arena. Furthermore, it is common knowledge that customers tend to respond positively to those who behave with courtesy, confidence, and reliability. Consequently, the skill to conduct conflict-free and productive processes is one of the essential qualities for those who want to succeed in the business nationally and internationally. Since such knowledge and skills provide confidence in a highly competitive international business environment, Business Etiquette and Protocol course was included in the international economic relations curriculum.

The course was developed for fourth-year students of international economic relations at West Ukrainian National University. It aims to develop students' comprehensive knowledge of national and international principles and

rules of modern business protocol and etiquette and the ability to apply these principles and practices to run a global business effectively.

The main task of the Business Etiquette and Protocol course is to develop students' comprehensive knowledge about the principles and rules of modern business etiquette and protocol, its national peculiarities, and the ability to consider these principles and regulations for effective international economic activity. The course also aims to develop student's practical skills in establishing effective business relations with representatives of business circles globally.

The purpose of the course is also to teach students national and international principles and rules of modern business etiquette and protocol. Students should realize that compliance with these rules is essential to their business success. Additionally, taking national specifics into account helps prevent cultural conflicts and optimizes cooperation with foreign partners.

The course includes both general and specific aspects of business etiquette and protocol. However, it is worth mentioning that Business Etiquette and Protocol course was designed based on the six basic principles of business etiquette pointed out by Jan Yager [22]: be on time; be discreet; be courteous, pleasant, and positive; be concerned with others, not just yourself; dress appropriately; use proper written and spoken language [22, p. 9-16].

The course covers the issues of handshakes and business handshake mistakes; important etiquette and protocol rules of business card exchange; punctuality and time across cultures; gift-giving etiquette; professional business attire; business meals and entertaining, etc. It is common knowledge that significant competence is the ability to communicate professionally and socially using professional terminology, including oral and written communication in Ukrainian and English. Consequently, business etiquette refers to the language culture as well. Language should always correspond to business partners' situation, culture, and professional level. Business language is characterized by brevity, accuracy, and clarity of thought; sayings, aphorisms, proverbs, and

figurative comparisons are also appreciated. Hence, the art of small talk, telephone conversations, using humor, etc., are among the components of the course.

The syllabus includes cultural peculiarities of global gift-giving, equality, status, and social class. Since non-verbals (body language and non-verbal communication) play a significant role in business communication, gestures, colors, eye contact, facial expressions, paralanguage, posture, silence, smell, and their cultural meanings are a part of the course. These comply with the need to develop intercultural competence in this subject.

Special attention is paid to digital etiquette knowledge and skills to meet the digital trends of Industry 4.0 and the digitalization of economies. Thus, the course includes such digital etiquette aspects as the pros and cons of e-business cards, virtual meetings etiquette, smartphones and other devices in the office, social media etiquette, and email etiquette.

The Business Etiquette and Protocol course ensures students' knowledge of the main principles and rules of modern business protocol and etiquette, communication patterns used in formal and informal protocol situations, and etiquette and protocol rules for conducting business negotiations, meetings, discussions, receptions, etc. In addition, students should know the rules of language etiquette and peculiarities of non-verbal communication, communication and norms of behavior in various protocol situations, national exceptions of the business protocol, and national and international aspects of business etiquette.

After the completion of the course, international economic relations students are supposed to be able to meet and greet business partners according to the rules of etiquette, behave appropriately at business receptions, and use business cards for business communication. Last but not least, they should be able to organize official visits and business meetings with business partners, establish effective business relations with representatives of business circles

internationally, and interpret the communicative behavior of representatives of different cultures in various business protocol situations.

Therefore, the primary outcome of the course is students' awareness and skills in business protocol and business etiquette in the field of international economic relations, given the specifics of intercultural communication on professional and social levels in Ukrainian and English. Students should know that business etiquette principles and rules open up business opportunities via mutually beneficial communication with potential partners. In contrast, violation of business etiquette requirements results in deteriorating business relationships. They need to consider that etiquette is one of the components of a business image, and it is vital to demonstrate respect for other employees, management, and company partners; experienced business partners always pay attention to the ethics of business cooperation. A good behavior style is of great importance in today's business environment. A friendly and polite attitude toward others is a significant constituent of an employee's professional image and is appreciated in business situations. Consequently, the knowledge students receive after completing this course becomes essential to their personal success and the company's success internationally.

Insights from this study and prospects for further research. One of the priority issues in the modern international business environment is the ability to cooperate to find common ground with business partners. Increasingly, Ukrainian business persons have to interact globally; this is a strong impetus to develop international contacts, which needs business etiquette and protocol knowledge and skills. Business etiquette and protocol are an integral part of efficient business cooperation and essential for improving and further developing international business relations. Thus, compliance with the principles of business etiquette makes it possible to maintain the decency and prestige of the company and contributes to creating a good communication process and psychological climate that affects a successful solution and lays the foundation

for mutually beneficial business relations in the future. Therefore, universities should respond to the need and include business etiquette in the curriculum.

The recent decade indicated a definite interest of researchers in business etiquette skills; however, the literature review revealed the paucity of scholarly sources on the issue of business etiquette and protocol for the students of international economic relations programs. Therefore, this study urges a more specific approach to the problem, which is developing knowledge and skills in business etiquette and protocol for the students of international economic relations. For this purpose, a Business Etiquette and Protocol course for the fourth-year students of West Ukrainian National University was developed. The course aims to develop skills for productive interpersonal interaction and constructive cooperation in international business environments. In addition, to comply with the trends of digitalization of economies, a considerable part of the course is devoted to digital aspects of business protocol.

The study prospects for further research are to investigate the needs and expectations the prospective employers have from the graduates of international economic relations programs concerning business etiquette skills. This will help improve the program to comply with the changing demand of the uncertain job market conditions.

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