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INTEGRATION OF FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEVELS OF CULTURE
INTO ENGLISH BUSINESS STUDIES

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The concept of culture is rather difficult to define. A definition frequently used in culture and civilization courses includes the music, art, literature and philosophic systems of particular people. The definition used by those writing introductory and intermediate language texts, however, frequently goes beyond these more formal categories to include the level of familiar customs, such as store hours and shopping habits, from the everyday life of the average person. Both levels belong to the sphere of “culture” in the broadest sense, but how are the two to be integrated and what aspects of such an integrated view of culture are particularly important for the Ukrainian business environment. There are some theories which address the integration of the various levels of culture and, at the same time, have relevance for the business environment. According to some of them each aspect of culture has three levels: formal, informal and technical and they are not independent of one another. All three levels are simultaneously present in different degrees of domination in any aspect of culture.

The formal and informal levels could be integrated under the term “implicit”, whereas the technical level is considered to be the “explicit” manifestation of culture. Each person understands the formal level of the culture very early in life through the rules and remarks of adults. The formal level includes all of those behavior codes that are of a binary, that is “yes-no”, character. There is no alternative behavior that is acceptable. The informal level is somewhat less rigid and its agent of transmission is a model used for imitation. On this level one simply learns through contacts with their friends. The technical level is transmitted almost exclusively in explicit terms from teacher to student, orally or in writing. The technical level is the farthest removed from emotional involvement, the informal and informal levels are emotionally charged.

Each level of cultural awareness presents its own particular set of problems for the outsider who desires to become familiar with the culture. The technical level of culture

is the easiest for an outsider to approach and learn. Members of the cultures are not disturbed by an outsider's misunderstanding or misinterpreting aspects of the culture at this level. The outsider is simply considered to be misinformed. Beyond this technical level, however, outsiders will meet with far great difficulty, both in their attempts to understand the culture and in the reaction of insiders, should their behavior be considered inappropriate. Mishandling the informal level can often lead to serious difficulties which are likely to become aggravated since the participants in an informal situation are not fully conscious of what is happening. They only know that under a certain set of unstated rules they can act in a certain way and depend on other people to react between two patterns in a cross-cultural situation. The gap of informal codes of behavior on the part of the outsider is met with a far more emotional response by insiders who may or may not forgive the breach, depending on their own level of cross-cultural awareness. The formal level presents the most difficult obstacle to the outsider's wish to understand a foreign culture. The formal level is the very core of culture, the base from which the rest of culture springs and around which it is formed. This cultural core is the most vital, the most resistant to change and the most closely similar to instinct. Thus, not only the outsider's reactions to a certain behavior in the foreign culture but also the insider's reactions to the outsider's breaches become more emotional and sensitive as one passes from the technical, through the informal, to the formal levels. This point should be stressed when one discusses culture in the business English classroom. Students must learn to deal with all three levels of culture, but if they are to be successful in international business careers their most difficult and important task will be to overcome their emotional responses to behavior patterns. It is possible to raise students' consciousness sufficiently to afford them to deal effectively with even the most complex cultural situations. The first step in that process of consciousness-raising can be to discuss stereotypes and their formation. The second step should involve a presentation of the nature and complexity of culture itself. The third and final step is to apply this knowledge to the environment of international business and economics, using manifestations of culture appropriate to the chosen thematic units.

