

Using Business Etiquette Nowadays. Qualitative Research on Business Phoning, Emailing and Meetings

Nicolau Cristina

Alsati Karam

Hertanu Andreea

"Transilvania" University of Braşov

cristina.nicolau@unitbv.ro

alsati.karam@gmail.com

andreeahertanu.deea@yahoo.com

Abstract

Business etiquette has a very important role in the business world, representing the image of a business. In this respect, this paper aims at identifying firstly its main constitutive parts and secondly, how emailing, phoning and meetings are used in practice by people of different origins who works internationally. Hence, the qualitative piece of research presented hereinafter approaches the significance of etiquettes. The results clearly show that appearance, actions as well as spoken and written words reflect the image of a person and its interests within the business environment. Therefore, we underline that employees shall benefit from specialized training on business etiquette and we clearly highlight that standardization with business etiquette has continuously changed with international businesses and globalization. We did conclude that, by providing good practice with business etiquette, communication, the so important process in the business world, is qualitatively developed enhancing interpersonal business relationships.

Key words: business etiquette, business communication, cultural differences.

J.E.L. classification: M14, Z13.

1. Introduction

In the field of business, business etiquette plays nowadays a central role among the business skills necessary to any individual so as to properly operate professionally. The globally-independent economy strongly indicating business leaders and international entrepreneurs to provide opportunities for their managers to travel abroad to engage in cross-cultural communication determines such managers to acquire the necessary skills and orientation for coping with cultural differences (Okoro, 2013, p. 2).

Moore (1993) defines business etiquette as a set of rules allowing communication and interaction in a civilized manner, including rites and mores, forms and manners required in a society or profession. Such sets of rules, particular for every culture, are used by business people as behavioural codes.

In this regard, this paper approaches the subject of business etiquette and aims at identifying the diversity in the different cultural behaviours in terms of emailing, phoning and meeting for business purposes. It consists of two parts, a theoretical approach and a piece of qualitative research whose results are presented in detail.

2. Literature review

When it comes to the business world, verbal communication takes the main oral forms of phoning and business meetings and the written forms of emailing, business cards and business documents. These elements, together with the non-verbal ones, such as pitch, speed, tone and

volume of voice, gestures and facial expressions, body posture, stance and proximity to the listener, eye movements and contact as well as dressing and appearance shall guarantee to any business person a successful image on others. But, these shall be completed by the skill of knowing what to do and when, which in other words is called business etiquette (Sabath, 1993, p. 7).

Currently, knowing business etiquette of particular nations is a topic of study before business meetings occurring at international level, leading to fitting into an unknown foreign reality and to successful negotiation (Zator-Peljan, 2013, pp. 50-51). Moreover, not only working personnel shall successfully create a prosper working environment, but also managers shall identify strong sub-cultures and respond to the needs of their employees with so many different backgrounds and origins. Hence, the role of the etiquette in business expresses the real need of training of global managers in developing interpersonal relations and group communication and cross-cultural negotiation skills (Mukherjee and Ramos-Salazar, 2014, p.18).

Moreover, business etiquette increases the consciousness and knowledge of own and foreign culture and it is a good instrument to reduce and even eliminate stereotypes which may generate conflicts and bad working environments. Among other advantages of developing such skill, presented in previous pieces of research, etiquette training conflates displays of deference, kindness and demeanour, whereas training new employees in an interactional presentation of self shall be designed to promote a positive corporate image (Dunn, 2013, p. 225). Hence, the business etiquette serves to meeting larger strategic goals, too, being not only important at individual level.

Another study on etiquette, comparatively undertaken on three samples originating from Japan, Turkey and the USA, looks at the specific sets of cultural norms that every country developed and concludes that it is that company understanding core differences among nations that shall gain the power to succeed in the international market (Marchiori et al., 2014, p. 274). Hence, deviation to the etiquettes as well as strict adherence to it can testify the speaker's attitude to the hearer and his/her perception of a situation (Ryabova, 2015, p. 92).

In this respect, business etiquette should play an important role within ethical culture. The ethical culture is part of the organizational culture and it may be defined as one of the components which make up an institution, organisation, business or company penetrating all the other components of the institutional or business structure (Semradova and Hubackova, 2014, p. 56).

3. Research methodology

The methodology consisted of a piece of qualitative research using a semi-directed interview aiming at analysing and designing the professional business etiquette used in the 21st century. Respondents were approached online whereas the questionnaire was applied in English giving the fact that we aimed at an international sample (the respondents were of different nationalities). Data were collected between June and July 2017 and the final sample size counted 40 respondents. The questionnaire contained a series of questions meant to determine the main important factors that determine the respondents' behaviour regarding the professional business etiquette. These factors referred to the main verbal communication channels used, but also to non-verbal communication. In this matter, all the communication means in business were analysed: emailing, phone calls and meetings.

4. Research outcomes

The main purpose of our research was to determine the influence factors of the business etiquette. In this regard, the semi-directed interview had 25 open, semi-open or multiple-choice questions focused on four main topics, presented herein: general issues on business etiquette, business phoning, business emailing and business meetings. The questionnaire was posted on social media networks and out of 64 answers, there were 62.5% complete and reliable questionnaires to process. The 40 respondents were of different 19 nationalities, of which the most numerous were from Romania, the United States and Italy.

They were all working on top and middle management positions with different businesses. The average age of the sample was 33.6 years, whereas 48% were female.

General issues on business etiquette

The first question demanded from the respondents to give their definition to the concept of business etiquette. The received answers presented this concept as the way one's external factors appear when engaged in formal meetings in a business environment. However this does not mean it has to mirror one's internal state, so business etiquette appears to be the correct manner in which to behave when it comes to socializing and carrying out tasks around the workplace. Furthermore, business etiquette refers to knowing what is possible and what is not possible within the business environment whereas it is about building relationship with other people, providing basic social comfort and creating an environment where the others feel comfortable. Hence, the way one presents itself in front of others in a work environment is the way of making a good impression on people working with. The acceptance and respectful behaviour towards business partners without losing the purpose and the aim of the business is also important, as business etiquette is perceived as the way to persuade people to pay for a product that they need or like.

In this regard, business etiquette defines the way people see others from a professional point of view, implying intelligence and high communication skills used within the organization, discipline and personal quality. In other words, it refers to good or bad impressions one deals with during business and it is a business instrument promoting trust. Whatsoever, there is a difference due to knowledge and education between workers and office staff (the simplest way to differentiate this is by appearing always as casual and always addressing them as Mister or Madam).

Moreover, respondents stated that dressing affects the way people see them, the way they talk to them and the way they responded to them, so in business, the attire creates charisma helping in building the relationships between people through mutual interests and respect. Even if respondents seem not to have cultivated or educated a business etiquette (not necessarily following rules and regulations), it implies providing basic social comfort and creating an environment where others feel comfortable and secure, so it improves communication. So business etiquette may be defined as a specific business style of acting with all different people in business regarding of their position or background whereas having a certain look, using specialized vocabulary, coherence in speech, healthy logic/thinking, straightforward and direct language, having a clear message in communication, consistency, physical cleanliness etc. Last, but not least, business etiquette refers to a personal image that is a starting point in making on others an image about the business we represent and about our approach to it and to the business environment. Attitudes, habits and behaviours convey a sense of respect and professionalism. How one interacts with colleagues, superiors, clients and vendors, the elegant attitude, personal verbal and non-verbal way of communication keeps the attention to the work, strengthening relationships between the people.

Having to state the usage importance given to phoning, emailing, meetings or business letters when it comes to working within business, the respondents considered that emailing, followed by business meetings are more used than phoning or business letters.

Business phoning

When asked of the importance of phoning in business, 40% of the respondents stated that it is of high importance in solving tasks, spending from 2 minutes to 2-3 hours in a conversation. Regarding the major issues that bother them the most when it comes to phoning in business, the respondents stated that people's total disinterest in the message and the lack of tools one can use to persuade on points of view or products are the most important. Then, waiting on hold, not having face-to-face contact and lack of some information create difficult situations as misleading or losing customers, misunderstandings, answers not generated or lack of problem solving.

Hence, participants considered that business phoning often may interfere to one's personal life if the call time is not properly chosen which they really did not like (sometimes it is an issue of time zone difference), there are too many details given or talks are too long, people's rudeness or ignorance, long waiting times, not having clear objectives, not summarizing key points at the end of calls/action items or not focusing on the real topic of conversation. Moreover, respondents

mentioned also some external factors influencing the quality of communication by phone, such as noise, loss of signal or technology which changes too rapidly.

Business emailing

About emailing, the participants stated that they spent from half an hour to 8 hours per day working with online written messages. The most important factors to analyse on business emailing were its clear subject, level of formality, addressing, fast response and vocabulary used. The major issues regarding business emailing that often disturb respondents were too many spam messages which may conduct to missing the necessary and important information and time, delaying or denying possible deals, losses of valuable time, poor connection on the Internet, mistrust on the sender and relevance to the business activity. All these make problem solving slower with emailing than with phoning. To conclude, the most important factors creating professional business etiquette with regard to online written messages used in business are the subject, followed by a fast response, addressing, vocabulary and email formality.

Business meetings

The respondents spend from half an hour to 6 hours per day in business meetings, the punctuality being a very important factor for 73% of them. The majority answered that they were punctual at their meetings. However, approximately 13% had time management problems, so they had the habit of arriving late. Correlating the factor of being late with the nationality of the respondents, we can conclude that for Romanians, Mexicans and Syrians, this factor is not of high importance, some being late in meetings up to 15 minutes.

Regarding how the participants like to be titled, 78% of them responded that their first name should be used. But according to their opinion, titles are important as are part of the business etiquette which brings more politeness and formality within the business environment.

Moreover, religion and nationality are important factors when it comes to meeting new people in business only for Romanians and Syrians. The German, Dutch, Romanians, Italians and Turkish rated the tone of voice as being very important in business meetings whereas mimics and gestures are of high importance when related to business meetings for Romanians, Russians, Spanish, Dutch, Lithuanians, Turkish and Italians. Hand-shaking in business meetings are important, but not as important as attitude, highly rated for 88% of our respondents.

Dressing and appearance had always been important issues when it comes to business, 43% respondents considering this factor of being very important. When it comes to the dress code in business meetings, only 23% dress business formal, whilst the others dress either business casual, smart casual or simply casual. In correlation with the sex of the respondents, we can observe that only men dress formal in business meetings, women dress either business casual or just simply casual.

5. Conclusions

Business etiquette (Hrevova and Bednafr, 2017, p. 174) provides a standard framework within which business people can operate as they communicate and collaborate. Professionalism and respect for business parties is shown with using a proper business etiquette, which from the first beginning, creates not only a strong first impression, but it also consolidates relations. A certain code of etiquette makes work relations more confident and strong, helping teams to understand others' cultural backgrounds. In this respect, we underline that etiquette plays a significant role in developing organisational cultures and business environment highly influenced by globalization. It also enhances productivity within multicultural businesses which operate nowadays on different markets, serve different customers and use resources of different origin.

As every country/nation has its own culture and sub-cultures, every company has too its own culture and sub-cultures. The more we research, the more we learn and gain experience in knowing how to deal with people with diverse backgrounds. So etiquette must be taken into consideration especially when it comes to business.

Business etiquette is not only about knowing what to say and how to say or how to address others. It is also about showing ourselves in such a way that we will look responsible and able to carry the business or the tasks given. Moreover, business etiquette relates to non-verbal

communication (mimics, gestures, attitude, tone of voice etc.) and we shall continue this research with a study on this topic. The first impression is a crucial part of business. As psychologists say, it takes somewhere in between 4 and 7 seconds to create the first impression and if we do not master business etiquette, this impression will be a bad one costing us the job, the deal or even the future of the company. It is considered that once the first impression is made, it is nearly impossible to be changed. Hence, the cultural differences when it comes to business, in the context of globalization, are being minimalized, but there are still some sensitive aspects that have to be taken into consideration when working with people from different cultures.

Nonetheless, the present verbal written communication has been under the changes of technology and the IT world. And so has business etiquette. The importance of digitalisation for the business world has to be taken into account. Digitalisation brought changes with regard to the use and aim of documents, the most important being social documents. Their features, like storage, accessibility, changeability, duplicability, originality, structure, content connectivity, metadata, format etc. have changed (Hausmann and Williams, 2015, p. 364-365) so that we shall live an era in which business etiquette will play a central role within organisational cultures.

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