

How to Regain Legitimacy and Relevance in a New Era for International Business: If Not Us, Who?

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Be ready to apply this general question, which we pose in the subtitle of this paper, to contemporary challenges facing us!

The New IB Realities

For us who research, teach, and learn about international business (IB), several recent news and developments have generated powerful concerns for the field of IB:

- Taken as a whole, the world economy is no longer booming but is crawling sideways as far as trade and investment are concerned, with economic growth generating less international business than in the recent past (UNCTAD, 2016; World Trade Organization, 2016).
- The post-WWII, post-Soviet Union, and post-isolated China consensus about the benefits of globalization and economic integration have been shaken by the nationalism evident in the post-recession rise of “guarded globalization” in many emerging markets (Bremmer, 2014), recent anti-globalization and anti-integration movements in developed countries as illustrated by the Brexit vote in the United Kingdom, growing anti-European Union and anti-immigration sentiments in several other European countries including Germany, France, Italy, and The Netherlands, separatist movements in the UK (Scotland) and Spain (Basque country and Catalonia), the neo-mercantilism revealed by thousands of new trade restrictions since 2008, and the populist ethnocentrism manifested against immigrants and refugees.
- Regime changes and uncertain government policies render the political picture murky and even scary in several key Western and Eastern countries, which have witnessed new voting constituencies as well as leaders willing to upset the global economic order – as with the new U.S. administration pulling out of an imminent Trans-Pacific trade agreement or renegotiating existing trade and investment agreements to regain sovereignty in light of controversies surrounding the

investor-state dispute settlement (ISDS) system (Meyer & Rottig, 2016).

In the face of these new realities, Professor Simon Collinson wonders whether today’s IB faculty can shed its elitist image of detachment and irrelevance, and replace it with one of professionalism, imagination, conviction and credibility so as to rebuild legitimacy and relevance of our field. However, *who will achieve these goals if not us?* Collinson foresees us getting the new “right messages” to “the people that matter” so here is the first question for you, our valued readers of *AIB Insights*: **What messages and what audiences will matter most in the near future?**

The New Challenges

Professor Mary Ann Von Glinow agrees that the above new realities do not have the sound of a “working global system.” We have failed so far to help our stakeholders – students, managers, and policy-makers – make sense of our constantly changing world. We have been tested and found wanting! Yet, she is optimistic enough to believe that we can develop what it takes to “add value” to our audiences if we focus on “the fringe and frontier issues” that are relevant, important and even critically alarming in our world today. We have a “voice” and must use it to answer the second question of: **What constraints may hamper our full engagement in this project?**

Professor Jonathan Doh evokes the MNE research that started after World War II when IB problems were new and exciting to discover, analyze and explain. Today, many issues sound stale and overworked, and we wonder what new “phenomena” will inspire us and what new incentives we need now to locate, study and report “rich details for which no theory yet exists.” In other words, “description” is again acceptable when grounded in deep detailing of what has been so far overlooked but merits definite attention. The impact of the recent reduction from 32 to 17 U.S. CIBERs (Centers for International Business Education and Research) that have been financed by the U.S. Department of

Education, illustrate this point so that our third question for you is: **What (other) IB “phenomena” can you identify that deserve rich description and preliminary explanations?**

Professor Robert Grosse has greatly benefited from his multiple foreign assignments as Business School Dean in Mexico and the United Arab Emirates and as Founding Director of a Global Leadership Center in a large South African bank, in addition to his teaching in several universities in the United States, Spain, and Latin America. Hence, he is well qualified to comment on the relative decline of IB education in the United States and its absolute growth in other parts of the world, including China and India which offer large and growing markets for the IB field. He thinks that earlier policy- and strategy-oriented studies are worth emphasizing again albeit in a new guise. He cites an example of how IB professors have looked at international business in a free-trade manner combined with a decent respect for international norms and agreements. Now, we must change this scenario and credibly assume that China and other emerging markets as well as even some developed markets generally act as neo-mercantilists operating with few scruples and that MNEs often try to become overbearing monopolists.

Besides, he believes that global value chains (GVCs) make IB research more “international” by locating, for instance, the United States and the European Union’s member countries as individual links in these chains that offer U.S. and European firms, whether big or small to medium enterprises, rich opportunities to position themselves within their countries of origin but also wherever in the world their contributions fit the local link. As the economist David Ricardo demonstrated through his comparative-advantage thesis 200 years ago, there is always room for one less well-endowed country to compete and succeed at it! However, the world remains a suboptimal place where countries act opportunistically with guile while firms seek monopolistic positions. We live in a “new world” where governments pursue international policies that maximize voters’ well-being while companies favor nation-serving rather than globe-saving endeavors. Based on these considerations, our fourth question to you is: **What teaching and curriculum changes would you propose to make IB pedagogy more relevant, legitimate, and impactful?**

Action Begins at Home

Jonathan Doh exhorts us to make the efforts, take the risks, and choose the right targets in order to prepare those executives, managers, and operators who will staff and run firms in Grosse’s new world. These targets must also include the organizations we belong to and the instruments they use. Think of the Academy of International Business, the International Management Division of the Academy of Management, their leaders and Secretariats, their publications – mainly, AIB’s *Journal of International Business Studies*, *AIB Insights*, as well as AIB’s new policy journal that is about to be launched – their conferences, their chapters

(18 around the world in the case of the AIB) and their accreditors (e.g. the AACSB, AMBA, EQUIS).

In the following section, we would like to start exploring with you some actionable projects that we, as IB teachers and scholars, could implement following a fruitful discussion. Therefore, we kindly solicit your input on how we can contribute to our field’s efforts to regain legitimacy and relevance in the new era for international business.

Actionable Projects

1. Share up-to-date relevant information among members of the IB community.

There are many sources of information unknown or unavailable to members of the IB community, and we encourage efforts to continuously identify these sources, rapidly publicize and distribute news about key trends and new developments regarding such topics as the benefits and costs of globalization, international trade and investment changes, the integration (or trends toward disintegration) of countries into associations and blocs, the treaties uniting countries, the growth of terrorism, as well as immigration problems and opportunities. To realize this project, we could envision, for example, a more pro-active engagement of AIB’s 18 regional chapter organizations, coordinated by AIB’s leadership (e.g., VP in charge of chapters), to “feel the pulse” of specific locales around the globe and so learn about and share with the AIB community in a timely manner current political, legal, economic and cultural news, analyses, events, and developments. The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) and Central & Eastern European (CEE) Chapters, for example, could inform and distribute important data, information, and developments about the refugee crisis in their region.

Another example is the recent decision by the new administration of the United States to not join the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) agreement that the previous administration had negotiated. AIB’s chapters which cover the remaining 11 TPP member countries – namely, the Australia-New Zealand, Canadian, and Japanese chapters, as well as the Latin American and Southeast Asian chapters – could provide updates on the current discussions and future outlook for the TPP without the United States from their own regional perspectives, an interesting dialogue that could be complemented by insights from AIB’s Chinese chapter regarding China possibly filling the void which the United States opened in TPP’s implementation efforts by withdrawing from the agreement. AIB’s central website, individual chapter websites, and perhaps even a new AIB social media app to which the AIB membership could subscribe, could serve as central and timely outlets for these data and other information and as platforms for sharing, discussing, and interpreting them. Our question to you is: **What do you think are other sources of information about the above issues and how can we make them available to AIB members on a continuous basis?**

2. Share interpretations of major and current developments

In addition to sharing data and information about current events relevant to our field, their structured and in-depth analyses would be valuable for the IB community. This would require: (1) identifying and distributing major published analyses and (2) circulating blogs written by AIB members on these topics.

Building on our earlier suggestion to engage AIB regional chapters, the Western European Chapter, for example, could provide analyses and discussions about the implications of the refugee crisis, based on the data and information provided by the AIB's MENA and CEE chapters, while the UK-Ireland Chapter could contribute by interpreting the current execution of the Brexit vote and discussing the latter's implications for the UK, the EU, and the rest of Europe.

Besides, AIB's publication strategy could provide a timely outlet for these analyses and discussions based on blogs, online discussion forums, AIB social media apps, and more fine-grained and developed analyses. The latter's output could be published in *AIB Insights* as was done right after the Brexit vote in June 2016, when *AIB Insights* published a featured article by Pankaj Ghemawat titled "Beyond Brexit: An Initial Analysis and Questions for the AIB Community" (Vol. 16, Issue 3). In it, Professor Ghemawat discussed the Brexit vote, explored its implications based on the laws of globalization, sketched out business implications and concluded with a set of thought-provoking questions to the AIB community in an effort to stimulate a fruitful discussion on the topic which *AIB Insights* facilitated through an interactive "Comments" feature on its website that allowed the readership to comment on the article, discuss the underlying topic and so communicate with the author and with each other in a two-way and timely fashion. Therefore, our question to you is: **What suggestions do you have for the best identification and distribution of major public analyses and interpretations of key events?**

3. Facilitate new research on current major issues

It is not enough to urge new studies if we do not translate the above issues into intelligible and manageable research topics and do not suggest the relevant theories to apply. For example, the topic of immigration could be translated into "How do U.S. MNEs facilitate the immigration of foreign labor?"—a subject that could be investigated with the help of the resource-based view and of resource-dependence theory. The phenomenon-based research advocated by Professor Doh is certainly also worth considering.

AIB's conferences and specifically its chapter meetings could encourage scholars to present well-conceived research ideas as well as preliminary studies and final analyses based on annual conference themes focused on important developments worth exploring in our field. Conference panels, the new town-hall format, interactive round-table paper discussions and development workshops, as well as focused discussions by top IB scholars and AIB Fellows could provide an opportunity to exchange

information and further refine these research ideas in an effort to develop them into publishable papers. AIB's publications, including the *Journal of International Business Studies (JIBS)*, *AIB Insights*, and the about-to-be launched AIB policy journal could be valuable outlets for these analyses and discussions. This time, our question to you is: **How can we best encourage, support and facilitate path-breaking research on current major issues, and disseminate it in the IB community and beyond?**

4. Other initiatives to regain legitimacy and relevance

AIB, its regional chapters, as well as the Academy of Management's International Management Division could launch specific research initiatives, raise funds to support studies on specific topics, and reward the best research possibly based on "Current Phenomenon-based Best Paper Awards," thereby inspiring and encouraging more institutional research in the field of IB—particularly against the background of recent "institutional" problems linked to our associations and profession.

Such important "institutional" problems include the supply and demand for new professors of IB topics, the structure of school departments specializing in IB teaching and research, the variety of programs offering majors and minors in IB subjects, and related topics reflecting and affecting the present and foreseeable future of IB education.

Is it true, for example, that fewer schools now hire academics who teach only IB courses? Besides, what doctoral programs still train such IB specialists, and what has been their recent experience in placing them? Through our deans, we could ask the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB International) and other accrediting bodies (such as AMBA and EQUIS) to study the supply and demand of new Professors of International Business.

Apropos accrediting bodies, particularly the AACSB's recent guidelines affecting the relevance and legitimacy of business schools include *engagement, innovation and impact*. Do we, as a field, and as individual members "engage" sufficiently— not only within, but also outside our academic realm? Do we feel that our research is innovative enough or merely trying to fit into commonly established research norms and expectations of our academic journals in order to become published and cited? Are the number of publications and academic citations the only impact we value and do we believe that we, as academic scholars and educators in IB, (should) have sufficient impact on IB business practice and policy and sufficient visibility to share our expert opinions, research findings and ideas outside of our academic realm?

In her presidential address at the 2005 Academy of Management conference in Honolulu, Hawaii, Denise Rousseau (2006) talked about the disconnect between management research and management practice in her excellent speech about "evidence-based management." Now, a dozen years later, do we

believe that managers in the IB field make decisions based on the evidence (data, information, analyses, etc.) that we provide in academia? Do we feel that we have sufficiently supported and engaged in initiatives such as the Center for Evidence-Based Management (CEBMA), which provides support and resources to managers, consultants, organizations, teachers, academics, and others interested in learning more about evidence-based decision making and practices in the field of management and leadership? Jonathan Doh, in his article in this issue, prescribes how we could engage based on “phenomenon-based research” so that we need to ask ourselves to what extent have we in the past, and will we in the future have to value and evaluate “phenomenon-based research” so as to facilitate “evidence-based management.” Perhaps this and other routes will significantly contribute to the efforts of our scholarly community to regain legitimacy and relevance in the new era for international business. Through the afore-raised and other questions we would like to explore with you, the *AIB Insights* readership and the AIB membership, how to provide the necessary guidance and drive needed to achieve these goals.

*In an effort to encourage and engage in an action-oriented discussion about how we can contribute to, and facilitate the efforts of, our field to regain legitimacy and relevance in the new era for international business, we would like to identify and highlight three opportunities to participate in this action-oriented dialogue:

First, if you are attending this year’s AIB Annual Meeting in Dubai (July 2–5, 2017), we have organized a panel session titled “Tracing the Contours of a New Era for International Business: Regaining Legitimacy and Relevance for its Study.” This panel session will be held on Tuesday, July 4 from 9:00 to 10:15 a.m. in Room Dubai 1-2 at the Conference hotel (JW Marriott Marquis Dubai) and co-chaired by the authors of this paper – namely, Jean Boddewyn and Daniel Rottig. All authors who have contributed to this special issue—Simon Collinson, Jonathan Doh, Mary Ann von Glinow, and Rob Grosse—will, as panelists, discuss their articles and ideas and invite your comments and suggestions for how we can contribute to rebuilding legitimacy and relevance of our field. We would, therefore, like to cordially invite and encourage you to attend this panel, and we hope that you will take advantage of this invaluable opportunity to communicate and engage with our panelists who are accomplished, experienced and respected IB scholars and educators.

Second, *AIB Insights* provides you with the opportunity to engage in a conversation with the authors of the articles in this special issue through an interactive “Comments Feature” on the *AIB Insights* website at aib.msu.edu/publications/insights. You are cordially invited and encouraged to share your comments, feedback, and suggestions to any of the articles or topics, and the authors will be glad to respond. We further plan on publishing the best comments and suggestions in a future issue of *AIB Insights* and on the aforementioned publication website.

Third, we invite you to submit articles to *AIB Insights* in response

to this special issue that sketch out and discuss suggestions for how our field can regain legitimacy and relevance in this new era for international business. We also welcome articles which follow the suggestions made in this special issue by, for example, analyzing current, relevant, and interesting phenomenon-based research topics and so contribute to building relevant new knowledge and insights that will have an impact within and beyond our field.

We hope that this special issue will spark a healthy, constructive, and fruitful discussion that will contribute to the authors’ recommendations bearing on rebuilding our relevance and legitimacy and on obtaining the evidence necessary to promote the relevant study, teaching and learning of international business. We are confident that your involvement reflecting either the aforementioned three opportunities, the authors’ presentations at the panel in Dubai and the participation of the audience there will enrich these proposals and their execution.

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