From Distant and Detached to Up-Close and Personal

Bridging Strategic and Cross-cultural Perspectives in International Management Research and Practice

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“There isn’t really any need for IB as a separate field, I already develop and teach multinational cases with foreign-owned companies from all around the world and my students themselves come from so many countries.”

Renowned strategy scholar. 09/08/08
Globalization on retreat

- World trade is contracting
- Companies retreating from foreign markets
- Less cross-border M&As

Phenomena on which IB thrived are less vibrant.....
University endowments shrinking

- Impoverished donors
- Tighter public budget
- --→
- Pair down activities—IB makes a good target
  - High cost of teaching & research activities
  - Not discipline based
How did this happen?
No core paradigm—no central research question

- Two disparate perspectives
  - Economics—>strategy
  - Cross-cultural management
Results

- Domain hi-jacking
- Firm/home-centric thinking
- Encouraged knowledge seeking about differences between nation states
  ...less-home centric, more contextually sensitive perspectives are rare
Sociology of the Field

- Eclipsed complexities of culture
  - Ontology
    - Positivist vs. Interpretive
  - Epistemology
    - Search for causal relationships vs. search for links of meaning
    - Binary logic as universals vs. discursive subjectivities
  - Types of studies
    - Nomothetic vs. ideographic
    - Large-scale empirical vs. descriptive ethnographies
    - Examining structures vs. processes
    - “Far and away” vs. “Close up”
Complexities of culture construct

Nature of culture
- Fragmented (sub-cultures, counter-culture) not monolithic
- Variance within not just between cultures
  - increasing with new demographics
- Dynamic and changing, not static and often not reflective of national culture
Complexities in the nature of cultural knowledge

- **Nature of cultural knowledge**
  - explicit vs. tacit
  - stand-alone vs. embedded
  - contextually activated
  - inevitability of recontextualization
Complex cultural combinations

- Ethnicity as cultural indicator is becoming less and less useful
  - Biculturals and hybrids with mixed cultural schemas like Nissan’s Carlos Goshn are becoming more and more common
- Who are these cultural “hybrids”?
  - Dimensions and values don’t get at this.
- What do they bring to organizations?
Complexities of contexts
- Home, host, global, virtual, etc.

Complex technologies
- Co-mingling of cultures--side-by-side; two-in-one; multiple identities

Complex leadership challenges
- Global at once local
- Cultural intelligence
  - General vs. specific cultural knowledge
  - Metacognition
    - Mindfulness mediating knowledge & skills
- Directive, purposeful vs. dependent co-arising effects of globalization
  - Loss of control cf. Iñárritu (Babel)
Globalization...what’s new now?

- “Lucy”
- Alexander
- Romans
- Genghis Khan
- Portuguese
- Columbus
International Business

- Metanational
  - Beyond trade, beyond resource/market seeking
- International managers
  - We study
  - We teach
  - We train
Future Research

- Leverage our identity as IB researchers
  - Deep contextual knowledge
    - High perceptual acuity
    - Flexibility and openness
      - to content: complex cultural phenomena
      - to new approaches
    - Bridging capabilities
      - levels of analysis
      - interdisciplinary research
  - Method
    - Back to qualitative beginnings
    - Mixed-methods
Cross-Cultural research that enhances

Firm strategy

- Stockpiling cultural knowledge from the periphery to redeploy in emerging contexts
- Informing HR directors and influencing global talent management training programs regarding how to leverage the nature and inherent knowledge of existing talent

Insight and impact

- New operationalizations and research designs
- Bridging between theories between far away and up close views
  - Mixed-levels of analysis
  - Mid-level process theories
Up close and Personal

Thank you!