

Talking About Cultivation of BE Students' Intercultural Business Etiquette

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Abstract: Intercultural business etiquette is the set of written and unwritten rules of conduct that make business transactions more smoothly. Appropriate intercultural business etiquette is expected for everyone, especially those who work in an international business environment. So, the author thinks that it is crucial for us to discuss how to cultivate the BE Students' intercultural business etiquette which includes the fundamental knowledge about etiquette definitions, understanding the importance of intercultural business etiquette in international business and then how to train the BE students' intercultural etiquette skills, so as to improve the BE students' intercultural communication competence and make the BE students' knowledge structure better in order to let the BE students' adaption to the needs of international business and marketing in the world.

Keywords: Business English, intercultural business etiquette, globalization, international business

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, the economic shifts to globalization inevitably change the contours of the world of work and bring in new consumers, new corporations, new knowledge, and new jobs [1]. Because the new consumers spreading throughout the world are difficult to be concentrated, the global market of human society, including technology, management, culture, language, etc. The coming of new corporations indicates the challenge to the structure of organization that requires a new corporate culture to adjust to the new environment[2].

In other words, a new way of managing the diverse and cross – functional employees will become basic tenets for the global business to survive. Also, the cultural environment for business is regarded as a key factor in business and marketing development, and the gap among different cultures must be eliminated when entering the global market. To effectively achieve success in the international business and marketing, businesspersons must acquire knowledge of diverse cultural environments. Thus, the Business English (BE) students in China will become businesspeople in the future. The qualification of BE students will directly connect with the development of China's economy and marketing. It is an important issue for us to pay much more attention to education of the BE students in our country.

In the education, intercultural business etiquette has its own unique and effective functions to cultivate the BE students to meet the needs of both domestic and international business and market. It will cause more

colleges and universities, teachers and businessperson to focus on the cultivation of the BE students' intercultural business etiquette. So, the author thinks that it is crucial for us to discuss how to cultivate the BE Students' intercultural business etiquette which includes the fundamental knowledge about etiquette definitions, understanding the importance of intercultural business etiquette in international business and then how to train the BE students' intercultural etiquette skills, so as to improve the BE students' intercultural communication competence and make the BE students' knowledge structure better in order to let the BE students' adaption to the needs of international business and marketing in the world.

DEFINITIONS OF INTERCULTURAL BUSINESS ETIQUETTE

The word "etiquette originated in France during the 1600s and 1700s. It used to mean "Keep off the grass" in French. Louis XIV's gardener noticed that the aristocrats were walking through the king's gardens, so he put up signs, or étiquets, to ward them off. However, the dukes and duchesses still walked right past these signs. Due to this blatant disregard, the King of Versailles decreed that no individual was to go beyond the bounds of the étiquets. The meaning of etiquette would later include the ticket to a court that listed the rules on where a person would stand and what was to done. This code of proper social behavior was eventually adopted by the upper classed throughout the western world [3].

Oxford Advanced Learner's English - Chinese Dictionary defines "etiquette" as "the formal rules of

correct or polite behavior in society or among members of a particular profession”[4].

Webster’s Third New International Dictionary defines “etiquette” as “the forms required by good breeding or prescribed by authority to be observed in social or official life: observance of the proprieties of rank and occasion.”

According to Chaney and Martin, [5] “Etiquette refers to manners and behavior considered acceptable in social and business situations”.

Fraser points out “assumes that each society has a particular set of social norms consisting of more or less explicit rules that prescribe a certain behavior, a state of affairs, or a way of thinking in a context [6]. A positive evaluation (politeness) arises when an action is in congruence with the norm, a negative evaluation (impoliteness = rudeness) when action is to the contrary.

In sum, intercultural business etiquette refers to a set of behavior codes that are based on common sense and cultural norms in an intercultural business context. Generally speaking, the intercultural business etiquette is the set of written and unwritten rules of conduct that make business transactions more smoothly. Appropriate intercultural business etiquette is expected for everyone, especially those who work in an international business environment.

IMPORTANCE OF INTERCULTURAL BUSINESS ETIQUETTE

From the above definition, we can easily see that conducting business abroad or in our own country with some one of another culture, the knowledge of certain rules of social and business etiquette is of great importance.

First of all, for any businessperson, they should very clearly understand that it is not just professionals working overseas who need to learn intercultural business etiquette. Even if businessperson work in his own country, his colleagues are suppliers could hail from other cultures. His business organization might decide to acquire or merge with another business organization in a different country. And customers, too, may be located in dozens of countries worldwide. Any businessperson should know that our world’s diversity is what makes it so fascinating. When taking time to understand the reasons for that diversity, they show their respect for other people’s cultures. And when businessperson do this in an intercultural business context, they’ll improve their working relationships and develop their own business reputation.

We take dresses in different cultures as an example. The general rule for business attire in all countries and regions is to dress conservatively; this

usually means a suit and tie for men and a dress or skirted suit for women. Business attire in Canada, France, Germany, Japan, Mexico, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom is similar to that worn in the United States with some minor differences. Dress in Canada, Europe, Japan, and South America is perhaps more formal than in the United States; coats and ties are expected in business settings. Dressing professionally and conservatively is expected in Korea as appropriate attire indicates respect. In Middle Eastern countries and in Southern Asia, styles of dress vary with the country. Although attire in India varies by region and by religion, men often wear Western – style suits; they may also wear traditional clothing or the safari suit. In Saudi Arabia, men wear traditional attire, which includes an ankle – length white flowing robe and checkered head cloth. Visitors should avoid dressing in native clothing; doing so is perceived as offensive. However, dressing modestly in countries where people do cover their entire bodies is considered appropriate [7].

To some extent, in most cultures, dress identifies a person as belonging to a specific group and having a certain status. Dress can offend, but it can also protect. The way we dress also communicates. Dressing according to custom and expectations shows respect for form and establishes a foundation for future dealings. Subtle aspects of dress can let people know where one is from [8].

Attributes of dress is considered important when interacting with people of other culture. Needless to say, culture can affect and determine business practice. Business practices are not neutral or culture – free. Businesspeople should need to understand the business etiquette with cultural values and customs when they interact with someone from another culture, as well as understand the other person’s cultural values. Understanding other cultures is a legitimate concern of businesses. Hence, it is essential for business people to know some knowledge about intercultural business etiquette if business people had awareness of intercultural business etiquette, they would give the other businesspeople good first impressions which could greatly help or hurt a business relationship and also could make business relationships successful or unsuccessful. As Lieberman states: “Regarding first impressions, there is something called the primacy effect: the process whereby our first impression of another person causes us to interpret his or her subsequent behavior in a manner consistent with the first impression.”

In a word, cultural differences in intercultural business etiquette should be kept in mind, while embarking on an international business’ venture. Understanding cultural differences would help an entrepreneur forge the necessary business ties by observing correct business etiquette from another

culture. At the same time, keeping the importance of intercultural business etiquette in mind, now consider the complexities of working on the international stage. Modern business is global and demands people travel to foreign countries and mix with foreign clients, colleagues or customers. Each one of those cultures will also have their own etiquette rules, many of them unwritten. When two or more different cultures mix, it is easy for small etiquette mistakes to be made that could have negative consequences. Sometimes, not understanding the etiquette of another culture means you show a lack of manner and as Lawrence Sterne said, a lack of deference. This can and does lead to soured relationships, lost deals and in the end poor business results. Anyone working on the international stage needs to understand intercultural business etiquette.

METHODS OF THE BE STUDENTS' INTERCULTURAL BUSINESS ETIQUETTE CLASSROOM TRAINING

Intercultural business etiquette manifests in many shapes and sizes. Throughout the world people from different cultures have various etiquette rules around areas such as posture, dressing, makeup, meeting and greeting, handshaking or kissing, business card, conversation, reception and entertaining, dining, farewell and much more. For the BE students, it is crucial for them to make a good impression and understanding of intercultural business etiquette. Thus, a good grasp of intercultural business etiquette will reinforce our BE students to use these valuable soft skills to help themselves compete in a global economy which demands flexibility and awareness. In this way, our BE students would achieve success in the international business arena no matter where they conduct business in future. Therefore, there are some fundamental teaching methods that teachers should consider how to train BE students' intercultural business etiquette in the classroom. Especially, Fowler and Blohm [9] introduce the following typology regarding intercultural business communication: cognitive and active methods. Maybe, these two training methods are also worthy of consideration for the BE students' intercultural business etiquette classroom training.

Cognitive methods

Cognitive methods focus on knowledge acquisition. And the acquisition of knowledge is the most important goal, this requires our teacher to use the following activities to encourage our BE students to increase their knowledge of intercultural business etiquette as a subject. Teacher can use the following methods in the classroom.

Lectures: It is a traditional and common teaching method. Nevertheless, the trained BE students can present information, clarify ideas and introduce new

topic about different business etiquette in an intercultural business transaction in the classroom.

Written Materials: authentic materials are usually used in training sessions to transmit facts, ideas and concepts. Our teacher may ask the BE students to read different materials including readings, textbooks, articles, workbooks, letters, emails...from different countries through raising the BE students' awareness of different cultural orientations presented in these different business etiquette.

Computer – based Materials: although computer – based materials are frequently used to acquire conceptual information, the teachers can also find materials that develop skills and / or modify attitudes. Our teachers may provide CDs, DVDs, online programs and web sites including intercultural business etiquette such as Business Etiquette Articles (s.a.), World Business Culture (s.a.) and eslflow.com (s.a.).

Films: some educational films or commercial films are a motivating material to transmit knowledge and provide scenarios of intercultural business etiquette learning.

Case Studies: the teachers may take an advantage of real business workplace so that the BE students will get the chance to deal with concrete business situations and specific etiquette problems in an intercultural context. It can be very helpful for BE students to practice in the classroom.

Active methods

Active methods will encourage the BE students for active learning where emotions and interpersonal skills in business etiquette are brought to play. That is, the BE students will learn by doing in that it makes the BE students more aware of different cultures and building up specific business etiquette skills.

Role – play: role playing puts knowledge and skills into practice in an intercultural context and can be emphasized on special content. The BE students have the chance to rehearse diverse roles in real business situation for a specific business purpose. When playing these roles who involve a meeting from different businessmen with different cultural backgrounds, the BE students should pay more attention to recognizing specific attitudes and patterns of behavior of different businessmen, such as greetings, body language, head movements, eye contact, physical space, time orientation, etc.

Simulation games: they are highly motivating and versatile. The teachers can combine educational and entertaining elements to build up intercultural communication knowledge and develop intercultural business etiquette skills. For instance, the game Hands shaking will show how to shake hands with

businessmen or businesswomen from America and Germany.

Intercultural exercises: these activities usually combine two or more technique (physical response, drinking or dining) and involve the BE students in content while providing practice. Intercultural exercises are commonly used to raise awareness about cultural differences and develop strategies to adapt to diverse business environment. As an example of intercultural exercise, the Cocktail Party [10] puts in action non – verbal behaviors unusual to North – American culture

CONCLUSION

Since economy is the most visible aspect of globalization, the need to do business in an international context has increased the demand to learn Business English. Nevertheless, the development of intercultural communication has made clear that despite today's globalization, cultural differences persist. Speakers of different languages see the world differently since cultural values are usually transferred to the communicative process. These doing business in a global market depends on the ability to successfully communicate in an intercultural context [11].

As a result, BE students are expected to develop and awareness of the intercultural business etiquette that influence business relations all over the world and to acquire the ability to behave appropriately in different cultural environment. Thus, the BE students should know the definition and the fundamental knowledge of intercultural business etiquette, understand the importance of intercultural business etiquette in conducting business abroad or in their own country with some one of another culture. And then the BE students will be trained to accept some intercultural business etiquette skills by appropriate methods including cognitive methods. In this way, the BE students will overcome some barriers in an intercultural business communication and finally will be suitable to the challenge needs from globalized and diverse cultural working environment.

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