SCIENTIFIC MINDFULNESS: A FOUNDATION FOR FUTURE THEMES IN INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS

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ABSTRACT

We conceptualize new ways to qualify what themes should dominate the future international business and management (IB/IM) research agenda by examining three questions: Whom should we ask? What should we ask, and which selection criteria should we apply? What are the contextual forces? Our main findings are the following: (1) wider perspectives from academia and practice would benefit both rigor and relevance; (2) four key forces are climate change, globalization, inequality, and sustainability; and (3) we propose scientific mindfulness as the way forward for

generating themes in IB/IM research. Scientific mindfulness is a holistic, cross-disciplinary, and contextual approach, whereby researchers need to make sense of multiple perspectives with the betterment of society as the ultimate criterion.

INTRODUCTION

What the future holds for international business and management (IB/IM) and, as a consequence, which themes will dominate the field, has received much recent attention, as evidenced by publications in journals such as the *Journal of International Business Studies* (2008, Vol. 39) and *Management International Review* (2009, Vol. 49). This effort is worthwhile because scholarly research guides and is guided by future practices of the international business community. Griffith, Cavusgil, and Xu (2008) provide a useful entry point to the essential debate on future themes in international business research, and their article is insightful in many ways. In it, they focus on previous contributions to IB/IM research and on themes that are likely to become future trends in internationally focused scholarly journals. The authors used a Delphi technique in which prolific scholars from 1996 to 2006 were solicited for their ideas in order to identify future themes. These *experts in the field* suggested that a considerable amount of IB/IM research was at best classified as an extension, if not replication, of previous research. This approach follows Buckley's (2002) recommendation of looking back as the best way forward for IB/IM research and it is consistent with Werner's (2002) review analyzing trends in top journals. It also speaks to Pfeffer's (2007) claim that generic review processes in journals generally favor existing beliefs. If this is indeed the case, it is no wonder that the insights of those who already dominate the field are considered good predictors for what lies ahead in IB/IM research. It also explains Tsui's (2007) observation that important questions in novel contexts and across contexts are ignored by scientists. This classical approach for incremental research is thus of no surprise and has been referred to as "normal science" (Kuhn, 1962).

However, as called for by Van de Ven (2007), we believe the most rewarding, ethical, and sustainable way of improving science in the field is by engaging those external to our closed scholarly circle. In this paper, we revisit the traditional notions of how science progresses within the field of IB/IM. We raise the following questions: (1) Who should be involved in

determining future trends and themes in IB/IM? (2) How should we judge which future research questions are worth exploring? (3) What are the important contextual forces driving the future research agenda? By illuminating these questions, we hope to provide guidance, inspiration, and encouragement to future IB/IM scholars, whatever their background.

Based on our investigation and experience with fieldwork, we illustrate alternative ways of *thinking* that we believe are needed to shed light on the future of the IB/IM scholarly field and to benefit practice and society. These findings are consistent with the call for change from Pfeffer (2009) who suggests that management research has become (a) disconnected from practice, (b) unconcerned with larger issues of social and human welfare, and (c) institutionalized and thus takes things for granted and as uncontestable. Our approach is conceptual and, following the recommendation of Seno-Alday (2010), we do not attempt to produce alternative "laundry lists" of competing potential themes or predictions. We do not dispute that there is value in articles using traditional methods navigated in fairly closed systems. The research agenda is predictable in the near future because senior researchers tend to strengthen and expand their existing research streams, and doctoral students emulate the approaches of senior researchers. New ideas do creep into the system sometimes, but this only happens when they are already obvious to many.

We ask ourselves some fundamental questions about the best way to identify and judge options for the future IB/IM research agenda. As an international group of researchers, we decided to step back and contemplate these questions as a group during our annual meeting in Istanbul in May 2009 and in subsequent workgroups. This paper is the result of those discussions and further reflections. A subset of the research group membership has written this chapter; therefore, it may not reflect the individual views of each member. It does represent, however, the vigorous discussions that took place among the membership, and it is a perspective that we feel is worth sharing more broadly.

ARE WE ASKING THE RIGHT PEOPLE? DEFINING THE EXPERTS

We believe that the term *experts in the field* (used by Griffith et al., 2008, and many others) begs the questions: What experts and what field? If we understand field to mean IB/IM, then we are missing a more diverse

representation of scholars – including those in adjacent sciences and those with non-Western views – and practitioners worldwide. Although science and practice may ask different questions, science should be a process that is based on evidence from the world rather than merely scientists' opinions of the world (Van de Ven, 2007). As scientists, we cannot assume that the multinational organization (or its members or stakeholders) is an outside actor, standing apart from the social and environmental contexts within which it operates.

Ferguson (1994, p. 82) raised the important question of "who counts as knowers?" and made a call for including more voices in research. More voices can refer to a wider range or different "classes" of people, from practitioners of trades to subcultures in less affluent regions of the world – voices that need representation by those who investigate and are able to write eloquently enough to make scholarly careers out of it. An important voice is that of workers who are not heard presumably because they do not hold positions of power. Yet, their ideas may be critical to the evolution of international business and it is therefore important to include them in the practitioner group.

Today, in the academic world, *experts in the field* are those who have published the most or have gathered the most citations for their work. This world is characterized by a focus on history and a certain set of underlying assumptions and is based on a system that relies on the exploitation of existing knowledge, constructs, and theories (March, 1991). Citations are used to calculate the impact (factor) of research, but does this mean that scholars who have published the most have the greatest impact on business or society? If impact is solely gauged by being cited and published in the top-rated journal sphere, we run the risk of getting "trapped in the social echo chamber of our own voice" (Pettigrew, 2001, p. S69). Adler and Harzing (2009) have recently discussed this matter in depth and several other authors have investigated the regime of A-journals (Judge, Cable, Colbert, & Rynes, 2007; Starbuck, 2005; Singh, Haddad, & Chow, 2007). Frey (2003) wrote a critical piece on academia claiming that career success for academics depends on their *intellectual prostitution*. He recommended that scholars should be given (or fight for) more freedom and be treated more like artists. The point is if we limit our information scanning to prolific authors in top journals, we run the risk of incestuous predictions – predictions that are often based on prior research and limited by institutional interpretations of what constitutes rigor and relevance, predictions that don't make full use of the range of tools available to the futurist, and predictions that neglect important macrolevel changes in

society when determining trends (see Cornish, 2004). Such predictions may or may not come true but they leave us "sleepwalking into the future" (analogy borrowed from Barber, 2006).

Our immediate reaction when discussing this was, "What about practitioners or managers?" As suggested by Czinkota and Ronkainen (2009), practicing managers in international business are a source of ideas for the research agenda. Those of us, however, who regularly work with practitioners know that they operate, for the most part, in a closed system too, although some will accept ideas and approaches from outside their system. This cocooning is unfortunate, as differences between scientists and practitioners are enriching and complementary. There are many examples of great work done as a result of collaboration between scientists and practitioners (cf. Latham, 2001; Saari, 2001).

If we look back in management history, we see that practice and research were more closely joined at one time (Pfeffer, 2009). We propose that this type of collaboration should take place today when we contemplate the future of IB/IM research. There are numerous examples of research emerging from practice, such as *inclusion* (e.g., Roberson, 2006) – a recent example from diversity research that was driven by organizational practice – and *organizational culture*, although the latter is perhaps a logical extension of the organizational climate debates of the 1960s and 1970s, it was sparked by popular management books of the early 1980s.

In addition to being informed by practice, we can also "practice" ourselves. Consider, for example, Jacqueline Novogratz, founder and CEO of Acumen Fund, a nonprofit venture capital firm dedicated to understanding and eradicating global poverty. Ms. Novogratz learned the importance of balancing reflection and practice – "letting the work teach you" – as one of her mentors suggested. Through her continued immersion in the poverty-stricken realities of Africa, Novogratz found many of her assumptions just did not hold true. Existing philanthropic efforts to give money away, to grant money in the hopes of stimulating economic activity, repeatedly proved to be ineffective. Novogratz challenged existing assumptions when she found that philanthropy worked best when money was invested in not-for-profit institutions. Her strategy of "patient capital – money invested over a long period of time with the acknowledgement that returns might be below market, but with a wide range of management support services to nurture the company to liftoff and beyond" (Novogratz, 2009, p. 204) – has worked. Acumen Fund has stimulated more sustainable economic activity for the poorest sectors of society than most other past efforts have. Novogratz challenged the prevailing wisdom and developed

alternative models by balancing practice with reflection, by testing her own models and considering the results. IB/IM scholars might learn much from her approach.

The previous anecdote of an outsider solving an insider's problems raises the question: Do we systematically simplify phenomena of our study, so that we do not have to "live them" in order to suggest solutions or effective practices? Ivancevich and Gilbert (2000) report how most researchers stay outside of the organizational flow and activities, due to archival data, surveys, and secondary databases being the predominant forms of data collection. These authors conclude that researchers therefore make too broad assumptions and that they cannot capture the complexities and the fabric of organizational life. Novogratz (2009, p. 248) suggests, "As our world gets more complex, smart and skilled generalists who know how to listen to many perspectives across multiple disciplines will become more critical than ever." If this is the wave of the future, are we doing a disservice to practitioners by continuing in our preference for academic elitism? Will our science be better off without their perspectives? We think not. Of course, in science, there is a need for simplification for the sake of understanding, but more importantly, there is a need for (1) understanding the balance of simplicity and complexity, and (2) a willingness to find complex answers to complex problems, as Novogratz's example shows. If scientists want to advance knowledge and inform practice, they benefit from "practical" perspectives, be it by learning from practice and practitioners or becoming scientist-practitioners.

Generating new and relevant ideas and themes also requires that we study complex phenomena in depth. This is particularly important in studies of culture and management. For researchers to truly understand what is going on in specific countries around the world and thus be able to provide important and meaningful insights into that country's important issues, it will be necessary for international business scholars to focus on taking an in-depth look at single countries (see d'Iribarne, 1994, 2002, for examples). In doing so, they must explore multiple dimensions of the country they focus on, including the societal, political, governmental, and organizational dimensions. This requires input, thinking, and research from the perspectives of individuals and bodies involved in each of these areas. Several large-scale studies of national or societal culture (e.g., Hofstede, 2001; Schwartz, 1992; House, 2004; Inglehart, Basáñez, & Menéndez Moreno, 1998) have helped focus the field of international business on the differences among nations, and research on societal culture has been extensive (Gelfand, Erez, & Aycan, 2007). Yet, most research has empirically compared

dimensions that were perhaps less universal than its claims, as opposed to comparisons rooted in national history and traditions (see Crozier, 1964; De Maria, 2008; d'Iribarne 1994, 2002). Without taking local context and history into consideration, we run the risk of proposing pseudoglobal applicability of many aspects of international business research, as Özbilgin (2008) aptly pointed out (see Peterson, 2001, for thoughts on context-sensitive international collaboration).

Another example of how our past has shaped our present ways of studying and researching is the notion of *national culture*. Although it is widely noted that cultural boundaries do not align with country boundaries, the existence of country scores and the ease of drawing on those scores via an Indirect Values Inference approach (Lenartowicz & Roth, 1999) has resulted in substantial literature that empirically treats culture and country borders as equivalent (for a sample of such research, see the review by Kirkman, Lowe, & Gibson, 2006). This is convenient because it allows scholars to study many subjects more easily and communicate their results more easily (e.g., Brewer & Sheriff, 2007; Harzing, 2004). It is also very likely that the nation-as-proxy-for-culture approach has indeed provided practitioners with a better starting point when visiting and dealing with other cultures as some conclusions seem solid because they have been uncontested for decades, such as different interpretations and responses to strategic issues (Schneider & De Meyer, 1991). We do not really know if the end of the nation state is near or not (it has been a frequent claim in sociology and elsewhere since the early 1970s). Nevertheless, many authors in the field of international business are very aware of the problems created by the use of country scores and some have begun to empirically test the influence of intracultural variation (e.g., Au, 1999; Au & Cheung, 2004). Additionally, some researchers have begun to focus on culture at multiple levels of analysis, rather than focusing on societal cultures (see, e.g., Yoko Brannen & Salk, 2000, as well as an upcoming special issue in *Journal of International Business Studies*).

From the perspective of a multinational corporation (MNC), focusing on heterogeneous cultures provides numerous managerial advantages (Au, 1999). However, focusing on intracultural variation not only reflects "reality" but also has the potential to help provide new research ideas. In addition to exploring the empirical impact of intracultural variation, it is essential that we improve our understanding of the implications it has for theory and practice. Do the types of questions we use to examine an organization, city, region, or society with a high level of intracultural variation differ substantially from those we use in a similar area with a low

level of intracultural variation? Do widely studied concepts represent the same phenomenon in samples that differ substantially in terms of diversity? The variation that exists within a culture and the boundaries that are drawn for different levels of analysis represent opportunities for identifying future research areas.

Rather than treating culture as a variable to be measured and assessed (e.g., Stahl, Maznevski, Voigt, & Jonsen, 2010), an *alternative* interpretive approach essentially understands culture as a root metaphor for organizations (cf. Frost, Moore, Louis, Lundberg, & Martin, 1985; Pondy, Frost, Morgan, & Dandridge, 1983; Smircich, 1983). The central features of the interpretive approach are laid out by Alvesson and Sköldberg (2000, pp. 58–66) as: a search for tacit meanings rather than causal relationships (deep assumption-level cultural constructs following Schein, 1985), a view of organizational life as narrative or text replete with meaningful symbols rather than data and facts, an understanding of the subjective nature of research versus a purely objective view, and finally, an understanding of the dynamic, interactive nature of culture. Such a paradigmatic add-on may help open the way toward middle-range, process-based theories that might then lead to more dynamic models for understanding the interaction between global leaders, foreign managers, and host country employees.

ARE WE ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTIONS?

If we are not asking the right questions, how do we determine what is right? Adler and Harzing (2009) remind us that the original purpose of universities was to conduct research that contributes to advancing societal under-standing and well-being, as opposed to primarily benefiting the careers of individuals or creating knowledge for its own sake and that of its creators.

In seeking answers to the most appropriate questions, we focus on Van de Ven's (2007) problem formulation step in the engaged scholarship process: What are the problems we are trying to solve? Are they relevant?

> Engagement is not done just for socially acceptable, persuasive or enjoyable reasons; instead, it is undertaken out of necessity to learn and understand the problem domain. It's the research question about the problem domain that drives the engaged scholarship process. (Van de Ven, 2007, p. 268)

Among scientists, the answers to the above questions often have to be framed as the rigor versus relevance debate, which has surfaced periodically

in recent decades (e.g., a seminal issue of the *British Journal of Management*, December 2001, and numerous presidential addresses at the Academy of Management, such as Hambrick, 1994). Recently, we have seen it debated in the *Academy of Management Learning and Education* (March 2009) and the *Journal of Management Studies* (May 2009). Judging research on dichotomies (see Anderson, Herriot, & Hodgkinson, 2001) of rigor and relevance is also common among practitioners who often cocoon and refuse to accept well-founded science in favor of fads (Weick, 2001). Given the tension and ambiguity surrounding this subject, and its seemingly constant recurrence, we wish to remind scholars that the dichotomy of rigor versus relevance is false, insofar as it is not an either/or issue, but a both/and issue. Choosing between rigor and relevance as a criterion upon which research questions are judged is akin to choosing between water and air for the planet. We need both. When there is a conflict, reviewers will favor rigor (Kieser & Leiner, 2009), and therefore, we should not stop attempting to eliminate dichotomy thinking around this matter. Perhaps top management journals fare better than some disciplines in other sciences in trying to emphasize both rigor and relevance, but we believe that there is a long way to go. The success of this journey is largely determined by the ability to phrase the right research questions and at the same time to ensure that these questions are specific enough to be answered with rigor.

How do we find these questions? If our epistemological aim is to create knowledge in the arena of international business, then a central question is what constitutes knowledge in international business versus knowledge in general. We believe that there are knowledge domains that are particularly relevant to IB/IM. We have chosen to work in an arena in which firms have dispersed locations, where businesses operate under different societal rules, institutions, and governments, where individuals are socialized in demonstrably different ways and, thus, misunderstanding occurs more easily. It is not that these things are unimportant in other fields; instead, it is that they are particularly important in our field. Furthermore, Gordon Mitchell (2004, p. 213), in his discussion of social movement rhetoric, criticizes scholars for their lack of reflexivity, for not using their own theoretical tools "back on themselves to illuminate the status of their own scholarship."

The same criticism could be directed at international business scholars. We need to consider our own cultural roots, our scholarly training, our vision, and the influence these have on what we study, how we study it, and our interpretation of meaning. Who we are affects what we ask and which methods we use to evaluate questions. An epistemological approach leads us

to reflect on what IB/IM knowledge is (Heatherington, 1996). The typical Western approach views the scientific method of validation as superior and the knowledge that results from this method as the truth until science determines otherwise (Kuhn, 1962). In other cultures and contexts, different forms of validation are accepted (such as personal experience). What is perhaps universal, however, is that what is considered to be "truth" must be determined within a particular context (Baba, Gluesing, Ratner, & Wagner, 2004; see also De Maria, 2008; Johns, 2006) – in our case, an international and cross-cultural context. Chris Bangle, the controversial former head of design for the BMW Group (1992–2009), was asked, "Is there a right and wrong in design?" and his response was, "We don't have an advanced design group, we call it advanced context, because context is everything. Why does the 7-Series [top model competing with Mercedes S-class and Audi A8] sell differently in Asia than it does in Europe? It is a completely different context. A global company with global products has to understand context and then make tough decisions. It is not like one is intrinsically right and one is intrinsically wrong. Design comes in waves and depending on where you are that wave is going to be accepted there or not." (Dowling, 2004). The point here is a richness of contexts that matter, including location context (e.g., Gunnigle, Murphy, Cleveland, Heraty, & Morley, 2002) and chronological context (timing). This is mentioned with an appropriate warning by Özbilgin (2009) that context must not be framed as a destiny-hindering progression, but rather as a possibility. These contextual aspects are already a central element of thorough review processes, yet they have perhaps been rather neglected in the actual phrasing and development of research questions.

We also wish to highlight here a distinct kind of knowledge called *phronesis* (Aristotle, 1976), which refers to knowledge that is appropriate in a given situation. It is a practical wisdom that involves making choices between alternative actions in relation to certain values or interests (Flyvbjerg, 2001). Therefore, the notion of practical wisdom helps us in thinking about asking the right questions. Based on the preceding discussion of rigor, relevance, the unique aspects of IB/IM, the identity of its protagonists, and practical wisdom, we can generate the following questions and themes for thinking about the right questions in IB/IM:

How can we expand our knowledge of IB/IM?

1. Historical knowledge – Knowledge from the past
2. Experiential knowledge – Knowledge from practice
3. Existential knowledge – Knowledge from socialization

4. Endemic knowledge – Knowledge from the local context
5. Explicit knowledge – Knowledge from textbook learning
6. Tacit knowledge.

What do we need to understand?

1. Different contexts and how to operate in them
2. How to use multiple disciplines to understand phenomena
3. What lies beneath the artifacts is especially important
4. Wider societal concerns
5. Knowledge from other contexts to meld with our own
6. The demands, and how to meet them, of the multiple stakeholders of IB/IM – those who are influenced and who influence IB/IM research, including top management, investors, employees, customers, society, IB/IM students, NGOs, governments, policymakers, and so on.

What is particularly important in international business in terms of the application of knowledge?

1. Knowledge should be applied in different contexts (e.g., societies)
2. Knowledge should be updated in response to rapid changes
3. Different interpretations of knowledge should be allowed
4. Learning from the "periphery" (e.g., non-Westerners, practitioners, and scholars of adjacent sciences).

WHAT CONTEXTUAL FORCES ARE DRIVING THE FUTURE RESEARCH AGENDA?

We argue that current major global contextual changes that are affecting, and will continue to affect, IB/IM are climate change, economic and social globalization, the technology gap and resultant inequality, and sustainability. These were chosen based on: (a) our close reading of the IB/IM and other literatures dealing with future directions and challenges (for a recent example, see Aharoni and Brock, 2010); (b) the fact that within them are subsumed many of the other issues that are creating complexity, such as terrorism, poverty, and the global financial crisis; and (c) their societal relevance. For example, the recent global financial meltdown can be seen as a result of increased economic globalization combined with an inattention to the sustainability of the free-market system as it has been practiced to date. Thus, these four key issues should play a major role in informing our

view and discussion of international business and serve as fundamental
drivers of future research. We acknowledge that there are overlaps between
these categories but regard these overlaps as inevitable in such a discussion
as this. We feel that the neglect of these contextual changes by IB/IM
scholars, while they fill incremental gaps in existing knowledge, corresponds
to ''fiddling while the world burns'' (analogy borrowed from Worldwatch
Institute, 2009). Studying phenomena derived from these forces will require
what we call *scientific mindfulness*: a thoughtful approach that is holistic,
contextual, and cross-disciplinary (we will return to the theme of scientific
mindfulness later).

Climate Change

Climate change (global warming) may be the most critical contextual change
affecting international business in the coming decades. According to the
Forum 2009 – *Human Impact Report on Climate Change* (2009), global
warming and the environmental damage that results from it will have a
greater impact on the world's population than any other single issue.
Because climate change is a global phenomenon, the negative effects of
environmental destruction and the consequent social upheaval in one part of
the globe will also impact countries (and the companies in them) in other
parts of the globe (IPCC, 2007). A recent report (Oxfam, 2009) suggests that
in Africa, for example, as global temperatures continue to rise and rainfall
patterns change, the Horn of Africa will lose between 80 and 94% of its
agricultural activity, and South African net grain revenues will fall by as
much as 90% by 2100. As Africa's agricultural base is eviscerated and its
population increases, we can expect an increase in the kind of conflicts we
have seen in Darfur and Congo. A study for the US Pentagon predicts that
global warming in the 21st century could ''…potentially de-stabilize the geo-
political environment, leading to skirmishes, battles, and even war due to
resource constraints … Disruption and conflict will be endemic features of
life'' (Schwartz & Randall, 2003, p. 22). Moreover, given the resultant rapid
decline in the already low incomes of these emerging economies, they will
find it increasingly difficult to generate revenues that will enable them to
build the infrastructure needed to support new business.

   The wide disparities in income, safety, and stability across world regions
will require international businesses to manage changes, deal with highly
volatile situations, think through proper risk assessments, and set up
contingency plans. Given the likelihood that climate change will occur in

some regions faster than others, "(d)ifferential warming should affect the allocation of international capital, since investors might perceive regions with high warming rates to be more risky" (Romilly, 2007, p. 475).

This contextual influence suggests a number of research questions including the following:

- How well does the present concept and measurement of "country risk assessment" fit this new reality?
- In what ways do we need to amend our current definitions and approaches to effectively managing country risk?
- How can we manage organizations with diminished resources resulting from global warming?
- How can we manage business transactions between countries that have more resources and those that have fewer resources?
- How will international business help create partnerships and infrastructure to support new technologies to manage risks, uncertainties, change, and resource scarcity?
- What are the interconnected consequences of global climate change that international business managers need to understand?
- How can companies work with emerging economies to develop solutions to the problems arising from climate change?

Globalization

Griffith et al. (2008, p. 1225) identify "understanding the role of emerging markets in globalization" and "developing a better understanding of the antecedents, processes, and consequences of globalization" as secondary issues for IB/IM research. However, it is our belief that these so-called secondary issues should be *central* themes for IB/IM researchers.

Much of the world's population now sees underdevelopment and its consequences (Kiggundu, 2002) as arising from, or at least exacerbated by, economic globalization (Cavanagh & Mander, 2004). For example, in the 1990s, "…per capita income fell in 54 of the world's poorest countries…" (Korten, 2006, p. 67) "…and these countries increasingly question the assumptions underlying economic globalization, such as promotion of hypergrowth, homogenization of cultures, adoption of consumerism model, and unrestricted flow of capital and resources" (Cavanagh & Mander, 2004, p. 34). Unless addressed, this could lead to a severe backlash against globalization (Bansal, 2002). Countries with emerging economies are

increasingly looking to multinational companies to address questions concerning how the fruits of globalization should be shared. If globalization is to increase benefits for humanity, its costs and the uneven bearing of those costs need to become a central theme of research in international business. Such research will require multidisciplinary teams of researchers to address questions such as:

- How do global organizations affect the social and economic well-being of the countries in which they operate? Can firms utilize financial and organizational practices to ensure that economic performance does not come at the cost of social disintegration?
- How can economic models be redefined to invite international managers to be more inclusive and compassionate when calculating return on investment?
- Will globalization lead to more identity clashes *between* international organizations and how will organizations manage internal diversity?
- What is the relationship between organizational structures and governance mechanisms and the distribution of profits across national boundaries?
- Can international codes of conduct and self-regulation lead to a more equitable distribution of profits?
- What business models can improve conditions for disadvantaged groups?
- How do organizations ensure knowledge transfer from developing to developed countries?

Technology Gap and Inequalities

As noted by the Commission on Science and Technology for Development (CSTD), "There is a wide gap between those who have access to technology and use it effectively and those who do not" (CSTD, 2006).

It is clear that allowing this gap to widen will only exacerbate poverty, hunger, disease, illiteracy, environmental degradation, and gender inequality among those nations that are underutilizing more advanced technologies (CSTD, 2006). It has also become clear that increases in poverty, hunger, and disease will have a dramatic impact on the entire world not just on the developing nations where these problems may be most acute (Korten, 2006; Cavanagh & Mander, 2004; Forum 2009 – *Human Impact Report on Climate Change*, 2009). Shrinking this technology gap and the resultant equity gap is thus a critical goal for humanity.

We also need to recognize the equally significant gap between those who can create these technologies, those who can access these technologies, and those who can use existing technologies (CSTD, 2006). The technological context raises a number of questions, including but not limited to the following:

- Who is best equipped to take the steps needed to close the technology gap?
- What steps need to be taken?
- How can these steps be identified, and by whom?
- What is the most effective process for implementing the steps that need to be taken and ensuring that they benefit the right people?

Sustainability

A fourth global contextual force is the emergence of the worldview of sustainability – "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (Worldwatch Institute, 2009). Sustainability is often operationalized in practice as the *triple bottom line* of simultaneously achieving economic, environmental, and social goals. Several studies have suggested that without equal attention to the social bottom line, the ability to achieve environmental goals will be undermined (Brown, Garver, Helmuth, Howell, & Szeghi, 2009; Dunphy, Griffiths, & Benn, 2003; Osland, Drake, & Feldman, 1999; Phillips & Claus, 2002; Bansal, 2002). Matutinovic (2007) suggests that a new worldview is emerging from the combination of global contextual changes that business now faces. We believe that sustainability represents the spearhead of this emerging new worldview, one that is likely to radically alter the way in which international business is conceived and conducted. This author defines a worldview as a "…set of beliefs, symbols, values and segments of objective knowledge that are widely shared in a given society over a considerable period of time (for at least the life-span of one generation)" (Matutinovic, 2007, p. 1111). A society's institutions, particularly those that regulate patterns of production and consumption, are shaped by the dominant worldview prevailing in that society.

The worldview underlying traditional international business research, including prediction of future themes, appears to be one in which managers of international business have a neoclassical, linear view of the world economy. In this worldview, the MNC is viewed as an independent actor

within the global system that can choose actions within the global arena (e.g., the configuration of its supply chain, whether to enter a particular foreign market based solely on economic returns, choosing its form of participation in the market) without considering the effects of these actions on the global economic, social, and environmental system. Hence, the topic of sustainability, which is often ignored by "experts" (e.g., Griffith et al., 2008), illustrates how reliance on the past and those who have created this past narrows our research focus at the expense of timely topics.

A new worldview with sustainability at its core suggests a number of important research questions, such as:

- What rules will guide the use of environmental resources to ensure sustainability?
- What emerging institutions (production and consumption) will guide the practice of international business?
- What new requirements will international businesses face for creating new environmentally inclusive business development models and innovative new technologies to meet sustainable development needs?
- What role can MNCs play in the design and creation of these new rules and institutions?
- How will this new worldview affect revenue generation in MNCs?

THE ROAD AHEAD: SCIENTIFIC MINDFULNESS

Because of the complexity and magnitude of these questions, it will be necessary for researchers to engage in what we call *scientific mindfulness* to generate ideas and themes. In essence, scientific mindfulness is taking thoughtful approaches that are holistic, contextual, and cross-disciplinary. This approach is an extension of what has been termed "Mode 2" of research (see Anderson et al., 2001, p. 393; Gibbons et al., 1994), in which the range of backgrounds and stakeholders involved in knowledge creation transcends the boundaries of traditional disciplines. Beyond simple mode of action, we see it as a *foundation* for many different kinds of research. *Scientific mindfulness* opens up the possibility of an interplay between traditional positivist ontologies to include an openness to interpretive as well as radical humanist and structural approaches. As such, scientific mindfulness would typically be characterized by *mixed methods* triangulations of research (for guidance, see e.g. Marschan-Piekkari & Welch, 2004; Greene, 2007; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003) in order to come to a deeper

understanding of today's increasingly complex organizational phenomena. Studies in IB/IM come predominantly from what Burrell and Morgan (1979) term a positivist or interpretive paradigmatic orientation, with the former enjoying a certain hegemonic position in management studies (Lowe, 2001; Romani, 2008). As such, most research on global firms takes on a positivist ontology in which reality is seen as something "out there," measurable and objective, independent of the researchers themselves (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). However important the positivist approach remains, this alone may not provide a complete picture when dealing with the complex, embedded, interconnected, and dynamic nature of IB/IM in today's contexts. The ongoing multifaceted, contextually situated interactions that characterize today's complex cultural organizations often demand a more nuanced, interpretive, and paradigmatic approach (Redding, 1994, cited in Romani, 2008).

The dominance of the positivist paradigm, especially in culture studies, has led to a epistemology in international business research characterized by a binary logic of "us"/"them" that maps nicely with aggregated value-based dimensions, as put forth by Hofstede (2001) and others (e.g., Schwartz, 1992; House, 2004). The anthropologist Eric Wolf (1982, p. 34; cf. Yoko Brannen, 1994) calls such binary representations "two-billiard ball" understandings of culture. National cultures were often treated as made up of relatively stable value structures. Clearly, when little was known about other cultures (especially in the field of management), the resultant general guidelines for protocol helped expatriates and others crossing cultural boundaries to avoid taking the wrong path by inadvertently insulting their hosts. However, the next step was to treat a country as a context in which existing knowledge or theories could be tested or adapted to new markets; for example, a theory of Chinese management (Barney & Zhang, 2008). These authors propose another avenue that does not begin in the West, namely Chinese management theory. This choice applies to many emerging or emerged markets. The integration of traditional Western research with "the rest of the world" is underexplored and central to the tenet of future IB/IM research and, perhaps, IB/IM itself. The efforts needed may end up "disrupting the hegemony of Western epistemology" (Özkazanç-Pan, 2008, p. 971). Some journals, universities, and research environments have already adapted their structures, processes, and ways of thinking but we believe, nevertheless, that our field still needs to try harder in the endeavor of catching up with a new and flatter world.

Scientific mindfulness features breadth and depth of idea generation. In this mode, ideas and themes are generated using multiple sources of

information and involve multiple levels of analysis and interdisciplinary inquiry. Deep contextual understanding of institutional, cultural, and societal conditions are critical contexts that must be taken into consideration in generating ideas and themes. Thus, a more holistic approach that is at once interdisciplinary and mixed methods holds promise for generating ideas and themes that are both new and influential. It is not the process that we typically see in the discussion sections of empirical papers, where the narrow focus on the empirical research often produces only shallow ideas that are replications or incremental extensions of the existing work. We are often in a situation where scientists formulate problems that correspond closely to those techniques in which they are skilled and experienced (Kaplan, 1964, cited in Weick, 1996). Just as a photographer changes lenses to capture different motives (analogy from Peacock, 2001, p. 74), a scientifically mindful approach requires an exposure of the research question to a larger set of research tools brought to the subject matter by a plethora of researchers and thus better suited to capturing the complexities of today's complex cultural organizations.

Our conceptualization of scientific mindfulness has roots in other thoughtful conceptualizations of an expansion-of-mind approach. Weick, Sutcliffe, and Obstfeld (1999, p. 88) introduce *mindfulness* at the organizational level as a thinking style embedding "a rich awareness of discriminating detail and capacity for action." Martin and Meyerson (2008) talk about the need to look at societal solutions because they say that we have been trapped in incrementalism and institutional interlocks. Nowotny, Scott, and Gibbons (2001) also call for societal inclusion in science as a coevolutionary process. Gibbons et al. (1994) talk about increasing knowledge creation through transdisciplinary and context-accepting efforts. Senge (1990) is a proponent of holistic thinking that includes numerous sciences (see also Senge, Carstedt, & Porter, 2001). Pettigrew (2001) proposes a more contextualist view, inclusion of social sciences and a broader epistemological view, based on conscious pluralism. The idea of holistic science and multidisciplinary complex systems has been proposed by many as a sustainable alternative to reductionism and classic Newtonian approaches (e.g., Hanson, 1995; the Santa Fe Institute, 2009; Stenger, 1999). Finally, Adler et al. (2009) suggest a more holistic focus on societal changes and governmental expectations (among others) in an article in which she and five other AIB fellows describe the future of IB/IM research.

Scientific mindfulness also requires that we invite key informants, such as scholars from adjacent fields and practitioners, into our closed scientific

circle, instead of barricading ourselves behind traditional disciplines such as psychology and economics (McGrath, 2007; Pfeffer, 2009; see also Jonsen, Maznevski, & Schneider, 2010). Forecasting changes in the business environment is critical for policymakers as well as corporate decision makers (Czinkota & Ronkainen, 2009) and a requirement if international business is to be sustained as a legitimate scholarly field. Both rigor and relevance would benefit from wider interpretations of scholars in adjacent disciplines as well as those on the periphery of academia (i.e., outside of scholarly circles).

A good example of the lack of effort to communicate with adjacent disciplines to generate ideas for the future research agenda is the research that has been done on international human resource management. This research tends to focus on expatriates, and sometimes inpatriates, and parent country nationals. However, international business scholars have paid insufficient attention to the largest group of "international" employees – immigrants – those who have established permanent residency in a country other than their home country. This is surprising because immigrants face many of the same issues that expatriates face (e.g., adaptation), and companies that employ immigrants deal with integration and socialization issues that are conceptually similar to those of companies that employ expatriates (cf. Tung, 1993, 2009). Accordingly, research on immigrant employees has the potential to inform research on expatriates and vice versa (Aycan & Berry, 1996). Understanding the reasons for the absence of international business research on immigrants is complex. One might argue that international business scholars are servants to power (cf. Brief, 2000), who assume that studying immigrants is not in the interest of corporate leaders. Alternatively, history may just have been self-perpetuating (we did not study immigrants in the past; hence, we do not study immigrants now) (see also Dietz, 2010), although this self-perpetuation has resulted in a disconnection from emerging themes in the practice of international business. Then again, life in the ivory tower of international business may have kept many scholars from researching in other domains, such as ethnic studies and migration. Obviously, cross-citations of migration and international business journals are rare. Other examples of adjacent disciplines are speed theorists, futurists, and sociology studies regarding "how people live" and "new generations" (e.g., Eriksen, 2001; Lindgren, Luthi, & Furth, 2005; Mogensen et al., 2009; Shirky, 2008). These disciplines could help us determine important international business aspects, from human resource management to consumer behavior and marketing.

CONCLUSION

Our objective in this paper has been to conceptualize a new way of identifying the themes that should dominate the future IB/IM research agenda. We began the discussion with three basic questions: Whom should we ask? What questions should we be asking and which selection criteria should we apply? What contextual forces will drive the research agenda? Exploration of these questions led us to challenge some of the common practices that currently take place in the field of IB/IM research. As a result, we propose the concept of scientific mindfulness as the way forward. Scientific mindfulness is a holistic, cross-disciplinary, and contextual approach, whereby researchers need to make sense of multiple perspectives, from both academia and practice, with the betterment of society as the ultimate criterion.

Griffith et al. (2008) point out, and we concur, that much of the research in the field of IB/IM is contained in silos, with researchers in each silo often working in isolation from one another. New and enhanced means of communication technologies *should* have increased and accelerated cross-boundary thinking and transdisciplinary approaches around the globe (Gibbons et al., 1994). The internet *should* have broadened our sources for information and inspiration (see Evans, 2008). However, neither of these tools has had the predicted effect. This is particularly important for idea and theme generation in future IB/IM research. New ideas and innovations are unlikely to come from the foci that *currently* exist within the field. This is partly because cross-boundary and cross-field collaboration and writing are somewhat of a liability for academics trying to publish in top journals (often even for those who specialize in cross-cultural and international matters), just as ''foreignness'' is considered a liability for MNCs (Zaheer, 2002). We advocate that a conscious effort be made to expand our view beyond traditional approaches or conventional boundaries. In essence, foreignness and cross-boundary collaboration can be a source of innovation because recontextualizing knowledge can result in new understanding (Yoko Brannen, 2004). In other words, the effort made in crossing boundaries will lead to the consideration of new perspectives, insights, and findings.

In coming to this conclusion, we reviewed previous adjacent discussions such as the dichotomy of rigor versus relevance. In doing so, we realized that the real dilemma falls between advancing knowledge and finding solutions on the one side and the betterment of society on the other side. Ultimately, we cannot separate the levels of organizations and society; thus, we have described the contextual forces that managers and researchers need to take

into account: climate change, globalization, inequalities, and sustainability. Simple mindful questions can relate thoughtfully to the above, such as "How can ten pairs of cotton socks cost less than £2 in Primark on Oxford Street?" We add to Brief's (2000, p. 352) notion of questioning whom you serve as follows, "Question who you serve and serve the right questions." In essence, we have sought to provide a platform for reflection on the state of mind with which we engage in our science. In Kantian spirit, we suggest *taking IB/IM research to a new level where all players involved in and affected by international business are included – not for the cause of effects, but because it makes sustainable sense and is the right thing to do*.

NOTE

1. Members of ION (International Organizations Network). ION was formed with a mission to increase the quality and impact of research on people and their effectiveness in international organizations. The network's vision is to be a catalyst for the creation and application of knowledge and understanding that powerfully impacts how international organizations are managed.

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