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Track 10: The contribution of MNEs to building sustainable societies

Session format: Panel

Panel Title: A Vision of Responsible Research in International Business

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Panel Title: A Vision of Responsible Research in International Business

Abstract

The aim of this panel is to generate discussion among IB researchers about new directions for research that will generate reliable (repeatable and cumulative) knowledge with relevance for addressing important business and societal problems. The session draws on an interdisciplinary white paper, “A Vision of Responsible Research in Business and Management” (2016) co-authored by 24 senior scholars across five business disciplines from 23 universities in five countries. The white paper begins with a vision of 2030 when business schools around the world have adopted a mission of “business and management research in service of society” and have transformed their research programs toward this mission. It proposes a set of principles for responsible research as well as a set of actions by each of the stakeholders connected with the research eco-system. We will use a debate/dialectic format to discuss the pros and cons of the vision, principles, and actions. The session participants will be invited to join the debate. At the end of the session, we hope that the participants will leave with optimism about the potential of responsible research that will align business school research with societal needs.

Overview

Across business disciplines there is a growing concern that our research has become too narrow, that published research does not solve or address real issues of business and society, and that young researchers are discouraged from addressing these important business topics (Buckley, 2000; Delios, 2016; Doh, 2015; Meyer, 2013, 2015; Tsui, 2013, 2015, 2016). Many papers and editorials have been written on this and related topics (a partial bibliography of 60+ papers and editorials is available on request), and it is a common theme in discussions among deans,

accrediting agencies, professional associations, and journal editors. These groups question the relevance of much of the published research in business and also the validity of its findings. Specific criticisms about validity include an over-emphasis on basic theory over relevance of the topic being studied, excessive focus on methodological and analytical rigor vs. quality of data, and an emphasis on publishing in a small set of journals as evidence of scholarly success as opposed to assessing the quality of the research idea and its impact on theory development, policies and practice. Outsiders such as research funding agencies and business leaders have similar concerns. A further issue is that business school research tends to over-emphasize economic outcomes for businesses and under-emphasize outcomes important for other stakeholders and society as a whole (Walsh, Weber, & Margolis, 2003; Tsui & Jia, 2013).

These types of concerns and a concomitant desire to do better have motivated an interdisciplinary team of leading business school researchers from across disciplines to address the constraints, propose actions, and promote change within the research ecosystem. The vision is to create an ecosystem of “responsible research in business and management in service of society.” The team includes senior scholars from accounting, finance, management, marketing, and operations, and most of them have been former association presidents, former and current top journal editors, along with a group of deans and representatives from AACSB, EFMD (AACSB’s parallel organization in Europe), and the PRME group of the Global Compact of United Nations. Over the last two years the team has worked together to address some of the issues noted above and consider ways to move forward. They have produced a white paper, established a website (to be completed in early 2017), laid plans to establish a community of scholars committed to the responsible research principles as defined in the white paper, and begun an initiative to encourage top journals across disciplines to publish special issues related to

“Grand Challenges.” For example, this December (2016), the *Academy of Management Journal* will publish a Grand Challenge Special Issue. Many journals have published or will be publishing special issues on the problem of inequality in societies (e.g., *Human Relations*, 2013; *Journal of Management Studies*, in process; *Organization Studies*, in process). *AMJ* has just issued a new special research forum, calling for new theory development in management, singling out the issues of sustainability, inequality, and wellbeing as critical challenges in our world with implication for management and that can benefit from greater research attention. With this increasing momentum, we encourage the IB community to join this movement of critical importance to our profession. How can we dedicate our research resources and talents to studying problems that can contribute to developing knowledge that can be useful to upgrade the effectiveness of international business and ultimately create a better society and a better world?

The purpose of this panel is to present the foundational ideas from the interdisciplinary white paper with a vision of the future for business research; introduce the principles of responsible research, and possible actions leading toward the future vision. The ideas in the white paper will be especially important for international business research, since many business schools in the emerging markets are following the dominant research models which tend to be American-centric, compromising the opportunity to develop knowledge unique for their locations. The proposed responsible research framework will value inclusion and plurality in research paradigms to fit the socio-cultural, legal-political, economic-technological conditions of different region and stage of development around the world. Following an overview of the paper’s central ideas, the panelists will engage with each other in a debate format which will ensure that each set of ideas are examined with critical eyes. The audience will be invited to join in the debate. The session is intended to be highly interactive in potentially challenging our

current research approaches, examining the proposed solutions, and searching for opportunities to move forward.

At the end of the session, we hope everyone will leave with an optimism that through both collective and personal actions, IB research will move toward a vision that is on the cutting edge, produces solid knowledge, is timely and important, and addresses important international business problems. Business school researchers have a unique opportunity to contribute ideas and solutions to create a better future for organizations, employees, customers, and societies. With increasing criticism that much of our published research today, across business disciplines, is not aimed at these higher objectives and seems to lack real relevance or meaning, we believe the time is now for transformation. We believe that business school faculties are positioned so perfectly to pursue and create credible, relevant, meaningful and valuable research for business and for our societies.

Explanation of Interest to IB Members

The topic of this panel should be of great interest to researchers who are committed to relevant research already, those who wish to move their research in this direction, and young scholars who are grappling with the current realities of getting published on the one hand and their desires to produce important research that matters on the other. As explained above, the emphasis on the credibility and usefulness of knowledge from inclusive and pluralistic research paradigms and practices would be of particular importance to international business research.