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ROLE OF EDUCATION IN DEVELOPING ETHICAL DECISION MAKERS

Annotation. Growing interest in ethical behaviour and sustainable development of businesses at the global level, as well as the expectations of society for ethical and responsible behaviour of business organizations poses new requirements toward educational institutions in terms of training human resources that responds to more chllenging tasks of modern entrepreneurship activity. From this perspective this research work aims to study the role of higher educational institutions (particularly during the pandemic-forced distant education) in training of competent, innovative and flexible decision makers who are socially responsible and responsive, able to understand and respect universal ethical values, fairness and equality, high level of morality and ethics, cultural, religious, ethnic and other diversities, are willing to take measures to protect the environment from the negative impact of business activity and contribute to sustainable development.

Key words: moral values, ethical decision making, higher education, social responsibility, sustainable development.

Today the world and the humanity depend on the decisions, be it political, economic, social or any other character and there is a serious need for intelligent and honest people with necessary professional knowledge and skills, capable of making the right decisions and leading the society through the complications and unexpectedness of the modern world.

Rapid changes in the world over the past 20 years, the collapse of large business giants, the frequent replacement of new players in the marketplace and other forms of instability drawn the public attention to the issue of business' behaviour in respect to their environment they function in and forced to reconsider this behaviour. The large-scale economic crisis starting in the early 2000s and reaching its peak in 2008 marked the beginning of a turning point in business activity and gave impetus to the development of more ethical and responsive business environment that respects the requirements of society while taking decisions. Accordingly, concepts such as ethical behavior, social responsibility and responsiveness, sustainable development, triple bottom line and other related issues appeared in the list of the most debated topics of global significance.

Growing interest in ethical behaviour and sustainable development of businesses at the global level, as well as the expectations of society for ethical and responsible behaviour of business organizations poses new requirements toward educational institutions in terms of training human resources that responds to more chllenging tasks of modern entrepreneurship activity. From this perspective this research work aims to study the role of higher educational institutions (particularly during the pandemic-forced distant education) in training of competent, innovative and flexible decision makers who are socially responsible and responsive, able to understand and respect universal ethical values, fairness and equality, high level of morality and ethics, cultural, religious, ethnic and other diversities, are willing to take measures to protect the environment from the negative impact of business activity and contribute to sustainable development.

We try to clarify what approach should be applied by universities and what subjects the higher education curriculum should include to contribute to the development of human capital having necessary knowledge, skills and values.

Developing good decision-making skills takes years to master. According to Ferrell (2017) the model of the ethical decision-making process in business includes both the individual and organizational factors. These factors are interrelated and influence the correctness and ethicalness of the decision, as well as the motivation behind. As we know organizational factors are controlled by

certain regulatory mechanisms that are developed by organization's management in conformity with the existing laws and social norms. Individual factors instead are developed step by step since the beginning of a person's life. The most important period for developing individual qualities and high moral values that are the most significant component of individual qualities, is the years of education, particularly years of higher eduation.

Subjects developing and shaping soft-skills are very important for training decision makers who are able to evaluate the situation form various perspective before making final decision. Some people argue that soft skills such as ethics, social skills, leadership, communication and negotiation, conflict management, time management, leadership can be obtained during short training courses or seminars. However, practice shows that catching up all the skipped and missed knowledge within a couple of short courses is impossible; knowledge and skills necessary for effective management and decision making takes years of study and practice to master and the foundation needs to be laid well beforehand – during the years of education.

Courses that has positive impact in developing decision making skills include professional/business ethics, intercultural communication, conflictology, cultural and religious studies, human resources management, environmental studies to name a few. Below is a quick glance at some of these subjects.

Cultural and religious studies

Cultural and religious diversities are likely to become a rigorous basis for conflict and are important to be considered in modern and multinational work environment. Knowledge of cultural and religious differences, empathy, skills to manage conflicting situations or preventing them are impossible to develop within a short training course or within only one subject. They need to be repeatedly inoculated within different subjects and from various perspectives.

People behave according to the values and norms of their own culture while others may accept such behavior from a different standpoint. Including cultural studies in the curriculum helps to avoid this kind of misunderstanding as it familiarizes students with the basics of cultural values of various civilizations and cultivates understanding and respect to other cultural values. For example without being familiar with studies and frameworks for cross-cultural communication such as Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory it would be challenging or impossible for a representative of high power distance culture representative to effectively manage in a multinational environment where the majority are representatives of law power distance cultures.

Having a precise comprehension of one's own culture and increasing awareness of cultural values and principles of other nations helps to understand multicultural environment and avoid viewing them through the lens of cultural stereotypes and manage disputes and misunderstandings in multicultural settings. We think that the higher education in universities is the best platform for developing this awareness.

Religious studies is also one of the important subjects to be included in the curriculum of higher schools. Tolerance and respect for religious diversity is a major concern of all nations, yet unfortunately, various groups throughout history have misused religious concepts for political purposes and aggression and thus distorted the basic principles of their religion.

Taking religious studies and getting familiarized with the main concepts of other religions would prevent future generations from sensless collisions. This is especially important in XXI century when we frequently come across with different forms of religious based violences.

Including in the curriculum the above listed subjects that helps to cultivate soft skills is very important in achieving person's cognitive moral development – one of the important factor in ethical decision making. A model proposed by Lawrence Kohlberg, an American psychologist of XX century has six stages of cognitive moral development (CMD). According to Kohlberg people make different decisions in similar ethical situations because they are in different stages of moral development. Kohlberg proves that the higher the moral development of a person the more comprehensive, fair and ethical are the decisions taken by him. Based on this theory we also think that comprehensive

education, particularly inclusive higher education, plays an important role in shaping individuals' character and contributes to their moral development.

One of the important questions in developing competent decision makers is ensuring that the content of the learning materials within a subject are logically interconnected with the processes happening in modern political, economic and business landscapes. Modern learners are tend to finding parallels between the presented theory and current processes occurring around them to make sure that the learned theory/material might be helpful in preventing or resolving a problem they might face. We think that timeliness and relevance of the presented materials are two main provisions for the learners to demonstrate interest in studying and memorizing the material, and converting them into skills and then applying.

Another important question is the form of teaching the above-mentioned subjects. This includes the questions such as the period and intensity of training, the choice of seminars, lectures and other forms of teaching, alternation of in-class and out-of-class activities, etc. Since the study of these subjects have a significant impact to the development of broad-minded specialists we think that including them into the curriculum in the form of short-term modules rather than an entire semester will allow studying several important soft-skills subjects during the higher education period.

Methods used in teaching aforementioned subjects are also among questions that deserves attention. Traditionally, subjects closely related to a specific specialization are taught in a long-term format and using classic lecture classes to transfer fundamental theory and then strengthening the learned during the seminar classes. As for the subjects helpful in shaping soft-skills more flexible and innovative methods of teaching should be applied to achieve better understanding and increase interest of the audience. Role plays, gamification, collaborative learning, spaced learning, VAK approach in teaching, flipped classroom, self-learning and other methods can be applied to achieve effectiveness in teaching these classes. These innovative methods are appropriate for teaching short-term courses in all fields and are crucial for developing necessary soft skills in addition to required professional knowledge and skills. The only concern is the problem of applying them in distant learning environment. In the current distant learning environment, most of the mentioned methods are either not applicable or partially applicable.

Moreover, international educational activities – youth forums, exchange and training programs, invitation of guest lectures also provide extended opportunity for shaping these skills.

Conclusions and recommendations

Armed with necessary professional knowledge and skills and having been "inoculated" with the values such as social responsibility and responsiveness, high level of morality and ethics, fairness and equality, care of environment the well educated people will hardly close blind eye towards the behaviour damaging those values and seek short-term profits by deceiving.

We think that some other line of research worth pursuing further to study the significance of courses in shaping decision making and manegment skills with worthwile conclusions and recommendations.

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