FACULTY OF ECONOMICS TUL

Master Thesis

Business ethics training of delegates in international travel agencies

Study programme: N0413A050030 International Management
Author: **Bc. Anna Šádková**
Thesis Supervisors: Ing. Jitka Vávrová, Ph.D.
Department of Marketing and Trade

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Thesis Supervisors: Ing. Jitka Vávrová, Ph.D.
Department of Marketing and Trade

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L.S.

Ing. Mgr. Marek Skála, Ph.D.
Dean

doc. Ing. Kateřina Maršíková, Ph.D.
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Školení obchodní etiky pro delegáty v mezinárodních cestovních kancelářích

Anotace

Tato diplomová práce se zabývá analýzou etických výzev, kterým čelí delegáti mezinárodních cestovních kanceláří, se specifickým zaměřením na působení v Bulharsku.Teoretická část definuje východiska kulturních rozdílů na základě Hofstedeho dimenzí, koncepty podnikatelské etiky, etického klimatu a specifika etiky v cestovním ruchu. Empirická část využívá smíšený výzkumný design kombinující hloubkové rozhovory a dotazníkové šetření na situace, jako je agresivní komunikace, korupce, interní etické problémy či sexuální obtěžování. Hlavním přínosem práce je návrh třífázového vzdělávacího modelu zahrnujícího praktickou příručku, interaktivní online kurz a workshop v centrále společnosti, který má za cíl posílit etické rozhodování a kulturní kompetence delegátů v cílové destinaci.

Klíčová slova

Bulharsko, cestovní kancelář, delegát, etické výzvy, kulturní rozdíly

Business ethics training of delegates in international travel agencies.

Annotation

This thesis analyses the ethical challenges faced by delegates of international travel agencies, with a specific focus on operations in Bulgaria. The theoretical section defines the foundations of cultural differences based on Hofstede's dimensions, concepts of business ethics, the ethical climate, and the specific characteristics of ethics in tourism. The empirical section employs a mixed-methods research design combining in-depth interviews and a questionnaire survey on situations such as aggressive communication, corruption, internal ethical issues, and sexual harassment. The main contribution of this work is the proposal of a three-phase training model comprising a workshop at the company's headquarters, a practical handbook, and an interactive online course, aimed at strengthening the ethical decision-making and cultural competencies of tour guides at the destination.

Key Words

Bulgaria, travel agency, delegates, ethical challenges, cultural differences

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AI	artificial intelligence

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Introduction

Tour guides and delegates have a broad range of ethical responsibilities because they operate at the intersection of tourists, local communities, and service providers. In addition to providing services, their work involves managing sensitive situations, cultural differences, and customer expectations across various environments. (Martin a Cullen, 2006)

The aim of the diploma thesis is to propose effective training methods for employees of international travel agencies and to analyse the ethical challenges faced by delegates in such agencies. Based on these findings, a specialised online ethics training program and practical handbook will be designed and customised for delegates operating in Bulgaria. The empirical research, conducted through interviews and questionnaires, provided the evidence-based foundation for the development of the training modules. The resulting practical output is intended to provide delegates with a clear framework for ethical decision-making and to enhance their cultural competence in the Bulgarian context.

The theoretical framework combines cultural differences, business ethics, ethical climate, and ethics training in travel agencies to explain the ethical challenges faced by delegates. It also connects these concepts to the international business environment and to the specific role of delegates, who must respond to ethical dilemmas, intercultural situations, and interpersonal conflicts directly at the destination.

The research adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining structured interviews and a quantitative questionnaire distributed among delegates. A review of internal documents and ethical codes of conduct further supports this. This multi-perspective approach ensures an understanding of the specific ethical challenges and interpersonal dynamics, such as bossing, mobbing, or cultural conflicts, faced by staff operating in the Bulgarian tourism sector.

The thesis was prepared using selected artificial intelligence tools to streamline both the research and creative phases. The Anara.com and Perplexity.ai platforms, supplemented by the Scite.ai analytical tool, were used to identify and validate reliable academic sources. The Gemini model was applied to the methodological design of the research questionnaire and interviews, and subsequently to the preparation of materials for online ethics training. The Gemini and ChatGPT-5 models were used for the final stylistic editing of the text, while language proofreading was supported by Grammarly software. All outputs from these tools underwent critical review and extensive manual editing to ensure scientific accuracy and

originality. The final text combines thoughts, ideas and primary research findings. The AI tools were used to support the structuring and refinement of the text, while the core analysis, data interpretation, and formulation of proposed solutions constitute independent work.

Due to the sensitivity of the data collected, all data collected are 100% anonymous, and the findings were presented in the same way.

1 Theoretical Background

From a theoretical standpoint, ethical behaviour in this context can be understood through concepts such as business ethics, stakeholder theory, and ethical climate. These frameworks highlight the importance of responsible decision-making, respect for cultural diversity, and the balancing of multiple stakeholders' interests (Martin and Cullen, 2006). At the same time, ethical training is essential, as it equips guides and delegates with the skills needed to handle challenging situations in destinations more effectively and with greater confidence (Treviño and Nelson, 2021).

Ethical behaviour in international tourism can be understood through business ethics, stakeholder theory, ethical climate, and ethics training. Examining cultural differences through Hofstede's dimensions reveals that a delegate's mission success hinges on their ability to navigate the specificities of the Bulgarian environment. Compared to the Czech Republic, Bulgaria places greater emphasis on hierarchy and collectivism.

The chapters on business ethics and ethical climate emphasise that professional integrity is not just an individual trait, but also a product of organisational culture, which acts as a vital buffer against ethical issues such as mobbing, bossing, harassment and conflict of interest, risks that are particularly acute in the hospitality industry due to high-pressure environments and social interactions involving alcohol consumption.

Finally, the discussion on ethics training emphasises that ethical competence can be systematically developed. For Czech delegates operating in Bulgaria, such training platforms provide theoretical knowledge of ethical standards and practical skills in cross-cultural conflict resolution.

1.1 Cultural Differences

To understand the complexities of international management, one must first examine the underlying structures of human interaction. These structures are defined by culture, which serves as an invisible framework for every social and professional engagement.

Culture is a complex set of shared patterns of thinking, feeling, and acting rooted in social norms and common values (Yan and Halpenny, 2019). These differences significantly influence

how people perceive authority, responsibility, and social interactions. Western cultures often prioritise individualism and personal autonomy, while many Asian and Eastern cultures focus on collectivism and family integrity. (Hofstede et al., 2010) What is perceived as normal or acceptable behaviour in one culture may be viewed differently in another.

Hofstede et al. (2010) identifies six cultural dimensions that serve to differentiate between various national environments:

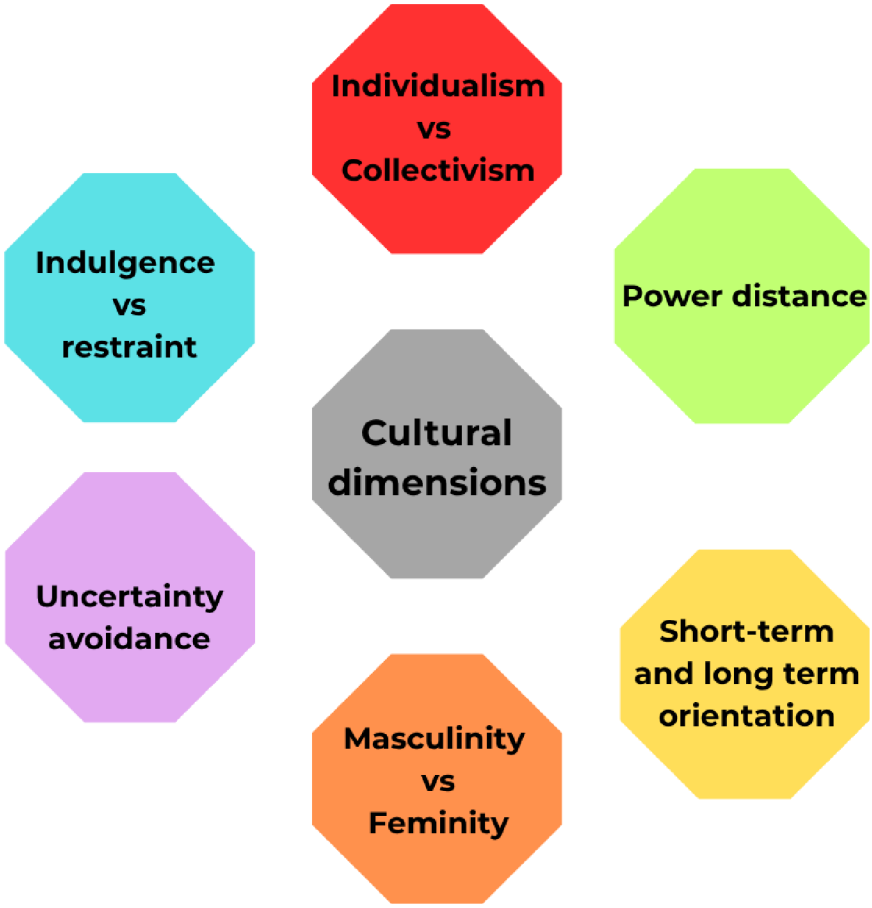

Figure 1: Hofstede's cultural dimensions.
Source: own processing by Hofstede et al. (2010)

Individualism refers to the extent to which people in each society view themselves as independent individuals. In such cultures, individuals tend to prioritise personal responsibility, self-reliance, and self-centred decision-making. Individuals have obligations towards themselves and their immediate families rather than towards a larger social group.

Emphasis is often placed on personal freedom, self-fulfilment, and the pursuit of individual goals, while social ties may be more flexible. (Hofstede et al., 2010)

In contrast, collectivism emphasises the group, prioritising collective interests over individual ambition. In such societies, people tend to define themselves in relation to the groups they belong to, such as their family, community, or organisation. Maintaining harmony, cooperation, and strong interpersonal relationships is considered essential, and individuals are expected to act in ways that benefit the group and preserve social cohesion. Personal achievements are often viewed in terms of their contribution to the collective rather than as purely individual successes. (Hofstede et al., 2010)

Power distance refers to the extent to which members of a society accept and expect an unequal or hierarchical distribution of power within institutions and organisations. In a culture characterised by a high-power distance, inequality is generally perceived as natural and legitimate, and individuals tend to show strong respect for authority, social status, and established class distinctions. Titles, formal roles, and hierarchical structures play a significant role in everyday interactions, and individuals in positions of power are often granted considerable autonomy and privilege. This concept is typically assessed using the Power Distance Index (PDI), which measures the extent to which less powerful members of society accept and internalise these inequalities. (Hofstede et al., 2010)

Short-term and long-term orientation describe how societies prioritise time horizons, values, and goals. Long-term oriented cultures emphasise persistence and perseverance, as well as the importance of maintaining ordered relationships based on status. These cultures also value thrift, careful resource management, and a strong sense of responsibility. This is often accompanied by awareness of social expectations, including feelings of shame when norms are not met. In contrast, short-term oriented cultures focus more on stability, maintaining personal consistency, and preserving one's social image or face. Respect for tradition and the importance of reciprocating social gestures, such as greetings, favours, and gifts, are crucial to sustaining social harmony today. (Hofstede et al., 2010)

Masculinity is a cultural concept that emphasises achievement, competitiveness, and material success. Societies with a stronger masculine orientation tend to value assertiveness, ambition, and individual accomplishments. Conversely, cultures with a more feminine orientation emphasise cooperation, empathy, social relationships, and quality of life, placing greater importance on harmony and mutual support. (Hofstede et al., 2010)

Uncertainty avoidance reflects the degree to which members of society feel uncomfortable with uncertainty and ambiguity. This dimension addresses how a culture deals with the fact that the future can never be known. Should we try to control the future or just let it happen? Cultures with high uncertainty avoidance maintain rigid codes of belief and behaviour and are intolerant of unorthodox ideas. In these societies, there is often an emotional need for rules and formal structures to minimise anxiety. Controversially, low-uncertainty-avoidance cultures maintain a more relaxed attitude in which practice counts more than principles, and deviations from the norm are more easily tolerated. (Hofstede et al., 2010)

Lastly, indulgence versus restraint focuses on the regulation of human desires. Indulgence refers to a society that allows free gratification of basic, natural human drives related to enjoying life and having fun. In contrast, restraint refers to a society that suppresses the gratification of needs and regulates them through strict social norms. Indulgent cultures tend to place higher importance on freedom of speech and personal happiness. In contrast, restrained cultures are more likely to believe that social prohibitions control their actions and that indulging oneself is somewhat wrong. (Hofstede et al., 2010)

1.1.1 Cultural Differences between the Czech Republic and Bulgaria

Cultural differences play a vital role in shaping the nature of interactions and business practices between different countries. As global organisations expand their operations, they must recognise the significant impact of cultural values on communication, decision-making, and negotiation patterns. The cultural dimension theory by Hofstede emphasises how cultural values impact business practices, as demonstrated by individualism-collectivism and power distance indexes (Lacko et al., 2023). By embracing cultural values, global organisations can improve cooperation, a key focus of ethics training for international delegates. Moreover, Cummings et al. (2017) argue that understanding cultural differences is essential in improving global governance and ethical practices in global organisations (Steers et al., 2023). By instilling a culture of inclusiveness and respect for diversity, global organisations can effectively navigate international relations, ensuring that equitable relationships are established and maintained.

When comparing the cultures of Bulgaria and the Czech Republic, numerous differences emerge. The Czech Republic presents a cultural profile characterised by a blend of hierarchical acceptance and individualistic autonomy. Based on the graph, Czech society has a power

distance score of 57, indicating a clear hierarchical order in which individuals have defined places. However, this is significantly influenced by a relatively high level of individualism (58), indicating a loosely knit social framework where people prioritise the „I“ over „we“ and value personal self-reliance. In a professional context, this results in a masculine-driven environment, where masculinity is 57, focused on competition, achievement, and success, yet governed by a high need for uncertainty avoidance (74). This combination suggests that while Czechs are competitive, they require a strict code of behaviour and formal rules to navigate professional challenges and mitigate risk. (Anon., [n. d.])

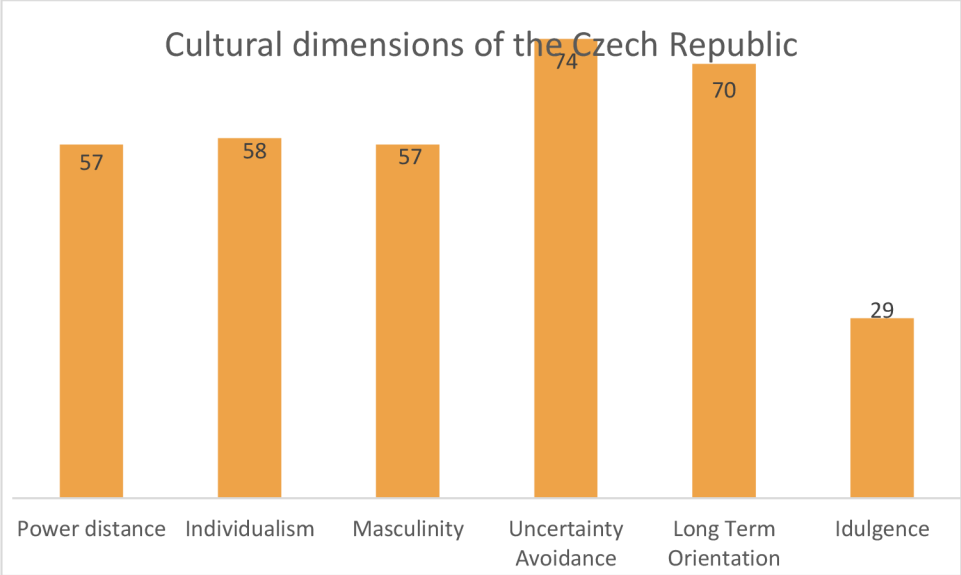

Figure 2: Cultural dimensions of the Czech Republic
Source: own processing by (Anon., [n. d.])

On the other hand, Bulgaria is highly collectivist-oriented because loyalty to the group, family, organisation, or even community is considered of prime importance. The country's history of monarchical, totalitarian, and Orthodox-Eastern cultural traditions is characterised by an unswerving need to demonstrate loyalty to the group rather than individualistic tendencies. (Gildersleeve-Neumann, n. d.)

The Power Distance dimension also sets these two cultures apart, as Bulgarian culture has a very hierarchical structure; Bulgaria has a power distance index of seventy, much higher than that of the Czech Republic. In Bulgaria, the unequal distribution of power is not only accepted but also viewed as the norm. This can be seen in both educational and professional settings, where student or employee initiative is discouraged, and a top-down approach to instruction is preferred. High power distance also creates a need to preserve face, especially when dealing with those in power. This can be seen especially in the service and tourism industries, where

the local population may communicate passively due to hesitation to express their own opinions and concerns to people in power. (Gildersleeve-Neumann, [n. d.]; Anon., [n. d.])

Lastly, while both nations exhibit a high level of uncertainty avoidance, the cultural drivers for each are unique. While Czechs rely on rules to succeed in a pragmatic world, Bulgaria's high level of uncertainty avoidance is often closely linked to a history of monolithic social homogenization and a lack of past entrepreneurial drivers. Additionally, the Bulgarian nation is traditionally seen as a more feminine society in terms of cultural values, prioritising harmony over aggressive competitiveness, as in more masculine societies worldwide. While the Czech nation is highly long-term oriented (70), the Bulgarian nation traditionally exhibits a more short-term orientation, focusing on completing social obligations. (Gildersleeve-Neumann, [n. d.]; Anon., [n. d.]). Developing this cultural understanding is essential for the ethical training of Czech delegates operating in Bulgaria.

1.2 Business Ethics

Business ethics is the study of moral principles and their application to business policies, institutions, and behaviour. Corporate social responsibility and ESG concepts have evolved significantly, with companies increasingly shifting from a shareholder-centric to a broader stakeholder perspective. According to Crane et al. (2019) business ethics is not merely about avoiding misconduct; it involves the organisational integrity that guides every decision, from supply chain management to executive compensation.

The foundation of the ethical approach in business, as it is used today, is stakeholder theory. Stakeholder theory argues that a company's responsibility is not only to its shareholders or owners but to everyone who might be affected by its operations, including its employees, customers, and local community. Harrison et al. (2019) argue that ethical businesses create value by effectively managing these relationships. In the current decade, the term Digital Ethics has become an integral part of business ethics. Companies face new ethical issues related to artificial intelligence, data privacy, algorithmic bias, and the unfair treatment of certain groups (Floridi, 2018).

In addition to these theoretical perspectives, ethical leadership is crucial in practice. Ethical leadership is the cornerstone of this discipline. Leaders need to move beyond egoistic goals or personal benefits and become servant or ethical leaders. In other words, they must set an

example for their subordinates and demonstrate tone at the top. Studies show that employees who perceive their leaders as ethical are more likely to report misconduct and to show greater job commitment. (Ashfaq et al. 2021) Without this foundation, even the best ethical code is meaningless.

1.3 Ethical Problems in Organisations

Ethical problems in the workplace can significantly undermine the organisational climate and erode trust between employees and management. When such issues occur, they often lead to decreased motivation, lower job satisfaction, and reduced productivity, while also increasing stress and employee turnover. Common forms of unethical behaviour in organisations include:

- Mobbing and bossing,
- micromanagement,
- favouritism and nepotism,
- bribery and corruption,
- conflict of interest,
- discrimination and sexual harassment.

Mobbing is a form of long-term psychological harassment of a person by groups of individuals in their social environment, where a person is repeatedly victimised or excluded by their co-workers. (Chadt, 2021). It involves a group attacking an individual. These attacks are characterised by their covert nature, subtlety, and malice. To determine whether a situation constitutes mobbing, the following criteria must be met: the behaviour must occur at least once a week for at least 6 months. Sexual harassment in the workplace is sometimes also classified as mobbing, while other definitions define it as mistreatment without a sexual or racial basis. (Kontul', 2020) For example, a group of colleagues systematically ignores a co-worker during lunch breaks, forgets to include them in important email threads, or spreads unfounded rumours about their personal life to isolate them.

When a supervisor or manager is involved, it is called bossing, and (Chadt, 2021) states that this type of behaviour is typically characteristic of poor management and a culture of toxicity, in which early warning signs of potential conflict are ignored. This refers to a supervisor's behaviour that undermines a subordinate in front of their colleagues, making it difficult or impossible for the subordinate to do their job. Of course, this behaviour can evolve and escalate over time. For example, a manager repeatedly assigns a subordinate impossible deadlines,

publicly ridicules their suggestions during meetings, or constantly threatens them with termination without valid professional reasons.

Micromanagement is a management style in which a manager closely monitors and controls an employee's work. This leaves employees with little autonomy. For domestic workers, who perform their duties in their employer's home, this often creates a constant feeling of being watched (Kantachote, 2023).

Favouritism refers to unfair and biased support given to certain individuals in positions of power, often at the expense of the common good. According to various definitions, it typically manifests in public and social life as strong patronage of preferred individuals, who are promoted to high- ranking positions despite lacking the necessary skills or experience. Therefore, a favourite is someone who enjoys the trust of a superior, can influence decisions, and advances in their career as a result of this privileged status. (Lasisi et al., 2022)

The concept of favouritism is closely related to nepotism and cronyism, which involve giving opportunities to friends or associates, regardless of their professional qualifications. Nepotism is often understood as the official support or promotion of relatives or close associates. These definitions suggest that both favouritism and nepotism occur when a person in authority advances their preferred individuals or relatives in their careers, regardless of their experience, knowledge, achievements, or merit.

Bribery refers to the offer or receipt of valuable items to influence an official action, and corruption is the abuse of power for personal benefit. (Comer a Stephens, 2013) Bribery and corruption are unethical and illegal behaviours. Organisations with an egoistic ethical culture, where personal interests are prioritised over the organisation's interests, are prone to these behaviours.

Conflict of interest refers to a situation where personal interests, such as profit or family ties, conflict with or influence official duties or responsibilities. According to Crane et al. (2019) a conflict of interest is one of the most common ethical challenges because it compromises a person's objectivity. When employees or managers prioritise their own benefits over the organisation's goals, it leads to biased decision-making and undermines stakeholder trust, including that of colleagues, customers, and shareholders.

There are many forms of conflict of interest, and they vary from using your position to arrange a contract for your own business to accepting expensive gifts from your suppliers. Just the appearance of a conflict of interest can do as much harm as if it existed, and it contributes to the perception of unfairness and corruption, which can destroy a company's reputation. Therefore, ethical organisations require people to disclose any potential conflicts of interest immediately to promote transparency (Crane et al., 2019).

To manage these risks effectively, organisations need a clear structure of ethical policies. Such a structure typically includes several components: a code of conduct that defines what constitutes a conflict of interest, and a recusal process in which individuals remove themselves from decisions in which they have a personal interest. By implementing these policies, organisations can promote transparency and accountability, prevent personal interest from undermining professional integrity, and uphold merit and the common good. (Sison et al., 2018)

Workplace discrimination is the unfair treatment of an employee or a candidate for a position in an organisation based on personal characteristics such as race, gender, age, religion, or disability. Bulgarian and Czech law explicitly prohibit discrimination on protected grounds, establishing a general principle of equal treatment in public and professional life. (Protection Against Discrimination Act, 2004; Act No. 198/2009 Coll., 2009). According to Tomšej (2020) found that discrimination creates a hostile work environment, contributes to pay gaps, and reduces growth opportunities. From an ethical point of view, it undermines meritocracy, or the idea that people should be rewarded for their skills and performance, rather than personal traits.

Sexual harassment is a major ethical and social problem in organisations in the world today. It involves unwanted sexual advances, requests for sexual favours, or any other sexual conduct, verbal or physical, that makes a victim feel intimidated or offended in the workplace (Tomšej et al., 2023). This is a grave violation of power and a violation of human dignity. It affects the victim's psychological well-being, impacts productivity, causes turnover, and exposes the organisation to legal liability. The forms of sexual harassment in tourism are as follows

- from customers,
- from supervisors,
- specific risk for tour guides, delegates, and hotel staff

From customers could be unsolicited comments, touching or proposing during service, from supervisors, employees can feel pressure to provide sexual favours in exchange for benefits, and guides, delegates, and hotel staff could cause sexual harassment during long shifts and during alcohol consumption (Chatterjee, 2025).

Inappropriate behaviour can occur in the tourism and hospitality sectors, such as unwanted touching, sexually suggestive jokes or comments, unsolicited flirting or advances from customers or colleagues, sharing explicit material in the workplace, and pressure from supervisors that implies rewards or threats based on compliance. Hospitality workers, particularly women, LGBT+ individuals, and migrants, are among the most vulnerable groups. Many work in precarious positions and fear retaliation or job loss if they report inappropriate behaviour. The emphasis on *service with a smile* in this industry often blurs professional boundaries, leading to inappropriate behaviour being tolerated or overlooked (Chatterjee, 2025).

1.4 Ethical Climate

Ethical climate represents the moral atmosphere of an organisation and shapes how employees perceive ethical behaviour and respond to ethical issues. Ethical climate can be classified into three main types: egoistic, benevolent, and principled. Beyond guiding decisions, a positive ethical climate also supports employee well-being by reducing stress, preventing burnout, and fostering motivation.

According to Newman et al., (2017) the ethical climate is *a subset of organisational culture characterised by shared perceptions of what constitutes ethical behaviour and how ethical issues should be handled.* In other words, it is the organisation's moral atmosphere. In the opinion of the classic theory of Victor and Cullen (1988), which remains the gold standard even in the 2020s, there are three types of ethical climates:

- egoistic
- benevolent
- and principled.

Table 1: Theoretical ethical climate types

Ethical criterion	Locus of analysis Individual	Local	Cosmopolitan
Egoism	Self Interest	Company profit	Efficiency
Benevolence	Friendship	Team interests	Social responsibility
Principle	Personal Morality	Rules	Professional codes

Source: own processing based on Victor and Cullen (1988) and Ramadugu (2024).

Gwamanda and Mahembe (2023) highlight that a principled climate is the most effective way of reducing unethical behaviour, such as bribery or fraud. In such a principled climate, doing the right thing is considered more important than achieving business objectives. Conversely, an egoistic climate often creates conditions for mobbing and corruption, as workers compete with one another to achieve the objectives at all costs. The organisation's ethical climate has a major impact on workers' mental health. Newman et al. 2017) found that a positive ethical organisational climate acts as a so-called buffer against job-related stress and burnout. If workers feel the organisation values an ethical climate, they feel safer and more motivated. A benevolent, principled ethical climate is a strategic imperative for modern management.

Egoism focuses on promoting one's own interests, while benevolence focuses on the interests of the group. Principles, or deontology, focus on adherence to rules. However, both benevolence and principles focus on the benefit of others. Regarding reference groups, the individual designates themself as the reference unit; the local level encompasses the immediate social system in which the individual finds themself. For example, a team, work group, or organisation.

By combining the criterion of moral decision-making by Ramadugu (2024), with reference groups, nine types of ethical climate theoretically emerge, as shown in Table 1 and described below

Self-interest – Self-interest is an ethical climate in which decisions are based on self-interest, and the reference point is the individual. The interests of the individual are prioritised over those of the group or organisation.

Corporate profit – In a corporate profit climate, self-interested decision-making is directed towards a local reference group, such as a team or work unit, and the organisation's priorities.

Effectiveness – Effectiveness is a climate in which egoistic criteria apply at a broader social or economic level, taking wider interest into account. In a friendship-based ethical climate, benevolence influences an individual's decision-making concerning others, not merely for their own benefit.

Friendship – In a friendship-based ethical climate, benevolence influences an individual's decision-making concerning others, not merely for their own benefit.

Team interest – Team interest is a type of climate in which benevolent decision-making reflects concern for the local collective, that is, the team or organisation.

Social responsibility – Social responsibility is a climate in which benevolence extends worldwide, with decisions considering broader societal impacts and external interests.

Personal morality – Personal morality refers to the principles that shape an individual's behaviour. Personal ethics are the primary guide in the workplace.

Company rules and procedures – A company's climate of rules and procedures is one in which decision-making principles are focused on the local level, with ethical standards based on the organisation's rules, guidelines, and procedures.

Laws and professional codes – Laws and professional codes shape an environment in which moral judgment is guided by clear principles and viewed from a global perspective. In this setting, ethical guidance comes from external sources, such as the legal framework and professional bodies, rather than from within the organisation. (Ramadugu, 2024)

Perception of ethical climates can shape workplace behaviour and influence various outcomes such as job satisfaction, commitment, psychological well-being, and intention to leave the organisation. (Martin a Cullen, 2006; Newman et al., 2017; Ramadugu, 2024). Consistent research shows that egoistic climates are associated with negative outcomes, whereas benevolent and principled climates encourage positive behaviours and organisational effectiveness. While most studies have focused on corporate contexts, the mechanisms involved, such as social information processing and cognitive social learning, can also be applied to educational institutions. In higher education, ethical climates reinforced by leadership practices and ethics education are crucial for shaping student and staff behaviour and promoting trust, commitment, and inclusive practices. This highlights the strategic importance of nurturing ethical climates alongside ethics education.

1.5 Ethics in the International Business Environment

The interconnection of the global economy, as observed in the contemporary business environment, has created numerous ethical challenges for organisations. These challenges arise from the complexity of the global business environment, characterised by diverse ethical

standards, legal systems, and cultural values. Globalisation has transformed business operations, creating opportunities but also significant risks. (Dowling et al., 2017) state that as the global business environment evolves, businesses and individuals must develop a profound understanding of different legal and business systems. This complexity can be overwhelming, especially for organisations with numerous stakeholders in different countries. In the modern business environment, organisations often face ethical challenges related to their adherence to international labour laws and ethical standards.

Furthermore, businesses often find themselves in a dilemma when their operations conflict with local communities' ethical values or when profit-seeking ignores moral responsibilities (Donaldson and Dunfee, 2000). These ethical challenges are particularly visible in multinational corporations, where cross-cultural conflicts, technological change, and data governance create new responsibilities for managers.

Multinational corporations are at the forefront of establishing the ethics of international business. Kakungulu (2025) highlights that multinational corporations often face challenges in regulating business and ethics due to the dynamic nature of business and technological changes. Accordingly, organisations must be aware of cultural differences and adapt to changes in the business environment to meet international market expectations. Multinational corporations must address potential ethical issues arising from cross-cultural conflicts by formulating codes of conduct that align with global ethical standards. (Crane et al., 2019)

The introduction of artificial intelligence in the international business environment has also raised several ethical issues regarding business conduct. Latinović a Krčadinac (2025) specifies that the introduction of artificial intelligence in international political communication has raised ethical concerns regarding individual autonomy and the balance of power.

One of the major issues for international businesses is how to govern cross-border data exchanges, particularly genetic and health-related data. In a related discussion, (Nestor et al., 2023) examine the ethical issues involved in the free flow of genetic data across borders. Their research suggests applying blockchain technology to establish ethical systems that promote individual privacy and enable collaborative research. These organisations must address the ethical concern of balancing scientific progress with data governance.

Furthermore, Ananda (2024) highlights the need for ethical-legal governance amid global challenges and demonstrates the impact of diverse legal systems on international

collaboration. As business operations increasingly assume a transnational character, ethical systems must evolve to facilitate the collaborative and equitable exchange of information across nations. Cabrera-Mendoza et al. (2025) assert that partnerships across regions underscore the importance of equity in data-sharing processes, highlighting the need for balance in global data dynamics.

1.6 Ethics Training of Employees

In an era marked by rising corporate scandals and stakeholder demands, ethics training has become an essential part of corporate management. According to Tentor, (2020) ethical awareness is defined as "a series of activities aimed at developing the level of awareness of ethical issues among employees and the level of ethical decision-making ability to create an ethical culture within an organisation." The increasingly globalised business environment has made the importance of ethics training more evident. Studies have shown that these programs have a significant impact on corporate performance. Ethics training is no longer considered a luxury for firms but rather a necessity for sustaining corporate reputations and complying with regulations (Treviño and Nelson, 2021).

Ethics training equips employees to manage ethical issues in the workplace, and it should be introduced at every level of the company. This ensures that everyone, from top management to frontline staff, understands the expectations. Research indicates that ethics training can influence employees' behaviour. For example, employees who received ethics training are more aware of ethical issues and behave more ethically. This suggests that ethical behaviour is not an innate trait but can be developed through training (Crane et al., 2019).

The research indicated that ethics training is more beneficial for lower-level employees than for senior management (Glonti et al., 2020). This may be because, in most cases, senior management has already developed the ability to make ethical decisions through their years of experience in their respective fields. However, this does not mean ethics training is unnecessary for them; rather, it should focus more on understanding the details of unethical behaviour and how to avoid it in the workplace (Glonti et al., 2020).

Ethics training is most effective when combined with a clear code of conduct. Crane et al., (2019) say that if employees face an ethical dilemma and are not sure what to do, they look to the company's code of conduct to rely on what they learned in ethics training. Ethics training

and written policies work together. To have a truly ethical workplace, it is necessary to provide ethics training and ensure employees adhere to the code of conduct.

1.6.1 Forms of Ethical Training

There are several forms of ethics training used by different organisations. Each approach serves a different purpose, ranging from legal risk management to cultivating moral character.

- Compliance-based training
- integrity-based training,
- online and technology-based training,
- in-person workshops and seminars,
- ethics committees and ongoing education.

The most common form of ethics training is compliance-based training. It educates employees on the various rules, laws, and regulations they must adhere to within the organisation. Employees may, for instance, be trained in anti-corruption policies, conflict-of-interest avoidance, data privacy, and workplace harassment prevention. According to (Perlman et al., 2021) compliance-based training is the most common choice because organisations must ensure their employees are aware of their legal obligations. However, the study's authors also found that compliance-based training alone is insufficient.

When organisations focus primarily on rules, they often neglect employees‘ values and motivations. Experience has shown that simply informing people of rules does not necessarily encourage compliance.

Integrity-based training, by contrast, seeks to help employees develop their personal values and moral judgment. This form of training assumes that employees who are genuinely interested in doing the right thing will act ethically even when there are no specific rules to guide them. Integrity-based training utilises tools such as case studies, role-plays, and group discussion on ethical dilemmas. Watts (2020) argues that positive experiences of ethics education significantly impact an individual’s ethical decision-making progress in the workplace.

Another form is online and technology-based training. The development of digital technologies has revolutionised the delivery of ethics training, enabling organisations to reach a wider, more

dispersed workforce more efficiently and cost-effectively. Developing capacity in workplace ethics requires these innovative strategies to engage diverse groups through technology.

Although technology is increasingly being used to deliver ethics training to an organisation's workforce, in-person workshops and seminars remain essential, particularly for resolving complex ethical issues (Al-Baher, 2024). According to Alamu a Dwyer (2017) inducting a workforce into high ethical standards through in-person training is an essential strategy for developing a productive, ethical environment.

In addition to developing ethics training strategies, ethics education can be promoted by establishing ethics committees, which is particularly important for fostering an ethical culture within an organisation. Ferretti et al. (2024) found that organisations that implemented mandatory training programs focused on ethics and sustainability achieved significantly better alignment with organisational values, serving as a key mechanism for spreading an ethical culture across the entire organisation.

1.6.2 Aim of Ethical Training

Ethics training in organisations has diverse and dual objectives at both the individual and organisational levels. At the individual level, ethics training aims to improve employees' awareness of ethics, their ability to apply their moral reasoning skills, and their ability to apply tools to deal with ethical dilemmas (Nguyen et al., 2019; Deshpande et al., 2021) On the organisational side, ethics training aims to foster a culture of ethics, reduce unethical behaviour, and enhance organisational reputation and performance (Glonti et al., 2020).

The objectives are:

- Enhancing ethical awareness and decision-making,
- reinforcing codes of conduct,
- fostering an ethical organisational culture,
- improving organisational performance.

One of the main objectives of ethics training within an organisation is to raise employees' awareness of ethics and enhance their ability to apply moral reasoning. Deshpande et al. (2021) assert that professional ethics training is a key step in a successful organisational ethics

programme. Many organisations have undertaken ethics training to help their employees recognise ethical issues. This is because many employees are unable to identify ethical issues, not because they are inherently unethical, but rather because they lack the necessary awareness.

Moreover, ethics training plays an important role in reinforcing and amplifying an organisation's existing codes of conduct. Deshpande et al. (2021) highlight that professional education is essential for reinforcing the organisation's codes of conduct. The authors assert that codes of conduct within an organisation are insufficient to guide employees' behaviour without ethics training.

On the other hand, Rankin et al. (2024) argue that ethics training and organisational codes of conduct are effective in educating employees about the importance of ethical behaviour and in reducing the likelihood of unethical conduct.

Another aim is to foster an ethical organisational culture. Perhaps the most ambitious role of ethics training is to foster an ethical organisational culture that pervades every aspect of an organisation. Glonti et al. (2020) assert that the development of corporate social activities, such as ethics training, is perhaps the most important managerial innovation. Furthermore, research suggests that ethics training is more effective for employees at the lowest levels of management.

Ethics training can also contribute to organisational performance by strengthening employee engagement, reducing turnover, and improving stakeholder relationships. As Treviño and Nelson (2021) point out, organisations that prioritise business ethics through codes of conduct and training programmes tend to achieve more positive outcomes in these areas. This performance-based perspective highlights the growing recognition that ethics and business success are complementary rather than contradictory.

1.7 Business Ethics in Travel Agencies

Tourism is one of the world's biggest and most dynamic industries, employing millions of people and linking cultures worldwide. However, this rapid growth has also raised several ethical concerns for travel agencies, tour operators, tourists, and local communities. As Jamal (2019) argues, the tourism literature has insufficiently discussed ethical and justice theories, and all those involved in the tourism industry, including businesses and tourists themselves,

must take greater responsibility. Therefore, the ethical side of tourism cannot be viewed as a marginal issue, but rather as a central one that dictates the sustainability and justice of the entire industry.

The field of tourism ethics covers a wide range of issues, including environmental concerns, employee treatment, marketing honesty, and cultural respect. Bernardo and Pereiro (2020) argues that responsible tourism, which is closely related to ethical tourism, emphasises ethics and human rights and can be seen as a counter-current movement for others, for a cause that one would freely consider ethical. This definition highlights that ethical tourism is not merely about rules and regulations, but about genuinely caring for the well-being of everyone involved in the tourism experience.

Travel agencies, as intermediaries in the tourism supply chain, play a significant role in setting ethical standards. Their responsibilities include developing and selling tourism products and communicating with clients. Şahin and Pulluk (2025) observed, the activities of tourism agencies and tour operators directly influence the performance of delegates and other tourism staff. In this context, unethical practices by tourism agencies, such as non-payment of fees, lack of official documents, and unprofessional conduct, reflect a critical ethical failure within the tourism industry. Furthermore (Mousa et al., 2024) observe that the absence of ethical policies and strategies developed by tourism agencies to ensure the safety of their female staff provides ground for harassment and discrimination to thrive.

To better understand how ethical principles are applied in practice, it is useful to examine the Global Code of Ethics for Tourism, developed by the UN World Tourism Organization. This document outlines the responsibilities of stakeholders in the tourism industry and provides a framework for ethical conduct. The following section discusses selected principles from this code (UN Tourism, 1999).

The first paragraph states that tourism professionals are responsible for providing tourists with accurate and transparent information about their destinations, as well as travel, accommodation, and hospitality conditions. Professionals must ensure that any contractual terms offered to customers are easy to understand and clearly outline the type, cost, and quality of the services they promise, along with any financial compensation they would owe if they unilaterally breach the contract. (UN Tourism, 1999)

Tourism professionals, to the extent that they can influence it, should collaborate with public authorities to ensure the security and safety of tourists, prevent accidents, protect health, and ensure food safety, as well as establish a solid insurance system, to report to the competent authorities in accordance with national regulations, and to provide fair compensation in the case of non-performance of the obligations undertaken. (UN Tourism, 1999)

Furthermore, tourism professionals, to the extent within their control, should contribute to tourists' cultural and spiritual fulfilment and allow them to practice their religions during the trip. In collaboration with relevant professionals and associations, public authorities in both countries should ensure the availability of an appropriate repatriation mechanism for tourist organisers who go bankrupt. (UN Tourism, 1999)

In times of crisis, governments have a legitimate right to inform their citizens about difficult conditions and dangers in the destination country. This should be done without causing unnecessary prejudice to the tourism industry or the host country's operators. (UN Tourism, 1999)

The last paragraph is about the press. The tourism press should provide the public with accurate information about events that could affect tourist numbers, as well as consumers of tourism services. New technologies related to communication and e-commerce should be developed for the above purposes, and, in the same way as the press, they should not promote sex tourism in any form. (UN Tourism, 1999)

1.7.1 Ethical Challenges of Travel Agency Delegates

Travel agencies encounter several specific ethical challenges. One of the most significant issues is the below-cost tours. Although these tours may generate little or no profit at the time of sale, travel agencies often rely on additional revenue generated in the destination. This may include optional excursions, commission-based visits to local shops or restaurants, and other paid additional services offered to tourists during their stay. In this way, the initial financial loss is not usually recovered by increasing the tour's original price, but by encouraging customers to purchase additional services. According to the Czech Consumer Protection Act (No. 634/1992 Coll.), these methods constitute unfair business practices. This creates a structural problem that negatively affects the performance and quality of tour guides. This issue is important and has negative ethical implications for travel agencies.

Another significant issue facing travel agencies related to ethics is gender discrimination and sexual harassment. Mousa et al. (2024) found that female tour guides within travel agencies in Egypt experience sexual harassment from tourists and managers, and that the absence of an ethical policy within travel agencies creates a fertile ground for sexual harassment to flourish within the organisation.

Mousa et al. (2024) also found that cronyism and nepotism within travel agencies contribute to the low representation of women in leadership roles, thereby sustaining gender inequality within the organisation.

Responsible and sustainable tourism is another key ethical concern for travel agencies. (Bernardo and Pereiro, 2020) contends that many tourism operators have formed alliances with other organisations based on ethical and rational considerations related to tourism associations and institutions. However, due to varying understandings of responsible tourism practices, there are inconsistencies in ethical standards within the tourism industry.

Travel agencies must clearly communicate their ethical practices to customers and stakeholders (Bernardo and Pereiro, 2020).

The development and integration of technology and artificial intelligence into travel agency operations have raised new ethical issues. Milwood et al. (2023), for example, highlight the significant potential for ethical and bias-related problems, including data injustices, in AI within the tourism sector. However, as these researchers argue, such issues are not yet adequately addressed by the scientific community. To maintain a competitive advantage, travel agencies must move beyond merely deploying smart systems; instead, they must lead a discourse on accountability, transparency, and data justice to prevent systematic injustices from being embedded in tourism technology.

1.8 Ethical Training in Travel Agencies

The travel agency industry operates in a uniquely complex ethical environment, where employees regularly engage with diverse cultural groups, handle sensitive customer information, and navigate conflicting interests among stakeholders. Ethical training in travel agencies is not just a formality but a genuine necessity. As Treviño a Nelson (2021) explains, ethical training in business involves more than simply creating rules and regulations; it fosters

a culture where employees value the consequences of ethical behaviour in real-world situations. This point is especially relevant to travel agencies, where employees must make daily choices regarding price transparency and supplier evaluation.

The importance of ethics training in tourism businesses has been acknowledged and supported in various literature studies. Jamal (2019) argues that tourism education should not treat ethics as a minor issue, emphasising the need for greater ethical responsibility among travel agencies and tour operators. Similarly Lucia et al. (2021) suggest that integrating values-based principles, such as stewardship, professionalism, and mutuality, is essential for developing managers capable of addressing the social, cultural, and environmental challenges.

Furthermore Mousa et al. (2024) demonstrate that the lack of ethical policies and training in travel agencies creates an environment where unethical behaviour, such as sexual harassment and power abuse, can flourish. Their findings regarding female tour guides highlight a critical need to develop prospective ethical frameworks. Beyond internal conduct Bernardo and Pereiro (2020) contends that travel agencies' ethical behaviour directly influences tourism sustainability, warning that a lack of training can lead to practices such as greenwashing. Westerlaken (2025) notes that training is essential to prevent the commodification of vulnerable populations, a risk that practitioners may inadvertently promote without proper ethical guidance. These general principles of ethical training also apply to specific roles within travel agencies, particularly delegates, who operate directly in destinations.

1.8.1 Ethical Training of Delegates

Ethical training for delegates should combine destination justice, respect for local culture and diversity, responsibility, ethics of care, and environmental protection.

Delegates should be trained to provide tourists with information about culturally sensitive sites, customs, and taboos. Jamal (2019) emphasises the concept of recognition, which is defined as acknowledging and respecting cultural differences and minority groups.

Delegates can also influence environmentally responsible behaviour during trips, for example by encouraging proper waste management, respecting protected natural areas, and choosing sustainable activities (Jamal 2019).

Delegates often have significant influence over the group's behaviour, including waste management, the preservation of natural reserves, and the selection of sustainable activities (Jamal, 2019).

Ethics training offers delegates practical tools for applying ethical principles through case studies, role-play, and ethical decision-making techniques (Watts, 2020*)*.

Delegates in international travel agencies are expected to embody their organisation's values across different cultures and navigate numerous rules and regulations. Ethics training should go beyond mere compliance and focus on developing integrity, cultural sensitivity, and transparent decision-making. Foundational research indicates that ethics training for tourism industry delegates should combine moral principles with nuanced decision-making. The literature further suggests that this can be achieved by integrating moral considerations into everyday professional choices.

In this context, Hoang et al. (2023) suggest that training should focus on ensuring that delegates in the tourism industry can deal fairly and with respect for the community in the destination country. This approach ensures that interactions between tourism professionals and local hosts remain ethical and sustainable.

A strong ethics training program for delegates in international travel agencies should focus on several objectives, including:

- Alignment with values and governance standards, training turns codes of conduct into everyday practice, shaping how delegates communicate product offers, manage supplier relationships, and handle ethical concerns in negotiations.
- To develop moral reasoning and reflexivity, participants should be able to analyse their obligations to clients, hosts, and the organisation, and provide reasons for their decisions (Šalamon et al. 2016).
- Management of conflicts of interest and transparency, education on the management of conflicts of interest should be provided to the participants to avoid any influence in the selection of suppliers and the creation of the itinerary (Hoang et al., 2023).
- Workplace ethics and prevention of harassment are a crucial objective in the training, identification, and prevention of internal ethical failures, such as mobbing, bossing, sexual harassment, etc. Training must equip employees to recognise these behaviours

and provide protocols for reporting them safely, ensuring a healthy, professional organisational culture.

- Data governance and data privacy, considering the handling of customer data, the delegates should be informed about data minimisation and handling of data information (Yallop et al., 2021).
- Equity, human rights, and cultural sensitivity should be incorporated into the training, ensuring consideration of the rights of clients and hosts in various contexts and promoting fairness when interacting with people from different cultural backgrounds (Milwood et al., 2023).
- In sustainable and responsible tourism, training should include education on the importance of integrity in marketing and product development to prevent greenwashing and unfair practices in the tourism industry (Yallop et al., 2021).

Hoang et al. (2023) and Yallop et al, (2021) identify several core ethical subjects that are essential for effective training, covering both internal organisational standards and external field interactions:

- Codes of conduct and governance, overview of organisational standards and obligations,
- conflict of interest and recusal, identification, and management of conflicts of interest,
- transparency and accountability, documentation and disclosure of decisions and actions,
- responsible marketing and pricing, accurate product descriptions, and full disclosure of terms,
- cultural competence and human rights, navigating diverse cultural norms and values,
- supplier ethics and due diligence, vetting and correcting suppliers for unethical behaviour,
- data privacy and information security, handling customer data and information sharing,
- harassment and workplace ethics, policies, and best practices for creating a safe workplace,
- crisis ethics and risk management, ethical considerations in crises.

Fennell (2016) and Watts (2020) argue that to maximise engagement and moral maturity, training programs should transition from passive lecturing to active learning methods, which include:

- Case-based learning,
- role-plays and simulations,
- reflective practice,
- group discussion and peer learning,
- e-learning modules,
- mentoring and coaching

Case-based learning uses realistic scenarios from daily operations, such as overbooking dilemmas, service misrepresentation, or supplier disputes, to evaluate ethical reasoning under time pressure. Studies in professional development suggest that this format enables learners to articulate their rationale and justify decisions within constrained environments (Fennell, 2016). A library of scenarios can be developed based on common agency activities, such as pricing transparency and refund policy audits. Each of these will focus on stakeholders, ethical conflicts, and decision points. The result is that delegates can quickly recognise ethical issues and act in accordance with organisational ethical standards. For instance, a scenario involving supplier rebates for preferred placement will require delegates to manage financial disclosures and determine when recusal is necessary to ensure fair competition.

Role-plays and simulations allow delegates to gain practical experience in negotiating with suppliers, managing client complaints, and addressing ethical breaches. Research shows that these methods notably enhance ethical decision-making, communication, and accountability among participants. These exercises might include scenarios such as supplier negotiations, resolving client complaints, and handling ongoing breaches, all of which require escalation through proper channels and documentation of actions. Main outcomes of these role-plays include improved integrity during supplier negotiations, stronger adherence to customer service ethics, and stronger internal reporting processes. For example, role plays may involve situations where suppliers offer incentives, leading to immediate disclosure, formal reviews, and documentation of actions (Hoang et al., 2023).

Through reflective practice, delegates can identify personal biases and values through journals and debriefing sessions, thereby fostering ethical maturity. This process allows participants to critically analyse their decision-making and compare their personal values with those of the organisation. (Hoang et al., 2023) According to Fennell, (2016) these reflective exercises are essential for internalising ethical standards and for enabling delegates to navigate complex moral dilemmas in the field with greater self-awareness.

Exposing delegates to diverse views through group discussion and peer learning helps eliminate ethnocentrism. Group discussion on controversial cases, where participants rotate through leadership positions, assists in developing a shared ethical language and in the consistent application of ethical norms within teams (Paluck et al., 2019). For instance, the teams may engage in group discussion on culturally sensitive marketing claims (Fennell, 2016).

The application of e-learning can also be considered a scalable, modular solution for critical areas such as data privacy, anti-corruption, and environmental responsibility. Interactive tools like decision trees can be more engaging and can improve knowledge retention compared to conventional training approaches. (Šalamon et al., 2016). In addition, micro-learning tools are considered more effective at addressing internal issues such as bossing, mobbing, and sexual harassment, as well as other ethical problems in the workplace. Employees can be trained through these online tools to recognise and report unethical behaviour in a private, non-threatening manner. It is not only a solution that can be applied across international agencies, but employees also prefer it.

Mentoring and coaching involve providing experienced ethics mentors to delegates who can offer guidance, feedback, and modelling on ethical conduct. This can help delegates address complex situations, enhance the effectiveness of employees‘ ethical behaviour, and develop skills in transparent reporting and communication with stakeholders (Crane et al., 2019).

2 Methods

The aim of the diploma thesis is to propose effective training methods for employees of international travel agencies and to analyse the ethical challenges faced by delegates in such agencies.

Although, the literature provides a strong foundation in general business ethics and cultural factors, such as Hofstede's theory, this theoretical knowledge alone is not sufficient to create an effective training program for several reasons. The existing literature often overlooks the specific context of the Bulgarian tourism market, which has distinct local customs and business practices. General ethical theories do not address the grey zones and daily challenges that delegates encounter, such as interaction with a Bulgarian bus driver or hotel managers.

A mixed-methods design was selected because current literature does not offer specific insights into the ethical challenges unique to Bulgaria. The qualitative phase was crucial for identifying real-world grey zones. This provided a solid basis for the training scenarios. The follow-up quantitative phase, which included a questionnaire, confirmed these findings on a larger scale. This combination ensures that the final handbook and online training are not only theoretical but also practical tools tailored to delegates' actual needs in the destination.

The demographic profile of the respondents shows that they are mainly young people aged 18-25, who represented 76% of the sample. At the same time, respondents had only one to five years of experience in tourism. This combination is important because it suggests that ethically and emotionally demanding situations in the destination are often handled by people who are still at the beginning of their professional careers.

Delegates are expected to communicate with clients, solve complaints, cooperate with local partners, respond to emergencies, and represent the travel agency in stressful and unpredictable situations. However, young and less experienced delegates may not yet have developed the professional confidence, communication strategies, or psychological resilience needed to manage such pressure independently. As a result, they may be more vulnerable to manipulation, aggressive communication, pressure from clients or local partners, and ethically unclear situations. In this context, the 3K principle – communication, coordination and cooperation is particularly relevant (CzechTourism, 2022). Effective communication supports the regular exchange of information between delegates, clients, headquarters, and local

partners. Coordination helps ensure that activities, responsibilities and procedures are aligned in time and content, while cooperation strengthens teamwork and creates added value through shared problem-solving.

The situation is problematic because these delegates often carry a high level of responsibility despite having limited professional experience. They may be required to make quick decisions in situations involving medical problems, overbooking, conflicts with local partners, alcohol-related incidents, or pressure to sell additional services. If clear procedures and organisational support are missing, they may rely mainly on intuition rather than structured ethical decision-making. This increases the risk of inconsistent responses, stress, and potential mistakes.

For this reason, the training of young and less experienced delegates should not be limited to basic operational information. It should include practical scenarios, crisis communication, ethical decision-making, and clear reporting procedures. The demographic structure of the sample, therefore, strengthens the argument that more systematic, scenario-based training is necessary, especially for junior delegates who are professionally vulnerable and may face complex ethical challenges before they have developed sufficient experience to handle them confidently.

2.1 Research Objectives

The primary objective of this thesis is to identify the ethical issues faced by travel agency delegates in Bulgaria and to evaluate the effectiveness of current training methods. The research was conducted in three phases:

- Phase one, this phase involved semi-structured interviews with experienced delegates.
- Phase two, this phase was an online additional questionnaire distributed to a broader group of delegates, based on snowball sampling.
- Application phase, transforming the findings into a specialised online ethics training curriculum and handbook.

2.2 Selected International Travel Agencies and Their Characteristics

2.2.1 Travel Agency X

Travel agency X is one of the leading Czech travel agencies specialising in package tours to seaside destinations. The company focuses primarily on mass tourism and family beach holidays. Its portfolio is mainly oriented towards leisure tourism, summer stays and family vacations in popular Mediterranean and non-European beach destinations. The agency offers a wide range of organised services, including accommodation, transport, transfers, local assistance and delegate support at the destination.

Bulgaria represents one of the agency's important summer destinations, especially because of its seaside resorts, shorter flight distance from the Czech Republic and suitability for family-oriented holidays. In this destination, the agency offers mainly classic beach stays in hotels, often with meal plans such as all-inclusive or half board. However, Bulgaria is not the main product in the agency's portfolio; it is rather one of several significant summer destinations within its wider offer. Optional excursions may also be available, through which visitors are introduced to local culture, historical places, entertainment opportunities and nearby attractions during their stay.

Besides beach holidays, the destination also offers opportunities for short trips and optional excursions. Travellers may visit historical towns such as Nessebar and Sozopol, explore Varna, or discover natural and cultural attractions such as the Stone Forest, the Aladzha Monastery, the Ropotamo reserve or nearby aquaparks. In this way, Bulgaria is presented not only as a destination for relaxing by the sea, but also as a place suitable for family activities, sightseeing and discovering local culture.

2.2.2 Travel Agency Y

The travel agency Y is a Czech travel agency specialising in vacation and sightseeing tours to European and exotic destinations. Its offering combines relaxing beach holidays with sightseeing tours, and focuses on quality service, trusted hotels and comfortable travel arrangements. It is one of the established travel agencies on the Czech market and has a long-term standing tradition.

The agency is especially connected with Bulgaria, which has had an important place in its offer for many years. Today, it is considered the largest Czech specialist for this destination. In Bulgaria, it focuses not only on classic seaside stays, but also on well-developed services for Czech tourists, especially in popular resorts such as Primorsko. The offer includes hotels, beach holidays, local delegates and activities that make the stay more comfortable and varied.

A more specific part of its programme is the range of optional excurrsions in Bulgaria. These are focused mainly on discovering Bulgarian history, culture and nature. Travellers can visit historical towns such as Nesebar or Sozopol, explore places like Varna with its dolphinarium, or take nature trips to the Strandzha and Ropotamo reserves. The agency also offers more active experiences, for example jeep safari, boat trips, diving or visit to aquaparks. This shows that its trips are not only about relaxing by the sea, but also about getting to know the destination more deeply.

2.2.3 Travel Agency Z

Travel agency Z is one of the largest and best-known travel agencies in the Czech Republic and is part of an international group. It specialises primarily in all-inclusive beach vacations, exotic vacations, sightseeing tours, and luxury holidays. Thanks to its strong backing, it offers a wide range of tours and a high standard of service. Its product portfolio is highly diversified, is Bulgaria represents only a smaller part of its overall offer.

In Bulgaria, Travel agency Z focuses mainly on classic seaside holidays in popular resorts. Its offer usually includes hotel stays near the beach, air transport, all-inclusive or half-board meal plans, family-friendly hotels and services in the destination. Compared to agencies that specialise mainly in Bulgaria, Travel agency Z presents this destination as one of many summer holiday options rather than as its main specialisation. Optional excursions may also be available, but they are more of an additional service through which travellers are introduced to local culture, historical places and nearby attractions during their stay.

Travellers can stay mainly in seaside hotels located in popular resorts around Varna and Burgas. The offer includes destinations such as Sunny beach, Golden Sands, Albena, Obzor and so on. Many hotels are situated close to sandy beaches and are suitable for family holidays, especially because they often offer all-inclusive meals, swimming pools, children's facilities and entertainment programmes.

2.3 Phase One, Semi-structured In-depth Interviews

The first phase of the research was conducted in collaboration with travel agency X, based on personal contacts. To ensure open and honest communication, all participants requested anonymity. The first phase of the research involved conducting semi-structured interviews, a method chosen to allow a deep exploration of delegates' subjective experiences and perspectives. These interviews were conducted with three respondents who possess direct, first-hand experience operating within the Bulgarian tourism sector.

The first respondent was in Bulgaria as a delegate for the first time, and this year the delegate is returning. The second respondent was a delegate who had been working in Bulgaria since 2023. The third respondent was a delegate who had been working in Bulgaria for two summer seasons.

The discussion focused primarily on their initial training experiences, the challenges of availability, perceived stress levels, and the complexities of interacting with local Bulgarian partners, such as hotel managers and drivers.

The interview questions were created through a multi-stage process to capture the most relevant ethical issues. The first set of questions came from a preliminary discussion with a delegate who had direct experience in the destination. This helped identify key themes. To widen the scope and make sure no important areas were missed, AI-assisted brainstorming was used to improve the wording and suggest more ethical dimensions. Then, the final structure was reviewed and completed with the thesis supervisor to ensure it met academic standards and matched the research goals.

The semi-structured interviews were guided by the following questions:

1. When you first started working for a travel agency, what kind of training did you receive regarding how to behave with clients and business partners?

- Did this training cover specific “do and don’ts” or was it mostly about logistics and sales?

2. Have you had specific training on proper conduct (e.g., handling complaints, anti-harassment? In what format was it provided (online modules, in-person, or real-life case studies?

- In your daily work in Bulgaria, how often do you actually rely on what you learned? Does it feel practical, or is the reality on the ground very different?

3. Does your agency have a written set of rules, a handbook, or a "Code of Conduct" that you are required to read?

- Do you recall if it mentions global tourism standards (like UN Tourism) or sustainability?

4. What would you say is the hardest part of your job as a delegate? Besides the daily tasks, what other professional or personal difficulties do you face regularly?

- In your daily work in Bulgaria, how often do you actually rely on what you learned in training? Does it feel practical, or is the reality on the ground very different?

5. Do you feel you have a sufficient level of autonomy – meaning, can you make your own decisions about your agenda, or is everything strictly managed?

- Would you prefer more freedom (autonomy) in your work, or do you feel you need more specific instructions from the agency?

6. How would you describe the atmosphere within your team of delegates? How effectively does communication and the sharing of information work between you and your colleagues or management?

- When a problem arises, is the communication clear enough for you to know exactly what is expected of you?

7. Overall, do you feel good in your job? Do you find the work fulfilling and enjoyable?

- How much stress do you experience while performing your work, and how does your agency or team help you maintain a healthy work-life balance?

8. You work closely with local partners (such as hotel managers, drivers, or local agency owners). Have you ever encountered a situation where their approach to work, time management, or keeping agreements was very different from what is common in your home country due to local customs?

- How did you handle that? Did you feel you had to adapt to their way of doing things (e.g., be more relaxed about rules) or did you try to stick strictly to your agency's standards?

9. In tourism, it is common for partners (like restaurants, shop owners, or hotel staff) to offer gifts or commissions to delegates. What is your agency's policy on accepting these?

- It is clear what you are allowed to keep and what you must refuse?

10. Have you ever felt pressured (by a client or partner) to bend the rules or do something you felt was uncomfortable or wrong?

- Who did you turn to for help?

11. Business is often based on personal connections. Do you feel that your agency treats all local partners (hotel, transport companies) fairly, or have you noticed that some get special treatment or better deals regardless of their quality

- How does it affect your work when you have to work with a partner who was chosen because of a personal connection rather than their professional standard?

12. Sometimes local Bulgarian managers or providers can be quite dominant or demanding. Have you ever felt pressured or treated unfairly (e.g., bossed around) by a local hotel manager or a driver?

- If a local partner treats you disrespectfully or tries to micromanage your work, does your agency back you up, or are you expected to just "deal with it" to keep the business relationship going?

13. Beyond small gifts or commissions, have you ever encountered a situation where a local partner or official expected a "financial favour" or payment to solve a problem or speed things

up? How does the agency expect you to react in such cases? / Do you know how to react in such a situation?

14. If you were to design a training for new delegates coming to Bulgaria, what is the one ethical challenge or "tricky situation" you would include to prepare them for the reality here?

- Could you describe a specific example of this situation? I would like to use it as a real-life case study in my proposed training to show others how to handle it.

The primary outcome of this phase was the collection of narrative evidence on existing ethical gaps, most notably the disconnect between the standardised training provided at company headquarters and the practical realities on the ground. These insights served as the essential foundation for the subsequent development of the quantitative research instrument.

2.3 Phase Two, Additional Questionnaire

Following the initial qualitative phase, an additional questionnaire was developed to validate the preliminary findings and to determine whether the identified ethical dilemmas are universal across the Bulgarian tourism sector. By involving delegates from various other travel agencies, this phase aimed to confirm whether the situations described in the interviews were isolated incidents or systematic issues experienced by a broader range of professionals in the destination.

Following up on some of the issues brought up during the interview process, such as cultural differences, ethical problems, and the need for practical case studies, a quantitative online questionnaire was developed. The online questionnaire was available on Google Forms.

The proposed questionnaire comprises 31 questions across 6 sections. Completing the questionnaire took 10-15 minutes. The research uses a mixed-methods approach. It combines data from Likert scales and matrix questions that assess the frequency of ten specific ethical issues and the level of preparation for initial training. It also includes qualitative elements. These are illustrated by six open-ended questions that allow respondents to describe specific conflicts with local partners in detail and to suggest topics for future education. The survey also has closed-ended questions with other options and a demographic section. This structure aims to pinpoint important gaps between corporate theory and the real needs of delegates working in the destination.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the findings, specific inclusion criteria were established. The inclusion criteria required participants to have direct experience as a travel agency delegate operating specifically within the Bulgarian tourism sector. This focus ensures that the collected data reflects the destination's unique cultural and ethical environment. Exclusion criteria were applied to disqualify respondents who operated in other geographical destinations or held positions outside the tourism industry, such as hotel staff, animators, etc.

The target group for this questionnaire was determined to be 31 delegates currently or recently working in Bulgaria. The survey was designed to measure the frequency of specific ethical issues, including mobbing, bossing, favouritism, and other related issues. To encourage delegates to be honest and transparent in giving information about issues, this questionnaire was conducted electronically and anonymously.

The data collection process involved a combination of snowball sampling and direct outreach via digital platforms. Snowball sampling is a commonly used method for selecting respondents in the social sciences and in the field of management. It is also referred to as a chain-referral data. This technique is considered an effective way to reach hard-to- reach groups and is particularly suitable for research on sensitive or confidential topics, as it leverages the trust between people within their social networks. (Ting et al., 2025)

Delegates who answered the questionnaire were asked to send it to another delegate they knew. Unfortunately, only a few answered, but some delegates were unwilling to answer. The questionnaire was sent to travel agencies, with a request that they forward it to their employees. The data were collected from 18. March to 2. May.

To extend the results and have more answers, The questionnaire was translated into the Czech language and sent it again to gain more results. A total of 92 delegates were surveyed, and 31 of them completed the questionnaire in full. The response rate was 33.67%

The final questionnaire included the following questions:

Section 1

- How morally difficult do you consider the work of a delegate in Bulgaria?
- How often do you encounter or observe the following situations in your work in Bulgaria?
    - Mobbing (bullying between colleagues)

- Bossing (bullying from a superior)
- Micromanagement (excessive control of details)
- Favouritism (giving unfair professional advantages)
- Nepotism (hiring relatives/friends)
- Bribery & Corruption (requests for money/gifts)
- Conflict of Interest (personal vs. professional)
- Discrimination (based on gender, age, etc.)
- Sexual Harassment (unwanted attention/touching)
- Alcohol Misconduct (guests or local partners)

- How well did your initial ethics training prepare you to handle these situations professionally?
  - Mobbing (bullying between colleagues)
  - Bossing (bullying from a superior)
  - Micromanagement (excessive control of details)
  - Favouritism (giving unfair professional advantages)
  - Nepotism (hiring relatives/friends)
  - Bribery & Corruption (requests for money/gifts)
  - Conflict of Interest (personal vs. professional)
  - Discrimination (based on gender, age, etc.)
  - Sexual Harassment (unwanted attention/touching)
  - Alcohol Misconduct (guests or local partners)

- Are there any other ethically problematic situations you face that were not mentioned above?

Section 2: Ethical training

- Where did your initial delegate training take place?
- For how long did your initial delegate training take place?
- To what extent did the training prepare you for the specific local behaviour in Bulgaria?
- Was AI/Modern Tech ethics included in your training?

Section 3: Rules and compliance

- It is common that many delegates in Bulgaria do not strictly follow all stated rules?
- What would make you follow all the stated rules?
- How often do you feel pressured to act unethically just to keep the peace or hit sales targets?

Section 4: Workplace and safety harassment

- Did you face any form of sexual harassment during your season in Bulgaria?
- Did you face any form of mobbing during your season in Bulgaria?
- Did you face any form of bossing during your season in Bulgaria?
- Did you experience micromanagement that hindered your work?
- Did you witness or face favouritism in your workplace?
- Did you witness or face nepotism during your season in Bulgaria?
- Did you encounter or witness bribery during your operations in Bulgaria?

- Did you witness or encounter corruption within the Bulgarian tourism environment?
- Did you face a situation involving a conflict of interest?
- Did you face any form of discrimination during your season?
- If you encountered a serious ethical or social issue, did you feel the training gave you a clear protocol on how to react?

Section 5: Local Culture in Bulgaria

- Two respondents in the interview mentioned conflicts with local Bulgarian drivers and partners. How do you handle situations where a local partner's behaviour is unprofessional or aggressive?
- What is the biggest ethical challenge of working specifically in Bulgaria?
- What topics or specific scenarios should be included in future ethics training for delegates?

Section 6: Conclusion

- Ethical training would help me respond better to local challenges.
- I would like more information on cultural sensitivity and human-rights issues in the host country.
- I prefer interactive workshops with real-case studies from destination.
- What type of training do you prefer?
- If you have any additional comments about ethical challenges faced by delegates in Bulgaria, please write them below.
- What age group do you belong to?
- How many years of experience do you have in tourism?

- What is your highest reached level of education?
- What gender are you?

3 Results

This chapter presents the data collected through in-depth interviews with three delegates operating in Bulgaria, as well as the results of the questionnaire sent to other delegates operating in Bulgaria.

The results are divided into qualitative and quantitative analyses of the interview and questionnaire's topics and a descriptive overview of the shared findings.

3.1 Interview Analysis

The following tables summarise the main findings from the interviews, categorised into main thematic areas.

The first area focuses on the preparation process of delegates and the ethical standards within their organisation. As shown in Table 2 below, initial training is usually conducted at the headquarters and lasts 1 to 3 days. The content primarily focuses on model situations regarding client behaviour, psychology, and sales techniques. Regarding ethical rules, awareness varies, while some delegates have a handbook or code of conduct available, others are unaware of such documents. Global standards, such as UN Tourism, are generally not known by delegates in practice. In the area of gifts and bribery, agencies maintain a zero-tolerance policy towards cash, although small tokens of appreciation, such as coffee or free meals at hotels, are common and tolerated.

Table 2: Training, ethics and standards

Topic	Main findings	Specific observations
Ethics training	Training lasts 1 to 3 days at the agency's headquarters. Focused on logistics, sales, and behavioural models.	Respondent 3 highlighted the use of role-playing real-life case studies for complaints.
Codes of conduct	Existence is inconsistent, some have a written code, others are unaware of one.	Global standards (UN Tourism) are generally not mentioned or remembered.
Gifts and bribery	Agencies maintain a zero-tolerance policy for cash/bribery. Small gifts or hotel perks are often tolerated.	Respondents have not encountered direct bribery; they have only encountered professional perks, such as free meals.

Source: own processing

The second area analyses the daily reality in Bulgaria, which often differs significantly from theory. In Table 3 at the end of Chapter 3.1.6, delegates encounter a different local mentality characterised by a relaxed approach to time and agreements, which is particularly evident with

bus drivers. The work is described as highly stressful and responsible, requiring delegates to be available 24/7, making a work-life balance virtually impossible during peak season. Conflicts with local partners are frequent, especially for younger female delegates who face dominant or disrespectful behaviour. Intuition, empathy, and a basic knowledge of Bulgarian phrases have proven essential tools for navigating these situations and improving communication with local staff.

3.1.1 Training as Basic Preparation

One of the most consistent themes across all interviews is the perception of training as a necessary but insufficient preparation for real working conditions. All respondents described their initial training as relatively short (ranging from one to three days) and primarily focused on logistics, sales techniques, and model behavioural situations.

Although training included practical elements such as case studies or role-playing, its applicability in real-life situations was perceived as limited. Respondents consistently emphasised that the reality of working in Bulgaria differs significantly from what is presented during training. For instance, one respondent stated that *"the reality is usually different, it's not as easy as it sounds"*. Similarly, another respondent pointed out that *"not so much information from training is reliable to reality"*. This perception was further reinforced by a third respondent, who explained that *"the training taught me the basics, but handling real situations in Bulgaria is something I learned much more on location"*.

These statements indicate a clear consensus that training primarily serves as an introductory framework rather than a comprehensive preparation tool. While it provides delegates with basic guidelines and theoretical knowledge, the development of practical skills occurs predominantly through direct experience in the destination. At the same time, respondents acknowledged the value of interactive elements in training, such as practising complaint handling through role-play, which suggests that experiential learning methods may be particularly effective.

3.1.2 Diverging Perceptions of Stress and Job Satisfaction

A particularly significant finding of this analysis is the divergence in how respondents perceive the level of stress associated with the job. Despite operating in similar conditions, respondents described their experiences in markedly different ways.

On one hand, the role is perceived as highly demanding and stressful. One respondent described the position as *"very stressful and responsible"* and highlighted the constant need for availability, stating that they are *"on the phone all the time, 24/7"* This perspective is supported by another respondent, who reported that *"the stress level was quite high"* and that *"work-life balance is virtually non-existent, you are 'on' almost 24/7"*. These statements reflect the intensity of the role, particularly during peak tourist seasons, when delegates must manage multiple responsibilities simultaneously while remaining accessible to clients at all times.

On the other hand, a contrasting perspective emerges from the third respondent, who described the job in a predominantly positive light. This respondent stated that *"I love my job and find it very fulfilling"* and added that they *"don't really experience stress"* in most situations.

This contrast is analytically important, as it suggests that stress is not solely determined by external working conditions but is also influenced by individual perception, personal resilience, and coping strategies. It may also reflect differences in team dynamics, management support, or prior experience. In this sense, the same working environment can be interpreted either as highly stressful or as stimulating and rewarding, depending on the individual.

3.1.3 Ethical Awareness and Organisational Inconsistency

The analysis further reveals inconsistencies in the area of ethical awareness and formal guidelines. While ethical standards are an important aspect of tourism operations, their communication and implementation appear to vary across organisations.

One respondent confirmed the existence of a code of conduct within their agency, whereas another explicitly stated that such a document is not present in their organisation. A third respondent mentioned receiving a handbook prior to training but noted that it was *"not required to read but highly recommended"*.

This inconsistency suggests a lack of standardisation in how ethical principles are communicated and enforced. Furthermore, none of the respondents demonstrated clear awareness of global tourism standards, such as those associated with international

organisations. This indicates that such frameworks are not actively integrated into everyday practice, and their relevance may remain largely theoretical.

3.1.4 Formal Rules and Informal Practices

A similar discrepancy can be observed in the areas of gifts and bribery. All respondents agreed that their agencies maintain a strict zero-tolerance policy towards bribery, particularly in relation to cash payments. For example, one respondent clearly stated that *"the agency has a strict policy no cash commissions"*.

However, respondents also acknowledged that certain informal practices are tolerated. These include small non-monetary benefits such as meals or access to hotel services. One respondent described that *"we can eat for free at the hotel, use the hotel's services"*, while another noted that *"small gifts like coffee were generally tolerated"*. Interestingly, not all respondents were fully aware of the official rules, as one participant admitted uncertainty regarding the agency's policy.

These findings point to the existence of a grey zone between formal ethical rules and everyday operational practices. While certain behaviours are officially prohibited, others are informally accepted, which may create ambiguity in decision-making and ethical judgement.

3.1.5 Intercultural Differences and Workplace Dynamics

Another important theme emerging from the analysis is the impact of intercultural differences on daily work. All respondents identified differences in work mentality, particularly in relation to time management and adherence to agreements.

For example, one respondent described how local partners, especially drivers, may prioritise personal activities, stating that *"drivers would often prioritise finishing a cigarette or coffee overloading luggage immediately"*. Similarly, another respondent observed that *"locals often act like they have all the time in the world"*.

However, the extent to which these differences lead to conflict varies. While some respondents described these situations as manageable and part of the local culture, others reported more

challenging interactions. One respondent highlighted experience with dominant behaviour from older local partners, noting that they may *"dismiss younger foreign representatives"*.

These findings suggest that intercultural differences are not only about differing work habits but may also involve power dynamics influenced by age, nationality, or gender. Successfully navigating these situations requires both cultural sensitivity and assertiveness.

3.1.6 Importance of Soft Skills

Across all interviews, there is a strong emphasis on the importance of soft skills in managing daily challenges. Respondents repeatedly highlighted the need for empathy, communication skills, and the ability to make quick decisions in unpredictable situations.

One respondent explicitly stated that *"for some situations we have to use our empathy for the client and our intuition"* while another emphasised the importance of relationship-building, explaining that *"once we had relationship, they respected my timelines"*.

In addition, practical competencies such as basic knowledge of the local language were identified as valuable tools that facilitate communication and reduce misunderstandings.

The interviews established a foundation for the development of the questionnaire. They identified main themes, ethical dilemmas, and the inconsistencies between training and on-the-job realities were identified. Participants highlighted issues such as conflicts with clients and local collaborators, ethical boundaries that were not clear enough, and different perceptions of stress. These scenarios were then translated into structured questionnaire questions covering topics such as mobbing, bribery, discrimination and so on.

The interviews also revealed inconsistencies in ethical awareness and the limited practical applicability of the training. This led to questions being included to evaluate the effectiveness of the training and compliance with the rules. Additionally, the importance of intercultural differences and soft skills influenced the inclusion of questions related to local culture and preferred training methods. Overall, the interviews enabled qualitative findings to be converted into measurable variables, thereby strengthening the research design.

Table 3: Destination reality and culture shock

Topic	Main findings	Specific observations
Local mentality	Significant differences in time management and response speed compared to the home country	Drivers often prioritise coffee/cigarettes over immediate task completion
Stress and autonomy	High stress levels due to being available for customers 24/7	Autonomy is high for daily tasks but strictly limited by flight or transfer schedules.
Communication	Reliance on WhatsApp groups between colleagues' delegates and local chiefs for support	Language barriers are a major issue, basic Bulgarian is essential for coordinating with locals.

Source: own processing

3.2 Questionnaire Results

The questionnaire survey was conducted among delegates with experience in the Bulgarian tourism sector. It focused on respondents' demographic characteristics, their initial training, the frequency of selected ethical issues, and their perceived preparedness to handle these situations. The results are presented primarily through descriptive statistics and cross-tabulations, which help identify the main ethical challenges delegates face and the areas where further training may be needed.

Table 4: Mobbing experience by years of experience in tourism

Number of respondents	Mobbing experience			
Years of experience	**No, I have not experienced this**	**Prefer not to say**	**Yes, I did**	**Total**
less than 1 year	2	1		3
1-5 years	13	2	2	17
6-10 years	2	3	2	7
11-20 years	1		1	2
21+ years	1	1		2
Total	**19**	**7**	**5**	**31**

Source: own processing

Table 4 shows whether delegates experienced mobbing during their season in Bulgaria, by years of tourism experience. The majority of delegates had not experienced mobbing, while five respondents reported such an experience. Seven respondents preferred not to answer this question. The results suggest that mobbing was reported across different levels of professional experience, although most respondents with one to five years of experience did not report experiencing it.

Table 5: Relationship between mobbing frequency and preparedness

Count	Preparedness				
Mobbing frequency	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**Total**
1	2	1	2	1	6
2	1	1	5		7
3	6	4	3		13
4	3	1			4
5	1				1
Total	**13**	**7**	**10**	**1**	**31**

Source: own processing

Table 5 presents the relationship between mobbing frequency and delegates' perceived preparedness. The results show that mobbing is encountered at a relatively low to moderate level, with the highest number of respondents reporting frequency level 3. Preparedness also varies among respondents, but the results are mainly concentrated in the lower to medium categories. Overall, the table suggests that although mobbing is not reported as highly frequent, delegates do not feel fully prepared to handle such situations.

Table 6: Bossing experience by years of experience in tourism

Number of respondents	Bossing experience			
Years of experience	**No, I have not experienced this**	**Prefer not to say**	**Yes, I did**	**Total**
less than 1 year	3			3
1-5 years	12	1	4	17
6-10 years	2	1	4	7
11-20 years		1	1	2
21+ years	1	1		2
Total	**18**	**4**	**9**	**31**

Source: own processing

Table 6 shows whether delegates experienced bossing during their season in Bulgaria, by years of tourism experience. The majority of respondents stated that they had not experienced bossing, while nine respondents reported such experience. Four delegates preferred not to answer. The results suggest that bossing was reported mainly by delegates with one to ten years of experience, while respondents with less than one year of experience did not report experiencing it.

Table 7: Relationship between bossing frequency and preparedness

Count	Preparedness					
Bossing frequency	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**Total**
1	3	2	5	1	1	12
2	3	4	2	3		12
3	1	2	2			5
4	1	1				2
Total	**8**	**9**	**9**	**4**	**1**	**31**

Source: own processing

Table 7 presents the relationship between the frequency of bossing and the perceived level of preparedness among delegates. The results show that bossing was mostly reported at lower frequency levels, especially levels 1 and 2. Preparedness varies across respondents, but most answers are concentrated between 1 and 3, suggesting that delegates do not feel highly prepared to deal with this issue. Overall, the findings indicate that although bossing is not reported as highly frequent, preparedness to handle such situations remains limited.

Table 8: Micromanagement experience by years of experience in tourism

Count	Micromanagement experience				
Years of experience	**No, I have not experienced this**	**Prefer not to say**	**Yes, from my direct supervisor**	**Yes, from the company headquarters**	**Total**
less than 1 year	2		1		3
1-5 years	12		4	1	17
6-10 years	3		3	1	7
11-20 years	1		1		2
21+ years	1	1			2
Total	**19**	**1**	**9**	**2**	**31**

Source: own processing

The data in Table 8 show whether delegates experienced micromanagement during their season in Bulgaria, by years of tourism experience. The majority of delegates reported that micromanagement had not been encountered, while 11 respondents indicated experiencing it from their direct supervisor or from company headquarters. It is suggested by the findings that micromanagement was most frequently reported by delegates with one to ten years of experience. Overall, although this issue was not reported by most respondents, micromanagement is still considered to represent a relevant workplace concern for a noticeable part of the sample.

Table 9: Relationship between micromanagement frequency and preparedness

Count	Preparedness					
Micromanagement frequency	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**Total**
1		3	2	2	1	8
2	6	2	4			12
3		4	1	2		7
4	2	1	1			4
Total	**8**	**10**	**8**	**4**	**1**	**31**

Source: own processing

Table 9 presents the relationship between the frequency of micromanagement and the perceived level of preparedness among delegates. It is shown that micromanagement is mostly reported at lower to moderate frequency levels, especially levels 1 and 2. Preparedness is mainly concentrated between levels 1 and 3, with only a small number of respondents reporting higher preparedness levels. Overall, it is suggested that while micromanagement is not reported as highly frequent, delegates' Preparedness to handle such situations remains limited.

Table 10: Favouritism experience by years of experience in tourism

Number of respondents	Favouritism experience				
Years of experience	**No, I have not experienced this**	**Prefer not to say**	**Yes, from the management/HQ**	**Yes, within the delegate team**	**Total**
less than 1 year	2			1	3
1-5 years	7	1	2	7	17
6-10 years	3	1	1	2	7
11-20 years				2	2
21+ years	1		1		2
Total	**13**	**2**	**4**	**12**	**31**

Source: own processing

The data in Table 10 illustrates the occurrence of favouritism among delegates in relation to their years of experience in tourism. The results indicate that favouritism was reported by a noticeable number of respondents, especially within the delegate team between colleagues. In total, twelve respondents experienced favouritism within the delegate team, while four respondents reported favouritism from management or headquarters. The findings suggest that favouritism was most frequently reported by delegates with one to five years of experience.

Table 11: Relationship between favouritism frequency and preparedness

Count	Preparedness					
Favouritism frequency	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**Total**
1	3	3		2	1	9
2	3	5	2	1		11
3	2		1	1		4
4	3		3			6
5	1					1
Total	**12**	**8**	**6**	**4**	**1**	**31**

Source: Own processing

The results presented in Table 11 examine the relationship between favouritism frequency and delegates' perceived preparedness to deal with such situations. Favouritism was mostly reported at lower frequency levels, particularly levels 1 and 2. Preparedness was mainly concentrated in the lower categories, especially level 1, with only a small number of respondents reporting higher levels of preparedness. Overall, the findings suggest that although favouritism is not reported as highly frequent, delegates' preparedness to handle such situations remains limited.

Table 12: Nepotism experience by years of experience in tourism

Number of respondents	Nepotism experience					
Years of experience	**No, I have not experienced this**	**Prefer not to say**	**Yes, from the management/HQ**	**Yes, within the delegate team (between colleagues)**	**Yes, within the delegate team (colleagues being relatives)**	**Total**
less than 1 year	1		1		1	3
1-5 years	12	1	2	1	1	17
6-10 years	2	1	1	1	2	7
11-20 years				1	1	2
21+ years	1	1				2
Total	**16**	**3**	**4**	**3**	**5**	**31**

Source: Own processing

The findings in Table 12 provide an overview of nepotism-related experiences among delegates with different lengths of professional experience in tourism. More than half of the respondents stated that they had not experienced nepotism during their season in Bulgaria. However, several respondents reported nepotism within the delegate team, within the wider team, or from management and headquarters. The results suggest that nepotism was mentioned across different experience groups, but it was most visible among delegates with one to five years of experience.

Table 13: Relationship between favouritism frequency and preparedness

Count	Preparedness					
Nepotism frequency	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**Total**
1	1	3	1	3	1	9
2	4	1	2			7
3	5	3	2	2		12
4	1	1	1			3
Total	**11**	**8**	**6**	**5**	**1**	**31**

Source: Own processing

Table 13 examines how frequently delegates encountered nepotism and how prepared they felt to deal with such situations. The data show that nepotism was mostly reported at lower to moderate frequency levels, especially levels 1 and 3. Preparedness scores were mainly concentrated in the lower categories, particularly levels 1 and 2. This indicates that although nepotism was not perceived as extremely frequent, delegates' preparedness to manage this type of workplace issue remained rather limited.

Table 14: Bribery experience by years of experience in tourism

Number of respondents	Bribery experience				
Years of experience	**No, I have not experienced this**	**Prefer not to say**	**Yes, involving local authorities (e.g., police, inspectors)**	**Yes, involving local partners (e.g., hotel staff, transport companies)**	**Total**
less than 1 year	2			1	3
1-5 years	9		3	5	17
6-10 years	3	2	1	1	7
11-20 years	1			1	2
21+ years	2				2
Total	**17**	**2**	**4**	**8**	**31**

Source: Own processing

Table 14 focuses on delegates' experience with bribery in relation to their length of professional experience in tourism. Most respondents stated that they had not experienced bribery during their season in Bulgaria. However, several delegates reported bribery involving local partners, such as hotel staff or transport companies, while a smaller number mentioned local authorities. The results indicate that bribery was reported across several experience groups, particularly among delegates with one to five years of experience.

Table 15: Corruption experience by years of experience in tourism

Number of respondents	Corruption experience			
Years of experience	**No, I have not experienced this**	**Prefer not to say**	**Yes, on a business/management level**	**Total**
less than 1 year	3			3
1-5 years	13		4	17
6-10 years	4	1	2	7
11-20 years	1		1	2
21+ years	1		1	2
Total	**22**	**1**	**8**	**31**

Source: Own processing

The data in Table 15 provide an overview of corruption-related experiences among delegates with varying levels of tourism experience. A clear majority of respondents reported that they had not experienced corruption during their season. Nevertheless, eight delegates indicated corruption on a business or management level, which shows that this issue was still present in the sample. These responses were most common among delegates with one to ten years.

Table 16: Relationship between bribery and corruption frequency and preparedness

Count	Preparedness					
Bribery and Corruption	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**Total**
1	2	2	3	5	1	13
2	4	4	5			13
3		1	2		1	4
4	1					1
Total	**7**	**7**	**10**	**5**	**2**	**31**

Source: Own processing

Table 16 examines how frequently delegates encountered bribery and corruption and how prepared they felt to respond to such situations. The results show that bribery and corruption were mostly reported at lower frequency levels, especially levels 1 and 2. Preparedness scores were mainly concentrated in the middle categories, particularly level 3. This suggests that although bribery and corruption were not reported as highly frequent, delegates' preparedness to deal with these situations was only moderate.

Table 17: Discrimination experience by years of experience in tourism

Number of respondents	Discrimination experience					
Years of experience	**No, I have not experienced this**	**Prefer not to say**	**Yes, from colleagues/management**	**Yes, from guests/tourists**	**Yes, from local partners**	**Total**
less than 1 year	3					3
1-5 years	9	1	5		2	17
6-10 years	3	1	1	1	1	7
11-20 years	1			1		2
21+ years	2					2
Total	**18**	**2**	**6**	**2**	**3**	**31**

Source: Own processing

In Table 17, discrimination-related experiences are presented according to respondents' years of experience in tourism. It can be observed that discrimination was not reported by the majority of respondents. However, several cases were identified, particularly from colleagues or management, while fewer respondents mentioned discrimination from guests, tourists, or local partners. Overall, discrimination appears to have been experienced mainly by delegates with one to five years of experience, although it was also reported in other experience groups.

Table 18: Discrimination experience by years of experience in tourism
Discrimination experience by years of experience in tourism

Count	Preparedness					
Discrimination frequency	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**Total**
1	2	7		4	1	14
2	2	3	1	2		8
3		1	3	1		5
4		2	1		1	4
Total	**4**	**13**	**5**	**7**	**2**	**31**

Source: Own processing

In Table 18, the relationship between discrimination frequency and perceived preparedness is examined. Discrimination was most often reported at the lowest frequency levels, especially levels 1 and 2. Preparedness scores were distributed across several categories, with the largest number of responses recorded at level 2. This indicates that although discrimination was generally not perceived as highly frequent, preparedness to respond to such situations was not consistently high. This finding is also supported by one open-ended response, in which discrimination based on insufficient knowledge of the Bulgarian language was mentioned.

Table 19: Sexual harassment experience by years of experience, age group and gender

Number of respondents			Sexual Harassment experience				
Years of experience	**Age group**	**Gender**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**Total**
less than 1 year	18-25	Female	1		1		2
		Male		1			1
1-5 years	18-25	Female	4	2	2		8
		Male	2	1	1		4
		Prefer not to say		1			1
	26-30	Female	2	1			3
	31-40	Female	1				1
6-10 years	18-25	Female			1		1
		Male		1			1
	26-30	Female		1			1
		Male			1	1	2
	41+	Female	1				1
		Male		1			1
11-20 years	31-40	Male		1			1
	41+	Female	1				1
21+ years	41+	Female	1				1
		Prefer not to say		1			1
Total			**13**	**11**	**6**	**1**	**31**

Source: Own processing

Table 19 provides a detailed descriptive overview of sexual harassment experience according to years of experience in tourism, age group, and gender. The results show that most respondents were concentrated in the group with one to five years of experience, particularly in the 18–25 age category. Reported experiences of sexual harassment appeared across several demographic groups, although some subgroups included only one or two respondents. For this reason, the table should be interpreted with caution and used mainly to illustrate the distribution of responses rather than to confirm a strong relationship between demographic characteristics and sexual harassment experience. The numbers 1-4 represent the response categories related to sexual harassment experience.

Table 20: Relationship between sexual harassment frequency and preparedness

Count	Preparedness					
Sexual Harassment frequency	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**Total**
1	1	5	3	2	2	13
2	3	4	2	2		11
3		4		2		6
4					1	1
Total	**4**	**13**	**5**	**6**	**3**	**31**

Source: Own processing

The data presented in Table 20 provide an overview of how frequently sexual harassment was encountered or observed and how prepared delegates felt to respond to such situations. Sexual harassment was most often reported at lower frequency levels, particularly levels 1 and 2. Preparedness scores were distributer mainly between levels 2 and 4, while only a small number of respondents selected the highest level of preparedness. The results suggest that although sexual harassment was not reported as highly frequent, preparedness to handle such situations was not consistently strong among respondents.

Table 21: Relationship between alcohol misconduct frequency and preparedness

Count	Preparedness					
Alcohol Misconduct frequency	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**Total**
1	1	3	2	3	3	12
2	2	4	2	1		9
3	1	2	2	2		7
4		1	1		1	3
Total	**4**	**10**	**7**	**6**	**4**	**31**

Source: Own processing

The data in Table 21 present the relationship between alcohol misconduct frequency and delegates perceived preparedness to respond to such situations. Alcohol misconduct was reported across all frequency levels, with most responses appearing at levels 1 and 2. Preparedness scores were spread across several categories, particularly levels 2 and, which suggests that respondents' confidence in handling alcohol-related situations was mixed. This issue was also reflected in the open-ended responses, were several respondents mentioned alcohol abuse by tourists, drunk tourists, or handling alcohol as one of the main challenges of working in Bulgaria. The findings indicate that alcohol-related misconduct represents a relevant practical challenge for delegates and should be considered in future ethics training, especially in relationship to conflict management and appropriate professional responses.

Analysis of open-ended questionnaire responses and interview data revealed several recurring themes related to the ethical challenges faced by delegates in Bulgaria. One of the most

frequently mentioned issues was the pressure to sell trips that did not fully meet client expectations. Respondents also highlighted difficulties relating to aggressive behaviour from local partners and tourists, as well as communication challenges, particularly due to language barriers and differing cultural expectations.

Another significant theme was the handling of alcohol abuse among tourists, which respondents described as a frequent source of ethically complex situations. Additionally, the respondent pointed to conflicts arising from cultural differences, where the expectations of Czech clients often did not align with local practice in Bulgaria. Less frequently mentioned, but still relevant, issues included corruption, nepotism and inappropriate behaviour, such as sexual harassment.

When asked about future training needs, respondents emphasised the importance of practical guidance in managing real-life situations, such as dealing with aggressive clients, communicating difficult information, such as overbooking or delays, and resolving conflicts with local partners. Several respondents also emphasised the need for clearer procedures in crisis situations, including medical emergencies. The findings suggest that delegates require scenario-based training that focuses on communication, conflict resolution, and ethical decision-making in complex and unpredictable environments.

In addition to the predefined options, respondents were given the opportunity to mention any other situations that they considered to be ethically problematic. While most respondents did not identify any additional issues, several recurring themes did emerge. These included language barriers, particularly when communicating with local partners, and situations involving discrimination due to a lack of knowledge of the Bulgarian language. Some respondents' responses also reflected differing perceptions of ethical standards, suggesting that certain behaviours may become normalised depending on the cultural context. While these responses were less common, they offer valuable insight into challenges that structured questions do not fully capture. Based on these findings, basic Bulgarian phrases and vocabulary were included in the handbook to support more effective communication and help delegates navigate everyday situations in the destination.

Cultural differences were included in both the handbook and the online training to help delegates better navigate the differences between Bulgaria and their home country. The handbook can also be adapted for use by other travel agencies by adjusting the cultural context.

The questionnaire responses also revealed several limitations of ethical training. This included time and logistical constraints, lack of engagement, organisational barriers, local mentality and cultural differences, the gap between theory and practice, lack of specific scenarios, individual differences, and the absence of continuous training. In addition, some respondents indicated that they did not have a clear protocol for dealing with serious ethical or social issues and often relied on financial pressure, and the short-term and inconsistent nature of initial training were also identified as factors that may reduce delegates' ability to respond confidently and professionally in practice.

4 Summary of Ethical Challenges and Training Needs for Delegates

The analytical part of this thesis is based on three interviews and a questionnaire survey conducted among delegates operating in Bulgaria. The findings highlight a significant gap between initial general training and the reality of the Bulgarian tourism sector. The results of the investigation point to a crucial difference between the theoretical training of delegates at headquarters and the dynamic, often ethically challenging reality directly at the destination. This chapter analyses the identified problems and defines why the current training system is insufficient for the needs of modern tourism in Bulgaria.

The research also indicates differences between more experienced and less experienced delegates. Experienced delegates often seem to rely on professional practice and previously developed coping strategies when dealing with complex ethical issues. In contrast, less experienced delegates may be more dependent on trial and error, especially when clear procedures are missing. For these respondents, the lack of practical ethical preparation may contribute to uncertainty and professional stress. This highlights two important needs, practical training based on real-life scenarios and the sharing of experience between senior and junior delegates. To support junior delegates and help them feel more confident at the destination, the proposed solution also includes a practical handbook as a reference tool, as well as online training materials that remain available after the initial training.

Figure 3: Ethical issues facing delegates in Bulgaria
Source: own processing

Figure 3 presents the main ethical issues delegates face in Bulgaria. The size of each bubble reflects the overall reported occurrence of the issue, calculated as the sum of respondents' frequency scores. The largest bubbles represent favouritism, nepotism, and micromanagement, which were among the most frequently reported issues. Other relevant areas included alcohol misconduct, mobbing, conflict of interest, and discrimination. The figure shows that ethical challenges in the destination are not limited to a single problem but encompass both internal workplace issues and those related to clients, local partners, and the destination environment.

The research revealed several areas that delegates perceived as most problematic. These points formed the basis for the subsequent design of the training module. The largest group of respondents received training at headquarters. According to the questionnaire result, the training most often lasted only one day, which appears insufficient for an in-depth understanding of ethical standards and local specifics.

4.1.1 The Gap between Theory and Bulgarian Reality

When asked to what extent the training had prepared delegates for specific behaviours in Bulgaria, respondents rated their preparedness with an average score of 3.1 out of 5. This result suggests that standard corporate training only partially prepares delegates for the local cultural and professional context. The main finding is that 61.3 % of delegates stated, "*I had only a vague idea of how to respond and acted mostly intuitively*." Only four of thirty-one felt they had a clear protocol.

One respondent said that there was "No need to be so sensitive" and compared the situation in Bulgaria to that in Muslim countries, where it is supposedly "ten times worse". This comment suggests that, as long as a worse situation exists elsewhere, ethical failures in the current location should be ignored or tolerated. From a management perspective, this attitude may be problematic because it normalises misconduct and discourages younger delegates from reporting harassment or corruption for fear of being labelled too sensitive.

4.2 The Main Problem Areas Identified by the Research

The analysis of respondents' open-ended answers and attitudes enabled the identification of several main areas connected to ethical challenges in Bulgaria.

4.2.1. Conflicts with Local Partners and Aggressive Communication

One of the strongest themes was the aggressive communication from local partners, for example, bus drivers and hotel managers. One respondent stated the biggest challenge: "*When someone shouts at you on the phone. You can't just hang up on them, but they don't listen to your explanation."* A feeling of lack of support compounds this emotional burden. When asked, several respondents indicated that stronger support and protection from the travel agency would help them follow stated rules more consistently in conflicts with local partners. Delegates currently feel forced to make unethical compromises to maintain business relationships, even at the cost of violating their own standards.

4.2.2 Medical Crises and Procedural Uncertainty

The research revealed uncertainty regarding acute medical emergencies. The quote from one of the respondents, "Medical problems, I didn't know what to do exactly," in combination with other answers, shows that delegates may lack confidence in crisis management. The absence of a clear procedure for who to call first, how to communicate with the hospital, and how to handle refusal of care creates enormous ethical pressure when delegates feel responsible for the client's life but lack the competence to act.

4.2.3 Sales Pressure

A significant proportion of respondents, 80.6%, reported moderate to strong pressure to act unethically to meet sales targets or keep the peace. One of the respondents mentioned the difficulty of telling the truth in situations such as overbooking: *"How do you tell clients the truth that, due to overbooking, they have to go to a different hotel…*" This conflict between loyalty to the company and honesty toward the client is a primary source of professional stress.

4.2.4 Assessment of Internal Ethics Readiness

The data revealed a disparity between the actual frequency of ethical incidents in the field and the level of preparedness provided to delegates by the current training system. This discrepancy is most evident in internal company relations, specifically in bossing and micromanagement. Although respondents reported encountering these forms of pressure relatively often, their subjective sense of preparedness for such situations was rated at the lowest possible level in the questionnaire, which appears insufficient.

A similarly critical situation exists regarding favouritism and nepotism. Favouritism was reported by more than half of respondents, while nepotism was reported by a smaller but still relevant part of the sample. However, in both cases, preparedness ratings were mainly concentrated in the lower categories, particularly levels 1 and 2.

The issue of bribery and corruption represents a specific category. While a smaller proportion of respondents encountered direct demands for illegal payments, those who did faced corrupt behaviour by local authorities or the police and described their feelings as absolute helplessness. These findings clearly demonstrate that current educational modules focus

primarily on ideal operational states but completely neglect complex or non-standard situations, and do not sufficiently address complex or non-standard situations, which nonetheless have a fundamental impact on the psychological integrity and professional stability of delegates at the destination.

4.3 Proposed Solution

The analysis clearly confirms that the current training system does not sufficiently prepare delegates for ethical, cultural, and crisis-related issues in Bulgaria. The findings show that 64.5 % of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that interactive workshops with real-case studies from the destination would be a preferred form of training.

Based on these findings, a three-phase training model is proposed. The model consists of an in-person workshop at headquarters, a practical handbook, and a follow-up online training module. This structure was designed to address the main limitations identified in the research, particularly the lack of practical scenarios, the absence of clear procedures, and limited preparation for destination-specific challenges.

Phase 1: **Workshop at Headquarters**

The training should begin with an in-person workshop at the headquarters. This phase provides delegates with a structured introduction to ethical challenges, organisational expectations, and real-life scenarios. It also allows for discussion, clarification and guided interpretation of complex situations.

Phase 2: **The Handbook** directly addresses the problem of acting on intuition. By providing the delegate with clear procedures for medical emergencies and crisis scenarios, as well as for ethical problems and cultural differences, the risk of errors in the first minutes of an incident is reduced. The handbook is designed as a supportive tool introduced during the training process, where its content is properly explained. Delegates are encouraged to revisit it after training as a practical reference guide. Delegates can ask follow-up questions even during the training itself or later in practice, which supports continuous learning and reduces uncertainty when facing real-life situations.

Phase 3: **Online Training**.

The final phase consists of an online training module that will be delivered after the initial training. To revise what delegates have learned during the training. Online training uses data from questionnaire and interviews, such as those on driver aggression, overbooking, and corruption, to create simulated situations. The delegate gets to practice what it is like to face an aggressive Bulgarian before even leaving the Czech Republic.

5 Proposed Solution

Based on the completed interviews and additional questionnaire, the following steps are proposed to ensure effective ethics training. The goal is for every delegate completing this programme to know exactly how to proceed in specific situations, including ethical challenges and interpersonal dynamics such as bossing, mobbing, or cultural conflicts, faced by staff operating in the Bulgarian tourism sector. The proposed solution consists of three interconnected phases.

5.1 Phase 1: Workshop at Headquarters

As a first step, it is recommended to begin the ethical training at the company's headquarters. This immediate personal interaction is important for establishing a safe environment in which complex ethical expectations can be introduced without overwhelming participants. Personal interaction also allows trainers to clarify any questions raised by delegates and address potential misunderstandings. Trainers can also revisit the scenarios with delegates, provide additional explanations, or review entire sections if needed. This hands-on experience and immediate feedback are essential for ensuring that delegates feel more confident when handling ethically challenging situations. To ensure the quality of the workshops, the sessions should be led by a multidisciplinary team. This team should include an external specialist focusing on psychology and diversity, together with the company's most senior delegate, who can provide practical on-the-ground insights and mentoring.

5.2 Phase 2: Handbook

As a second step, it is recommended to give delegates printed or electronic handbooks during the training at the headquarters. These materials should contain detailed descriptions of ethically problematic situations delegates may encounter in the field. The handbook serves as a theoretical foundation and a quick reference guide.

The primary focus of this handbook is to provide clear action plans for various scenarios. Rather than complex legal analysis, the manual offers straightforward instructions, such as identifying the correct manager to contact or following a basic reporting chain when an issue arises. By standardising these responses, the handbook ensures that even under pressure,

delegates can quickly find a solution or a point of contact, such as a designated ethics officer or a direct supervisor. This practical approach minimises confusion and ensures that ethical issues are communicated to the management immediately and through the proper channels. The design prioritises clarity and quickness through visual elements and concise bullet points, so that the handbook remains effective even in time-sensitive situations at the destination.

5.3 Phase 3: Online Training

After distributing the handbooks, the final step is to implement an interactive online course. As a practical output of this phase, an online training module titled *Business ethics training for delegates* was created. The module serves as a supplementary tool to the handbook and allows delegates to review the theory at their own pace and test their basic understanding of ethical principles through review questions.

This digital stage is designed to be time-efficient while maintaining high engagement through practical, decision-based scenarios. Instead of passive learning, delegates are presented with real-life dilemmas, such as responding to aggressive communication from local partners, dealing with overbooking, or deciding how to react in ethically unclear situations under time pressure. A significant advantage of this phase is management's ability to monitor progress and identify common areas where delegates struggle.

5.4. Economic Assessment of the Proposed Solution

The economic assessment is based on a general estimate and does not refer to any travel agency. Its purpose is to provide a universal approximation applicable to the travel agency sector.

When implementing a three-phase training program, it is necessary to account for both direct costs, such as materials and instructors, and indirect costs, such as opportunity costs and participants' labour costs. The calculation below represents a rough estimate of the cost per participant for a group of ten delegates. The preparatory phase includes adapting training materials and ethical scenarios to the specific conditions of the Bulgarian tourism market. This activity is included in the external specialist fee, estimated at EUR 1,440. The amount covers the preparation of destination–specific case studies, methodological support, and diversity management. Although the head delegate may participate in the training process, an external

specialist is recommended to provide a professional explanation of sensitive topics and practical guidance to delegates.

The handbook price is determined by the total number of 28 pages and the printing costs. The workshop is designed to take place directly at the travel agency headquarters to utilise existing internal infrastructure, meaning no rental fees are incurred, and only refreshments are budgeted. The external instructor fee covers a specialist in ethics, psychology and diversity management. The price reflects a five-hour session, including the preparation of destination-specific case studies for the Bulgarian market. The head of delegates will likely handle the ethics training, but it would be good to hire a specialist to explain all the information directly to the delegates.

The most significant item reflects the delegate's gross salary, including mandatory social and health insurance contributions. In accordance with Section 230 of the Czech Labour Code (Act No. 262/2006 Coll.), such professional training is considered work, meaning participants are entitled to their standard wage for the duration of the program. This covers approximately 15 hours of the employee's time dedicated to the entire program, including at least 10 hours of self-study via the handbook and online testing, and 5 hours in the practical workshop.

Table 22: Estimated cost per 10 delegates in EUR

Item	Category	Description	Estimated price (EUR)
Handbook	Direct cost	Printing 10 x 28 pages (Anon., [n. d.])	52
Workshop	Direct cost	light refreshments	130
External instructor	Direct cost	Ethics management specialist, psychology specialist	1440
Internal instructor	Direct costs	Head delegate	80
Labour costs	Indirect cost	Delegate's gross salary (5h)	350
Contingency fund	Reserve	10 % for unforeseen expenses	228
Total		**Estimated costs per 10 delegates**	**2 288**
Total		**Estimated costs for delegates**	**228, 80**

Source: own processing

Compared to commercially available training courses for delegates, which typically cost between € 196 and € 276 per person, the proposed program does not represent a significant cost saving, as its estimated cost is € 228.80 per participant. However, it remains within the usual market price range. Its main advantage lies in its customised content, destination-specific focus, and direct relevance to the ethical risks delegates face in the Bulgarian tourism sector.

To ensure maximum efficiency and an intensive learning environment, the program is designed for a group of 10 delegates. This group size was strategically chosen to allow for personalised feedback and high-quality interaction during the final workshop at headquarters.

5.4.1. Benefits of the Proposed Program

The implementation of the proposed three-phase training program is expected to generate measurable benefits at both the organisational and individual levels. Unlike generic commercial courses, this program directly targets the specific socio-cultural environment of the Bulgarian tourism sector.

At the organisational level, the program is designed to enhance the company's ethical standards and reduce the risk of inappropriate or culturally insensitive behaviour. By providing delegates with practical tools and real-life scenarios, specifically focusing on high-pressure sales targets and interactions with local hotel partners or bus drivers. The chances of service failure and reputational harm are significantly reduced. In addition, the standardisation of ethical guidelines promotes consistent service and quality, reinforcing the brand image as a professional and ethically responsible partner in international markets.

From a financial perspective, the program contributes to long-term cost efficiency. Although initial costs are incurred, these are offset by a reduction in potential costs related to crisis management or high staff turnover caused by delegate burnout. By leveraging internal infrastructure at the headquarters, the agency maintains greater control over the training content without the profit-margin overhead of external providers.

At the individual level, delegates benefit from improved professional competencies, particularly in ethical decision-making and intercultural communication. The combination of self-study and interactive workshops helps bridge the gap between theory and reality in the destination. As identified in the primary research, delegates often face unprofessional behaviour from local partners. This program provides them with the psychological confidence and scripts to handle such aggression, sexual harassment, mobbing and other ethical problems professionally.

An additional benefit is the handbook's practical function as an immediate support tool. It is designed not just as a manual but as a pocket guide for real-life situations in the field. In cases of ethical issues, requests for bribes, or first aid, it provides clear guidance and relevant contact

points, ensuring that delegates do not have to handle complex situations independently. This significantly enhances the previewed organisational support, leading to higher job satisfaction and less fluctuation in the demanding environment of the Bulgarian summer seasons.

While implementing this system may increase the frequency of consultations with headquarters, this should be seen as a highly positive outcome. It reflects a shift from solidarity, high-stress decision-making to a proactive, communicative relationship between the field and management.

Conclusion

This diploma thesis is based on a specific practical need. The impetus for writing it came from a personal experience in my immediate circle, when one of the delegates complained about a lack of guidance on ethical issues and felt that the travel agency had not adequately prepared him. This incident highlighted a potential systematic shortcoming in the training of tour guides and served as the basis for further investigation.

This experience was followed by three in-depth interviews with delegates, which served as the basis for developing a questionnaire. The questionnaire made it possible to verify whether the identified issues were also present among a broader group of respondents. The results confirmed that delegates repeatedly face ethical dilemmas and are often insufficiently prepared for practical situations at the destination.

At the same time, the respondents' statements revealed a contrast between the perceived attractiveness of the job and its demanding reality. While some delegates describe their work as fulfilling and appreciate the level of autonomy and trust from their supervisors, others highlighted the high level of stress, responsibility and the need to rely on intuition in unpredictable situations. One respondent stated that they preferred more freedom because it showed that their supervisor trusted them to handle situations independently. Another respondent described the job as fulfilling, especially because helping guests, solving problems, and contributing to their holiday experience gave the work personal meaning.

Furthermore, differences emerged in relation to age and experience. A younger respondent tended to emphasise the stressful nature of the job, whereas an older respondent aged over forty years old, pointed out that delegates should not be overly sensitive and need to develop a certain level of resilience when dealing with difficult situations. A similar attitude appeared in one questionnaire response, where a senior delegate emphasised the need not to judge the destination, but rather to adapt to the country and its people. While such experience-based resilience can help delegates cope with difficult situations, it may also create the risk that some problematic behaviours become normalised or underestimated.

The findings also showed that informal team support and communication play a crucial role in managing challenging situations, and that delegates must often deal with unexpected client behaviour and maintain psychological resilience. Interview responses indicated that delegates often rely on WhatsApp groups, chief delegates, destination management companies, or

headquarters in Prague when they need advice or support. This suggests that informal and semi-formal communication channels already play an important role in practice, but they should be supported by clearer written procedures and training materials. These insights further emphasise the need for practical, scenario-based training grounded in real-life experiences.

Based on these findings, specific solutions were proposed in the form of a practical handbook and an online ethics training course. These tools were supplemented by a proposed three-phase training model, which can serve as a systematic framework for training travel agency delegates. The model combines theoretical training, practical scenarios and subsequent reflection on experiences.

The draft handbook was further reviewed by a delegate who worked in Bulgaria, which helped refine it and make it more practical. Additionally, cultural differences were discussed directly with a native Bulgarian, allowing us to better capture the specifics of the local environment. Another important element of the handbook is the inclusion of specific contacts and procedures, as answers from the questionnaire have shown. Delegates often do not know what to turn to in problematic situations.

The online training includes real-world examples based on actual situations. This enhances its practicality and relevance. These scenarios help delegates better prepare for the specific ethical decisions they may encounter. This is particularly important because interview findings showed that reality in the destination is often different from theoretical preparation and that delegates sometimes have to act intuitively when training does not provide a clear answer.

Based on the collected data, both the proposed handbook and the ethics training have the potential to significantly improve delegates' preparedness. The benefits of these tools extend not only to newcomers but also to more experienced staff, who may encounter new or sensitive situations even after years of experience, as indicated by the questionnaire results

The proposed solution is directly connected to the theoretical framework presented in this thesis. The need to include cultural differences in the handbook and online training reflects the discussion of Hofstede's cultural dimensions and the comparison between the Czech Republic and Bulgaria in chapter 1.1.1. The emphasis on clear procedures, organisational support and reporting mechanisms is linked to the concept of ethical climate discussed in chapter 1.4, which shows that ethical behaviour is shaped not only by individual values but also by organisational

culture and support. The three-phase training model corresponds with the theoretical discussion of ethics training in chapters 1.6 and 1.8.1, particularly the importance of case-based learning, e-learning, mentoring and practical scenario-based preparation.

This diploma thesis offers practical tools that reflect the real needs of the industry and can help raise the ethical standards and quality of work among delegates in international tourism.

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Appendix A: Interviews with Delegates Operating in Bulgaria

Interview n.1.

Respondent: X
Date: 24. 2. 2026
Form: Online via Google Meet
Duration: Approximately 80 minutes.

1. When you first started working for a travel agency, what kind of training did you receive regarding how to behave with clients and business partners?

"Last year, in 2025, I had applied for the position of rep about three times before, but I always had to turn it down because of school. I had something like a training session about clients and a bit about business that took place at headquarters."

   a. Did this training cover specific "do and don'ts" or was it mostly about logistics and sales?

"I can say all of them. But mostly about sales and for example transfer system, psychological behaviour etc..... "

2. Have you had specific training on proper conduct (e.g., handling complaints, anti-harassment? In what format was it provided (online modules, in-person, or real-life case studies?

"Yes, I had. It was a one-day in-person training course at headquarters and also contained real-life case studies. "

   a. In your daily work in Bulgaria, how often do you actually rely on what you learned? Does it feel practical, or is the reality on the ground very different?

"I learned almost everything in Bulgaria. So, I only used what I learned in a few cases, mainly regarding complaints or, for example, PIR. It depends. Some things were the same as usual, but some things were different, like the attitude of the locals, for example, when it came to transfer issues... "

3. Does your agency have a written set of rules, a handbook, or a "Code of Conduct" that you are required to read?

"No, I don't think so. "

   a. Do you recall if it mentions global tourism standards (like UNWTO) or sustainability?

"Because my company doesn't have, I don't think so. My agency has General term and conditions, and it's recommended to read, but we are not required to read. "

4. What would you say is the hardest part of your job as a delegate? Besides the daily tasks, what other professional or personal difficulties do you face regularly?

"Definitely people. Any job involving people is very difficult. People can be very aggressive, especially Czechs on vacation... Besides people, I can say nothing specific. Maybe just a language barrier. Especially among the older generation and locals, apart from receptionists and airport staff, not so many people know English. Fortunately, I learned the most important phrases in Bulgarian.

a. In your daily work in Bulgaria, how often do you actually rely on what you learned in training? Does practical or is the reality on the ground very different?

"Almost every day. I think the reality on the ground is very different. Not so much information that I learned during training is relevant informations are not which I earned during training are realiable to reality... Especially when it comes to transfers or some informations from colleagues in tour sales... Then it is quite complicated and unnecessary to deal with these issues with clients, like trips, or something that the tour should involve, food problems etc."

5. Do you feel you have a sufficient level of autonomy – meaning can you make your own decisions about your agenda, or is everything strictly managed?

"Because, I worked mostly at airport my work is strictly bound by flight schedules and transfer lists, so the agenda is fixed. When a problem occurred – like missing passenger or lost luggage I had to follow the travel agency's rules. However, some since I worked mostly at the airport,tuation needed my personal quick decisions on the spot without waiting for approval from headquarters or other partners.

a. Would you prefer more freedom (autonomy) in your work, or do you feel you need more specific instructions from the agency?

"I think the level of autonomy was appropriate. In tourism you need clear some instructions and protocols for example PIR. I guess too much autonomy would cause chaos in transfers planning. I appreciated having clear guidelines for the ,"what" (transfer schedule, flight scheduel etc.), while having having freedom to handle the ,"how"- like managing the clients problems, which doesn't need support from partners or headquarters. "

6. How would you describe the atmosphere within your team of delegates? How effectively does communication and the sharing of information work between you and your colleagues or management?

"From my point of wiew, the atmosphere among my team of Sunny beach represantives was very good and friendly. Since our duty can be really stressful, we relied on each other. Communication with local colleagues was excellent. However, communication with DMC or my transfer partner GALA, she made the transfers schedules could be sometimes lagged.

a. When a problem arises, is the communication clear enough for you to know exactly what is expected of you?

"Mostly yes. But I remember my first major flight delay, more than 2h, by the way, it was my first day at this job. I didn't really know that exactly clients were entitled to like refreshment, beverages, refund, to like refreshment, beverages, refund etc. Many clients came to me, and of course asked me for what we are doing? I mean like why the flight is now 2 hours delayed? Where we can a get food, why we are here more than 4 hours in advance? Fortunately at that time was at the airport the supervisor from check-in staff and she helped me a lot. So overall, in more emergency situations, instructions sometimes reactive than proactive. But for standard operational issues like transfers change, problem with food at the hotel expectations were clear. "

7. Overall, do you feel good in your job? Do you find the work fulfilling and enjoyable?

"Definitely yes. I found the work fulfilling. I enjoyed the work with local partners, with local staff at the airport, at the hotels and also in my team. It was a really good experience for me or the satisfaction of solving problems for clients. It's definitely not a job for everyone, but I really liked the adrenaline aspect of it.

a. How much stress do you experience while performing your work, and how does your agency or team help you maintain a healthy work-life balance?

"The stress level was quite high, especially during peak season (July/August) or when someone was aggressive to me. To be honest, work-life balance is virtually non-existent during the high season in this role; you are "on" almost 24/7. The agency tried to provide days off, but the nature of destination work means you are never truly disconnected. "

8. You work closely with local partners (such as hotel managers, drivers, or local agency owners). Have you ever encountered a situation where their approach to work, time management, or keeping agreements was very different from what is common in your home country due to local customs?

"Absolutely. This was a really often. Especially with bus drivers. Drivers would often be priotize finishing a cigarette/coffee over loading luggage immediately, or try to change the schedule of the route, so the times of picking time was often really different."

a. How did you handle that? Did you feel you had to adapt to their way of doing things (e.g., be more relaxed about rules)or did you try to stick strictly to your agency's standards?

"It required a hybrid approach. I couldn't be relaxed because plans don't wait a long and also czech people are scared and can complaining about everything. But being overly strict or being

aggressive creates conflict with Bulgarian partners. I learned to build personal rapport with the drivers first. Once we had relationship, they respected my timelines and I respected their habits. Times flied and my Bulgarian improved, so my communication was much clearer and more natural for them.

9. In tourism, it is common for partners (like restaurants, shop owners, or hotel staff) to offer gifts or commissions to delegates. What is your agency's policy on accepting these?

"Simple answer... the agency has a strict policy no cash commisions that could influence business decisions. Small gifgenerallycoffee were generaly tolerated."

    a. It is clear what you are allowed to keep and what you must refuse?

"Yes, it is. "

10. Have you ever felt pressured (by a client or partner) to bend the rules or do something you felt was uncomfortable or wrong?

"Yes, but just occasionally. Clients would pressure me to delay a transfer bus for someone who was late, ignored the pickup time or pickup place. I remember some clients, who yelling at me because of delayed transfer and one family who were angry because of delayed flight during a peak season. When I told them, that they can recieve resfreshment and probably also receive some refund they became very friendly to me. Local drivers sometimes wanted to take unauthorised shortcuts or drop clients off at different locations to save time. "

a. Who did you turn to for help?

"I usually stood my ground using safety regulations as my justification. If the pressure persisted, I would contact the Chief representatives or somebody from headquarters, DMC partners or the branch airport to make the final call, so the responsibility wasn't solely on me. "

11. Business is often based on personal connections. Do you feel that your agency treats all local partners (hotel, transport companies) fairly, or have you noticed that some get special treatment or better deals regardless of their quality

"I did notice that transfer providers were used repeatedly despite occasional quality issues (e.g., older buses, broken AC, grumpy drivers). A few times the drivers didn't know the route, so I had to navigated him. It was a really an adrenaline situations, because the streets are really tiny, I had to do my job, like picking my client, be able to answer their questions, and I needed to navigate the driver in Bulgarian, because he didn't any single word in English. Interestingly, napravo (meaning "to the right" in Czech) means "straight ahead" in Bulgarian, so it was very confusing for me. I also noticed that sometimes was problem with seats and service on plane, like missing a seats or the were broken. Maybe it was due to long-standing contracts or because they did not have a another bus.

a. How does it affect your work when you have to work with a partner who was chosen because of a personal connection rather than their professional standard?

"It made my job harder. When a bus arrives without functioning air conditioning or the driver is rude, I am the one who has to face the angry clients and apologize, even though I have no control over the vendor selection. It creates unnecessary friction.

12. Sometimes local Bulgarian managers or providers can be quite dominant or demanding. Have you ever felt pressured or treated unfairly (e.g., bossed around) by a local hotel manager or a driver?

"Yes, specifically with older male bus drivers. There is a cultural element where they sometimes dismiss younger foreign delegates. I have been in situations where a driver tried to dictate the route or refused to help with luggage, acting as if he was the boss of the operation

a. If a local partner treats you disrespectfully or tries to micromanage your work, does your agency back you up, or are you expected to just "deal with it" to keep the business relationship going?

"The agency generally expects us to be diplomatic and "deal with it" in the moment to ensure the clients are not affected. However, if the situation or behaviour of the bus driver was unacceptable I could contact my local partner and she told them do not do this, you have to help with luggages etc.

13. Beyond small gifts or commissions, have you ever encountered a situation where a local partner or favourial expected a "financial favor" or payment to solve a problem or speed things up? How does the agency expect you to react in such cases?/ Do you know how to react in such a situation?

"Personally I haven't encountered this situation. The agency has a zero-tolerance policy for bribery. My reaction was always to play "by the book," ask for an official receipt, or call a superior. Usually, asking for an official paper trail makes the request for a bribe disappear immediately.

14. If you were to design a training for new delegates coming to Bulgaria, what is the one ethical challenge or "tricky situation" you would definitely include to prepare them for the reality here?

"I would include a module on managing authority vs. dependency with local drivers. The challenge is how to enforce agency rules, for example, no smoking on the bus, dropping clients at the exact reception door. With a driver who is local, older, and stubborn, without causing a conflict that ruins the transfer. I would include also at least learning basic Bulgarian words, especially words around transfers, and daily situations, I mean for example buggage, plane, delay, pickup place, navigation and so on.

a. Could you describe a specific example of this situation? I would like to use it as a real-life case study in my proposed training to show others how to handle it.

"The Case Study: You are at Burgas Airport. A flight has just landed, and you have a full bus of 50 tired tourists. One couple is missing, they lost luggage issue inside the terminal. The scheduled leaving time of bus has passed.

The Conflict: The Bulgarian bus driver is furious. He is shouting that he will leave now because he has another transfer in 1 hour, or because of his tachograph limits. He starts the engine and threatens to unload the luggage of the people already on board if you don't leave immediately. The clients on the bus are also getting agitated.

You need to keep the driver from leaving without the missing couple, calm down the passengers on the bus, and not lose your professional composure, all while communicating with the missing couple. Than you have to handle the situation with missing luggage and helped couple with PIR protocol. The trainee must learn how to de-escalate the driver's aggression without looking weak, and how to make a quick decision to wait vs leave based on company protocol rather than pressure.

Interview n 2.
Respondent: Y
Date: 24. 2. 2026
Form: Online via Google Meet
Duration: Approximately 65 minutes.

1. When you first started working for a travel agency, what kind of training did you receive regarding how to behave with clients and business partners?

"In 2024, and I got a 3 day training from my agency with all the ways to behave. "

a. Did this training cover specific "do and don'ts" or was it mostly about logistics and sales?

"Yes, it did cover specific do's and don'ts. Sales, I mostly learned on location "

2. Have you had specific training on proper conduct (e.g., handling complaints, anti-harassment? In what format was it provided (online modules, in-person, or real-life case studies?

"During the training we practiced handling complaints with each other through role play and real-life case studies. Anti-harassment was not really covered. "

a. In your daily work in Bulgaria, how often do you actually rely on what you learned? Does it feel practical, or is the reality on the ground very different?

"To be honest, I feel like I learned most by just doing the job. The training taught me the basics, but handling real situations in Bulgaria is something I learned much more on location, through daily experience. "

3. Does your agency have a written set of rules, a handbook, or a "Code of Conduct" that you are required to read?

"Yes, 2 or 3 months before the training, we did get a handbook. Not required to read but highly recommended."

a. Do you recall if it mentions global tourism standards (like UN Tourism) or sustainability?

"I do not recall specific mention of global tourism standards like World Tourism Organization. But Corendon is very focused on sustainability and makes it an important part of how they operate. "

4. What would you say is the hardest part of your job as a delegate? Besides the daily tasks, what other professional or personal difficulties do you face regularly?

"The hardest part is handling guests' personal issues professionally. You have to stay calm, show empathy, and solve problems quickly. "

a. In your daily work in Bulgaria, how often do you actually rely on what you learned in training? Does it feel practical or is the reality on the ground very different?

"My first season, the training was useful for basics and knowing what to expect. After that, I mostly rely on experience from the job. Every day is different, and handling real situations with guests, flights, or hotels is something you only learn on location. Training gives a foundation, but the reality on the ground is more complex and fast-paced. "

5. Do you feel you have a sufficient level of autonomy – meaning can you make your own decisions about your agenda, or is everything strictly managed?

"In Bulgaria, I could do a lot on my own and make my own decisions. If I ever needed to ask something, I could always call my boss "

a. Would you prefer more freedom (autonomy) in your work, or do you feel you need more specific instructions from the agency?

"I prefer more freedom because it shows my boss trusts me to handle things on my own. "

6. How would you describe the atmosphere within your team of delegates? Hoe effectively does communication and the sharing of information work between you and your colleagues or management?

"Our team is very close since we live together too. We share all work-related information with each other and have team meetings once a week to discuss everything needed. "

a. When a problem arises, is the communication clear enough for you to know exactly what is expected of you?

"Yes, that's one thing my boss is really clear in "

7. Overall, do you feel good in your job? Do you find the work fulfilling and enjoyable?

"I love my job and find it very fulfilling. Helping guests, solving problems, and seeing them enjoy their holiday makes me happy every day. Even busy days or challenges feel rewarding because I know I make a difference for people's experience. "

a. How much stress do you experience while performing your work, and how does your agency or team help you maintain a healthy work-life balance?

"Personally, I don't really experience stress, but the few times I do, my team helps by taking over some tasks, and my boss does the same. "

8. You work closely with local partners (such as hotel managers, drivers, or local agency owners). Have you ever encountered a situation where their approach to work, time management, or keeping agreements was very different from what is common in your home country due to local customs?

"In Bulgaria, everything is different from my country. Locals often act like they have all the time in the world, so their approach to work and deadlines can feel very relaxed. "

a. How did you handle that? Did you feel you had to adapt to their way of doing things (e.g., be more relaxed about rules) or did you try to stick strictly to your agency's standards?

"It's still really hard for me that Bulgarian people take a lot of time with everything, but you learn to live with it and accept it. I try to stick to my agency's standards, but I also adapt and stay patient with their pace. "

9. In tourism, it is common for partners (like restaurants, shop owners, or hotel staff) to offer gifts or commissions to delegates. What is your agency's policy on accepting these?

"Actually, I'm not sure about this one. I haven't received clear instructions from my agency on accepting gifts or commissions from partners. Just commission from our local agent "

10. Have you ever felt pressured (by a client or partner) to bend the rules or do something you felt was uncomfortable or wrong?

"No, thank god I did not "

11. Business is often based on personal connections. Do you feel that your agency treats all local partners (hotel, transport companies) fairly, or have you noticed that some get special treatment or better deals regardless of their quality

"Let's say the agency treats all local partners the same way, regardless of their size or quality.

12. Sometimes local Bulgarian managers or providers can be quite dominant or demanding. Have you ever felt pressured or treated unfairly (e.g., bossed around) by a local hotel manager or a driver?

"No "

a. If a local partner treats you disrespectfully or tries to micromanage your work, does your agency back you up, or are you expected to just "deal with it" to keep the business relationship going?

"They always back me up if it was necessary."

13. Beyond small gifts or commissions, have you ever encountered a situation where a local partner or official expected a "financial favour" or payment to solve a problem or speed things up? How does the agency expect you to react in such cases? / Do you know how to react in such a situation?

"Never really had this. Sometimes hotels give something to resolve a complaint, but that's it. "

14. If you were to design a training for new delegates coming to Bulgaria, what is the one ethical challenge or "tricky situation" you would definitely include to prepare them for the reality here?

"In my first season, I had a situation where a mother was an alcohol addict, wasn't feeding or paying attention to her child, and we had to call the police. I would add to the training how to deal with neglect. "

a. Could you describe a specific example of this situation? I would like to use it as a real-life case study in my proposed training to show others how to handle it.

"During my second month as a delegate, I encountered a very difficult situation where a 3-year-old child was left alone by the pool in a hotel while his mother, who showed signs of alcohol abuse, was not paying attention to him. When I approached her to talk, she became angry and accused me of calling her an alcoholic, which I had not done. The situation escalated, and we had to call the police, who spoke with her to ensure the child's safety. That same night, the child went to reception asking for food, and the staff gave him pizza, but the mother took it away when she found out. Later, I went to speak with her again, but she was sleeping, leaving the door open with the child, who could have walked out at any moment. The next day, the child was taken to the hospital by ambulance due to a fever. I tried contacting the mother but could not reach her, so I left instructions to be informed when she returned. When she finally came back, I had a calm, respectful conversation to check on her and the child. She left the hotel the following day. This experience taught me how challenging it is to handle neglect situations within the limits of what you are allowed to do and showed me that more training on handling these cases would have been very valuable.

<u>Interview n 3.</u>

Respondent: Z
Date: 24. 2. 2026
Form: Online via Google meet
Duration: Approximately 50 minutes.

1. When you first started working for a travel agency, what kind of training did you receive regarding how to behave with clients and business partners?

"In 2023, the training took place in Prague at the headquarters and lasted 1 day "

a. Did this training cover specific "do and don'ts" or was it mostly about logistics and sales?

*"Y*es, they told us how to behave towards clients, what to answer in difficult situations. There were model situations "

2. Have you had specific training on proper conduct (e.g., handling complaints, anti-harassment? In what format was it provided (online modules, in-person, or real-life case studies?

"They showed us everything in the presentation, and we talked about it in person. "

a. In your daily work in Bulgaria, how often do you actually rely on what you learned? Does it feel practical, or is the reality on the ground very different?

"The reality is usually different, it's not as easy as it sounds. Something can only be used in a specific situation, otherwise it is better to act intuitively."

3. Does your agency have a written set of rules, a handbook, or a "Code of Conduct" that you are required to read?

"Yes, it has. "

a. Do you recall if it mentions global tourism standards (like UN Tousim) or sustainability?

"It doesn't tell me anything, I'm just remembering something about the complaint "

4. What would you say is the hardest part of your job as a delegate? Besides the daily tasks, what other professional or personal difficulties do you face regularly?

"The most difficult are the problem clients who don't like any proposed solution and everyone sees the problem and are eternally dissatisfied. Also the fact that I have to be on the phone all the time, 24/7

a. In your daily work in Bulgaria, how often do you actually rely on what you learned in training? Does it feel practical or is the reality on the ground very different?

"There are procedures and advice for some situations, but for some we have to use our empathy for the client and our intuition. "

5. Do you feel you have a sufficient level of autonomy – meaning can you make your own decisions about your agenda, or is everything strictly managed?

"There are rules and papers for everything, only I can regulate my working hours.

a. Would you prefer more freedom (autonomy) in your work, or do you feel you need more specific instructions from the agency?

"Both, in some situations I would like to get advice, in some things I wanted to be more free.

6. How would you describe the atmosphere within your team of delegates? How effectively does communication and the sharing of information work between you and your colleagues or management?

"As delegates, we have WhatsApp groups where we write to each other for advice on situations, when we don't know, we call our chief delegate, in crisis situations we can contact the Destination management company or call the headquarters in Prague.

a. When a problem arises, is the communication clear enough for you to know exactly what is expected of you?

"Yes, I've never had a problem getting along with anyone "

7. Overall, do you feel good in your job? Do you find the work fulfilling and enjoyable?

"This job is very stressful and responsible, I don't feel very relaxed. "

a. How much stress do you experience while performing your work, and how does you agency or team help you maintain a healthy work-life balance?

"Stress is experienced every day, it depends on your area, clients, and not much time off when you have to be constantly on the phone even in your free time. "

8. You work closely with local partners (such as hotel managers, drivers, or local agency owners). Have you ever encountered a situation where their approach to work, time management, or keeping agreements was very different from what is common in your home country due to local customs?

"Yes, the mentality is different, and they don't respond as quickly as we are used to in the Czech Republic, or they don't even want to solve the problem. "

a. How did you handle that? Did you feel you had to adapt to their way of doing things (e.g., be more relaxed about rules) or did you try to stick strictly to your agency's standards?

"I have to follow the travel agency's rules, but in some cases it's not always possible, I have to try to explain to the clients that they are in another country and some things are handled differently here. "

9. In tourism, it is common for partners (like restaurants, shop owners, or hotel staff) to offer gifts or commissions to delegates. What is your agency's policy on accepting these?

"I've never received a gift, rather we can eat for free at the hotel, use the hotel's services, something like that. "

a. It is clear what you are allowed to keep and what you must refuse?

"I've never encountered any bribery, so I can't say, this wasn't even mentioned in the training.

10. Have you ever felt pressured (by a client or partner) to bend the rules or do something you felt was uncomfortable or wrong?

"No, everything could have been resolved within the framework of decency and rules. "

11. Business is often based on personal connections. Do you feel that your agency treats all local partners (hotel, transport companies) fairly, or have you noticed that some get special treatment or better deals regardless of their quality

"This is beyond me, I have no idea. "

12. Sometimes local Bulgarian managers or providers can be quite dominant or demanding. Have you ever felt pressured or treated unfairly (e.g., bossed around) by a local hotel manager or a driver?

"No, I had pretty good managers in my area who I could get along with. "

a. If a local partner treats you disrespectfully or tries to micromanage your work, does your agency back you up, or are you expected to just "deal with it" to keep the business relationship going?

"When there is a problem, we write to Prague and they try to solve it. "

13. Beyond small gifts or commissions, have you ever encountered a situation where a local partner or official expected a "financial favour" or payment to solve a problem or speed things up? How does the agency expect you to react in such cases? / Do you know how to react in such a situation?

"No, I didn't meet, it's hard to say, I don't think this was said. "

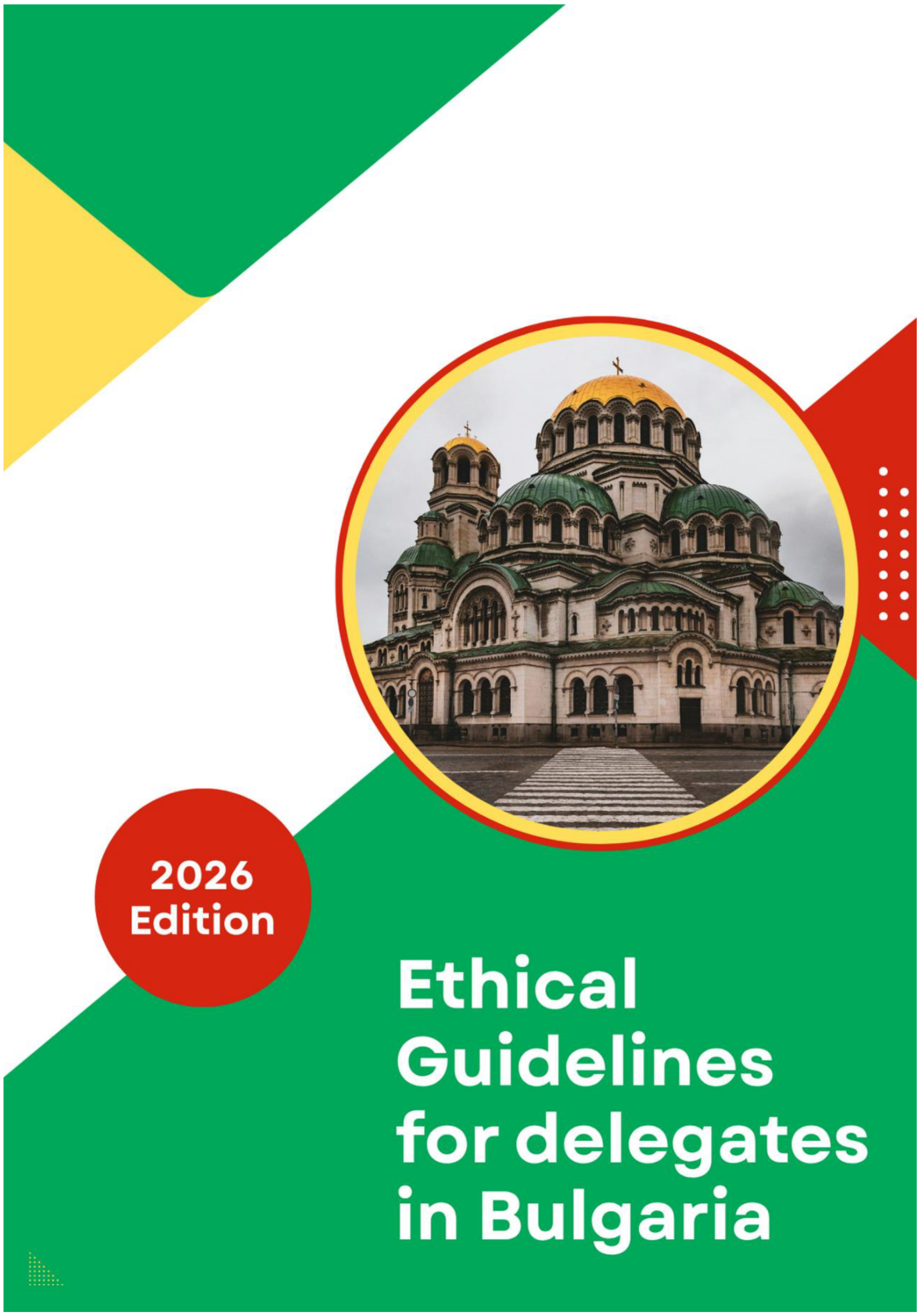
14. If you were to design training for new delegates coming to Bulgaria, what is the one ethical challenge or tricky situation you would definitely include to prepare them for the reality here?

"Let them always stand their ground and not let anyone break them, this is hard to say, problem clients, they always come up with some situation that you wouldn't have thought could happen. "

a. Could you describe a specific example of this situation? I would like to use it as a real-life case study in my proposed training to show others how to handle it.

"When a client gets stuck in traffic and may miss their plane home. Reassure them that the travel agency will find them alternative accommodation, that they will not be left at the airport without food and accommodation, will try to find them an alternative flight or seats on the plane as soon as possible and will cover all associated costs. Constantly reassuring clients and telling them that everything can be solved and no one will leave them to their fate.

Appendix B Handbook for Delegates



Hello!

Working as a delegate is not always easy. You may face unexpected situations, difficult people, or decisions that are not clearly right or wrong.

This guide is here to **help you handle these moments**. It offers **practical examples** and simple advice on how to **act professionally**, remain fair, and protect both yourself and your clients.

You don't need to read everything at once, use it when you need **support** or when something doesn't **feel right.**

Sometimes things can get a bit tricky, but it doesn't happen often. Usually, everything runs smoothly, and if not, you've got the team at **headquarters behind you.**

So, let's move on to the guide and learn how to handle situations in Bulgaria!

This guide was prepared by Bc. Anna Šádková as part of the master's thesis on Business ethics training for delegates in international travel agencies.

z

Mobbing

01

What is it?

- Mobbing is a form of **long-term psychological harassment** of the **person** by **groups of individuals** in **their social environment**, where a person is repeatedly **victimised** or **excluded** by their co-workers.

Example

- A group of three experienced delegates has a secret WhatsApp group. They intentionally give you the wrong meeting times for the bus drivers or tell you a hotel is easy when they know the manager is aggressive, just to watch you struggle.

How to handle it

✗ Don't:

- Try to buy their friendship by doing their paperwork for them.

✓ Do:

- Stay professional, verify all info with official schedules, and tell your manager: I feel like I'm missing critical info that isn't in the official group.

Who to contact

Your **team leader** or **HR department**

Bossing

02

What it is?

- Bossing is a form of workplace **bullying** where a **manager** or **supervisor** repeatedly **mistreats** an **employee**. It can include unfair criticism, excessive control, humiliation, or deliberately making the employee's job difficult.

Example

- Your manager forgets to schedule your relief at the airport. You've been standing for 12 hours in 35°C heat. When you call to ask when you can leave, he screams at you for being weak and unprofessional in front of the clients.

How to handle it

Don't:

- Don't accept the role of a victim
- Scream back or walk off the job (this risks tourist safety).

Do:

- Instist on professional communication and, if necessary, escalate the issue to headquarters

Who to contact

HR department, anonymous reporting system

Favoritism

03

What is it?

- **Favoritism** refers to showing **unfair favor** to **one** or a **few people** to the **disadvantage of others.**

Example

- A team leader preferential treatment to one or more employees based on personal liking or social connections, rather than their actual performance and skills.

Who to contact

Your team leader or area manager

How to handle it

Don't:

- Try to become the favourite by doing personal favours, or get discouraged and lower your work quality.

Do:

- Keep records of your performance. Request a meeting to clarify objective work standards.

Nepotism

04

What it is ?

- **Nepotism** is the practice of **giving jobs**, promotions, or advantages to **family members** or **close friends** instead of choosing people based on merit. It is often seen as unfair because it ignores qualifications and equal opportunities.

Example

- A manager hires their own sibling for a senior position role, or gives their partner the best working schedule while others get the night shifts

How to handle it

Who to contact

Headquarters or the compliance hotline

Don't:

- Let it affect your professional standards or engage in office gossip about the family clan

Do:

- Focus on your own performance data. If family ties lead to unfair treatment, report it through the official whistleblowing channel.

Sexual harassment

05

What is it?

- Sexual harassment is **unwanted sexual advances, requests** for **sexual favours,** or any **verbal** or **physical conduct** of a sexual nature that creates an **intimidating environment.**

Example

- A bus driver or hotel manager constantly makes inappropriate advances or touches you at every opportunity.

How to handle it

Don't:

- Stay silent or feel like you have to deal with it to keep a good working relationship.

Do:

- Set a clear boundary immediately (Stop, this is not professional), document the incident, and report it to your agency immediately

Who to contact

HR department, Emergency HQ line, or Local authorities

*Local tip:

- **Не ме пипай!** - Ne me pipaj! - Do not touch me
- **Спрете!** - Sprete! - Stop!

Micromanagement

06

What is it?

- Micromanagement is when a **manager controls every small detail** of **someone's work.** It is considered unethical because it undermines trust and prevents people from working independently.

Example

- Your supervisor demands you send a screenshot of every single conversation you have with a complaining guest, then critiques your tone even if the guest is already happy.

How to handle it

Don't:

- Don't let the calls distract you from doing your job for the clients

Do:

- Agree on fixed reporting times and explain that constant checks are preventing you from taking care of tourists.

Who to contact

Your direct supervisor

Bribery

07

What is it?

- Bribery is **offering, giving, or receiving money**, **gifts,** or **favours** to **influence** professional actions, decisions, or to gain an unfair advantage

Example

- The owner of a local bar offer you 50 EUR *under table* to bring the entire group of tourists there.

How to handle it

Don't:

- Never accept cash under the table

Do:

- Politely decline and explain that you only recommend verified partners approved by you travel agency

Who to contact

Area manager and the compliance hotline

Corruption

08

What is it?

- Corruption is the **abuse** of **entrusted power** or **position** for **personal benefit** or private gain

Example

- A local manager offers you a free stay or a gift if you agree to ignore guest complaints about broken facilities.

How to handle it

Don't:

- Accept gifts or favors in exchange for closing your eyes to quaility issues.

Do:

- Report all quality issues through official company channels and stay objective. Explain that your role is ensure standard service for all guests.

Who to contact

Area manager and the compliance hotline

Conflict of interest

09

What is it?

- Conflict of interest is a situation where **your personal relationships** or **benefits** interfere with your **professional duties** and **objectivity**

Example

- Your cousin in Bulgaria runs a car rental business, and you feel pressure to recommend him even though the travel agency has a contract with another company.

Who to contact

Head of delegates or the area manager

How to handle it

Don't:

- Do not prioritize pesonal relationships over the travel agency's interests

Do:

Always prioritize the agency's official partners, even if a personal contact offers *a better deal.*

Discrimination

10

What is it?

Discrimination is **unfair treatment** of an **employee** or a **guest** based on **personal characteristics** like race, gender, age, religion, or nationality

Who to contact

HR department or the Legal department

Example

- A local partner refuses to cooperate with a colleague simply because he is too young or because of his nationality.

How to handle it

Don't:

- Ignore the behaviour or join in the jokes to avoid conflicts. Never participate in treating anyone differently based on who they are.

Do:

- Politely but firmly state that such behavior is against company policy and human dignity. Document the incident and report it to your supervisor or the headquarters.

Overbooking

11

What it is ?

- Overbooking occurs when a **hotel sells more rooms** than its actual capacity. This results in the travel agency being **unable** to **accommodate guests** in **their originally booked hotel**, requiring an immediate move to an alternative property.

Example

- You arrive at the hotel with 10 guests, but the manager tells you they are full and have no rooms left. He asks you to tell the guests that there is a plumbing emergency in their room, rather than admit the overbooking error.

Who to contact

Area Manager, Operations Department, and the Hotel Management

How to handle it

Don't:

- Lie to the guests about the reason for the relocation

Do:

- Present the alternative accommodation's benefits clearly and assist guests with the transfer.

Racial discrimination

12

What is it?

- Discrimination is the **unfair** or **prejudicial treatment** of people **based** on characteristics such as **race, ethnicity, gender, religion, or age.** It is a severe breach of human rights and corporate ethics.

Example

- A local restaurant owner or a bus driver refuses to provide service to a group of your guests or treats them disrespectfully because of their skin colour or nationality.

How to handle it

Don't:

- Ignore the behaviour to *keep the peace* with the local partner.
- Expect the guests to handle the confrontation themselves.

Do:

- Protect your guests, **help** them leave the situation if necessary, and **document** the incident for a formal report.

Who to contact

HR department or the Legal department

Intoxicated tourists

13

What is it?

- A situation where a guest's excessive **alcohol consumption** leads to **aggressive behaviour,** property damage, or the disturbance of other tourists' peace and safety.

Example

- During a bar crawl or a welcome meeting, an intoxicated guest starts making inappropriate jokes and reaches out to touch you, pull you closer for a *photo*, or refuses to let go of your arm, claiming they are *just being friendly.*

How to handle it

Don't:

- Don't smile or laugh it off. Politeness is often mistaken for consent; keep a neutral and firm expression.

Do:

- Set firm boundaries. Step back and say clearly: *Please do not touch me, it is unprofessional.*
- Move to a public area. Immediately get to a place with cameras, other guests, or hotel staff.

Pressure to sell trips

14

What is it?

- Pressure to sell trips occurs when a delegate is pushed to promote or sell excursions **even when they may not fully match the client's needs, expectations, or budget.**

Example

- A client asks whether a trip is suitable for small children. You know the trip is long, exhausting, and may not be ideal, but you are still expected to recommend it because sales numbers are being monitored.

How to handle it

Don't:

- Don't promise something you cannot guarantee.
- Don't hide important information about the trip.

Do:

- Provide honest and complete information about the trip.
- Recommend excursions that fit the client's real needs.

Who to contact

Head of delegates or headquarters

Agressive communication

15

What is it?

- Aggressive communication involves **shouting, intimidation, rude behaviour, insults,** or **hostile language** from clients, local partners, managers, or colleagues.

Example

- A hotel manager starts shouting at you on the phone because of a complaint from guests and refuses to let you explain the situation calmly.

Who to contact

Head of delegates or headquarters

How to handle it

Don't:

- Don't respond with aggression.
- Don't escalate the conflict emotionally.

Do:

- Stay calm and communicate professionally.
- Set boundaries and ask the person to continue respectfully.

AI and data privacy

16

AI tools

- AI tools are great assistants, but as a delegate, you must **protect** both **client** and **company data.**

Rule: If you need help from AI tools. **Never** input personal data into public AI tools. Instead of John Smith (room 12), use *the client*.

Social medial

- You represent the travel agency 24/7

Don't

- Never share photos of funny situations involving drunk or problematic guests.

Do

- Respect guest privacy. Even a private post can be found by a client and used against you or the agency

Cultural differences

17

What is it?

- Cultural differences refer to the distinct social norms, communication styles, and expectations that vary between countries.

Example

- A Czech guest is angry because the hotel receptionist didn't smile and answered "No" by nodding their head up and down. The guest feels insulted, but in Bulgaria, nodding up and down actually means "No," and a neutral face is often seen as professional rather than rude.

How to handle it

Don't:

- Try to *re-educate* local partners on how they should behave according to Czech standards.

Do:

- Educate the guests early (e.g., during the welcome meeting, in the bus on the way to the hotel) about local specifics like the "**Yes/No**" head signals.

Who to contact

Senior delegate or area manager

Cultural differences

18

Yes and no signals

- Bulgarian nodding (up-down) means "No", while shaking the head (side-to-side) means "Yes"

Direct communication

- Local partners speak very loudly and directly. It is a sign of passion and transparency, not a sign of anger or rudeness.

The concept of "Ailyak"

- This is the local philosophy of living slowly and without stress. Expect that technical repairs or meetings might start 15–20 minutes later than planned

Coffee culture

- Business problems are never solved immediately; always start a conversation with a 2-minute small talk over coffee to build trust first.

Personal space

- Bulgarians stand closer to you and use more hand gestures than you might be used to.
  It is a sign of a friendly and open attitude.

Culture compass

19

Respect the hiearchy

- Treat hotel owners/managers with **respect.**
- Don't discuss matters with **rank-and-file staff** if the manager is the one **who makes the decisions.**
- If you **bypass the chain of comman**d, you'll offend them.

Connection over contracts

- **Loyalty to the group** is the most important thing.
- They want to **get to know you first.**
- **Have a cup of coffee**, ask about their **family**, and only then get down to business.
- Once you're ***one of them***, you can handle anything.

Culture compass

20

Harmony is key

- **Avoid aggressive pressure**. Bulgarians prioritize a **friendly atmosphere** and **quality of life.**
- Skip the *I am the boss* attitude — a **polite request** or showing **empathy** works better than a cold command.

Be ready for now

- Things are often **handled on the fly.**
- Don't see this as chaos, but as a **different pace.**
- **Be flexible** and **don't panic** if plans change at the **last minute.**

Medical assistance

21

What it is?

- Medical assistance involves managing situations where a guest or a colleague experiences a sudden health crisis, injury, or illness that requires professional medical intervention.

Example

- A guest collapses in the hotel lobby or during a bus transfer. People are panicking, and you are the only official representative present to manage the emergency.

How to handle it

Don't:

- Leave the patient alone to go look for your manual or to call the agency first.

Do:

- Immediately call 112 (Universal) or 150 (Bulgarian Ambulance) and inform the hotel reception to summon a doctor.

Important contacts

Emergency:	**112**
Police:	**+359 166**
Firefighters:	**+359 160**
Medical emergency:	**+359 150**
Traffic police:	**+359 165**
Roadside assistance:	**+359 146**

First aid

22

3-step protocol

1) Secure and assess

- Ensure the area is safe. Check if the person is conscious and breathing. Never leave the client alone.

Important contacts

Emergency:	**112**
Police:	**+359 166**
Firefighters:	**+359 160**
Medical emergency:	**+359 150**
Traffic police:	**+359 165**
Roadside assistance:	**+359 146**

2) Activate help

- Call **112**, Ambulance - **150**
- Speak clearly
  - Your name
  - Location (hotel/street)
  - What happened - number of victims.

3) Notify and support

- Call the hotel reception to bring the on-site doctor, and then contact your area manager or headquarters

Survival dictionary

23

Category	English	Bulgarian	Pronunciation (Phonetic)
Greetings	Hello	Здравейте	Zdra-vey-te
	Thank you	Благодаря / Мерси	Bla-go-da-rya / Mer-si
	Yes / No	Да / Не	Da / Ne (Careful with nodding!)
Transfer	Bus / Plane	Автобус / Самолет	Av-to-bus / Sa-mo-let
	Baggage	Багаж	Ba-gazh
	Delay	Закъснение	Za-kas-ne-nie
	Pickup place	Място за среща	Myas-to za sre-shta
Navigation	Straight	Направо	Na-pra-vo
	Left / Right	Наляво / Надясно	Na-lya-vo / Na-dyas-no
	Stop here	Спрете тук	Spre-te tuk
Emergency	Help!	Помощ!	Po-mosht!
	Police	Полиция	Po-li-tsi-ya

*Local tip: While “Blagodarya” is formal, Bulgarians use the French “Merci” much more often in daily life. :)

Checklist

24

Before making an important decision, ask yourself these 5 questions:

- Is it in line with the law (Bulgarian and Czech) and the agency's contract?
- Would I feel comfortable if my decision appeared on the front page of the news tomorrow?
- Would I want to be treated this way if I were the client?
- Does this decision prioritise the safety of the client and company, or just my current comfort?
- If I hesitate for more than 5 minutes, it's time to call the Area Manager.

Fill in the important numbers for this season:

Emergency Services (Bulgaria): 112
Czech Embassy (Sofia): +359 2 948 68 00
Area Manager: _____
HR Hotline: _____
Compliance/Ethics Officer: _____

This guide provides Ethical training for delegates on the Forms platform.

Ready to see if **full** points are possible?

Let's find out!