CALL FOR PAPERS: Special issue of Journal of International Business Studies

INTERNATIONALIZATION IN THE INFORMATION AGE

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Introduction

With the emergence of what many scholars call an information and communication age (Freeman and Louçã, 2001), the associated changes in the character of international business (IB) activity have been profound, as illustrated by the discussion over the idea that the world has become flat (Friedman, 2005). However, the debate about the relative importance of various drivers behind what has sometimes been called the third industrial revolution has been lively yet remains inconclusive. Some of the features that have been suggested as characterizing the new age include the following: organizational decentralization (Ghoshal and Bartlett, 1998), vertical disintegration and specialization (Langlois, 2003), modularity (Baldwin and Clark, 2000), flexibility (Volberda, 1998), accelerated knowledge creation, exchange or diffusion, and increased knowledge complexity (Foss and Pedersen, 2004), inter-organizational collaboration and openness (Chesbrough, 2003), and various kinds of networks (Ghoshal and Bartlett, 1990; Zander, 2002). Institution settings have also changed alongside the new wave of technological innovation (North, 1990), leading to changes across countries in the mechanisms responsible for standardization, intellectual property rights, and the institutional conditions fostering individual and local creativity (Mowery, 2009) but which have also been associated with new regulatory and industrial policies, trade policies, privatization and liberalization. Many of these changes have facilitated the internationalization of firms.

In this context, business activity from production to knowledge creation has come to rely on internationally highly disaggregated and geographically dispersed value chains (Gereffi et al, 2005; Mudambi, 2007); and yet a continued centralization of certain functions (including R&D, marketing and finance), as well as control over subsidiary management and decision making. At the same time this has left the way for corporate disaggregation (Zenger and Hesterly, 1997), and more decentralized organizational forms in which resources, including technology and managerial talent, might be distributed among subsidiaries and integrated between them through strong interdependencies. Thus, the traditional model of the MNE as a simple hierarchy and related conceptual approaches are in danger of becoming anachronistic and progressively less appropriate in capturing new trends and opportunities made feasible by the new technological paradigm, which has triggered or required new forms and processes for the international organization of production. Flexibility, knowledge creation, collaboration and international connections, as well as the characteristics of the institutional contexts in which these expanded interorganizational relations are embedded (Aguilera, 2011) have become essential elements to be considered for the contemporary
MNE. A finer slicing of the value chain is associated with networked forms that have shifted the boundaries of the firm. So the contemporary MNE is defined by the orchestration of international networks rather than merely by the international ownership of assets.

This topic can usefully be addressed from the standpoint of several extant streams of international business (IB) research and, in turn, it suggests the need to develop the theory of the MNE and international production in various new directions. The purpose of this Special Issue is to suggest how established IB approaches can be positively adapted, revised or extended to allow for the restructuring of MNEs and the new organizational forms of internationalization which have arisen to better explore and exploit the trajectories of the Information and Communication technological paradigm. For example, the O (Ownership) advantages of Dunning's eclectic paradigm now consist of capabilities that are dispersed among actors which are part of a common network, and a primary O advantage of the MNE becomes its ability to foster innovative connections between specialized capabilities across countries and organizations; the L (Location) dimension should allow that location-bound characteristics alone cannot fully explain firms' locational strategies, and that firm-location developmental interactions must be taken into account more fully (Cantwell, 2009; Piscitello, 2011); while the I (Internalization) dimension might be adapted to allow for the spread of more open and informal interorganizational relationships and networks.

Topics

In particular, we aim to encourage a multidisciplinary understanding of these issues by integrating IB more closely with research in progress in organization studies, and approaches from economic sociology, international economics, strategy, management and others. The objective of the special issue is to develop a finer-grained analysis of how the nature, boundaries and organizational forms of the MNE have adapted to more recent technological and institutional changes. We hope that this collection of papers will contribute to the ongoing yet still inconclusive dialogue among scholars in these disciplines, with the aim of constructing a more unified body of theory and a common epistemology for thinking about the continuing processes of transformation of IB activity. Hence, we welcome both theoretical and empirical contributions, and papers adopting either a single or multi-level analysis. Illustrative topics may include:

- The traditional paradigm of the MNE as a simple hierarchy had been already questioned in the 1980s and complemented by the notion of a globally networked transnational corporation in response to environmental forces and simultaneous demands for global efficiency, national responsiveness, and worldwide learning. Extending this line of reasoning, what further restructuring of international corporations, and new organizational processes and practices in firms' internationalization, would be more appropriate to exploring and exploiting the trajectories of the Information and Communication (IC) paradigm?
- The international fragmentation of production systems and the geographical dispersion of the value chain have opened up new scenarios and opportunities for new actors. How has the relative relevance of location factors and geographical hierarchies changed? How are emerging market countries capturing these opportunities to catch up and to shift their role in global supply/value chains? How do recent processes of backsourcing/backshoring reflect the same changes (i.e. are they the other side of the same coin)?
- Increasing de-verticalization and modularity of products and processes foster complex and dispersed network organizations. How do firms manage multifaceted portfolios including various forms of corporate partnering, external collaboration and non-equity forms across borders? What governance structures have been adopted to manage cross-country interorganizational networks? What creative value chain orchestration approaches are needed in this landscape? And what are the characteristics of a wider range of inter-organizational ties? Does the initiative for network formation come still at the firm level, or are more disaggregated levels of analysis needed? Are cross-boundary and cross-functional teams as well as flexible project-based forms of organizations more appropriate forms?
- How do changes in the international economic, technological, and social environment create new opportunities and roles for SMEs, international new ventures, international entrepreneurship and global start-ups? Conversely, what is the evolution in the role of large
global companies when they metamorphose from being primary producers and distributors to becoming aggregators? Have they successfully developed a new capacity to act as knowledge and capability coordinators or integrators?

- Technological revolutions and the evolution of industrial structures: How do information and communication as well as new digital technologies change sectoral boundaries (e.g. between manufacturing and non-manufacturing industries), deconstruct traditional industries, and stimulate the emergence of new sectors? Are reallocation and recombination of innovative efforts among international intra-firm and external actors facilitated by these new general purpose technologies? How do changes in sectoral boundaries impact corporate diversification and stimulate new organizational forms to manage geographical dispersion?

- Organizations evolve and adapt to their technological and institutional environments, and these changes are not unidirectional. What are the conditions enabling the harmonious co-evolution of MNE international networks with their institutional environment and policy context? What is the role of country-specific institutional systems? Do changes in the relationship between the public and private spheres, such as public private partnerships, play different roles in different industries and countries?

- How, and to what extent, does the emergence of new manufacturing technologies (e.g. digital manufacturing - additive manufacturing, continuous manufacturing, collective manufacturing, crowdsourcing, cloud computing and cloud manufacturing) lead to the international reorganization of production networks? How, and to what extent, do information technologies and increasing flexibility impact upon labor market and employment practices (e.g. freelance labor and project based work when internationally managed or coordinated)?

Submission Process

All manuscripts will be reviewed as a cohort for this special issue. Manuscripts must be submitted in the window between December 17, 2013, and December 31, 2013, at http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/jibs. All submissions will go through the JIBS regular double-blind review process and follow the standard norms and processes.

For more information about this call for papers, please contact the Special Issue Editors or the JIBS Managing Editor (managing-editor@jibs.net).

References


**Guest Editorial Team**

Juan Alcacer is part of the Strategy Unit at Harvard Business School as Associate Professor in 2007 after having been at the Stern School of Business, New York University. He received his Ph.D. in Strategy and International Business from the Ross School of Business at the University of Michigan. He has an MBA from Instituto de Estudios Superiores de Administración (IESA) and an undergraduate degree in Computer Engineering from Universidad Simon Bolivar. Prior to his doctoral studies, Professor Alcacer was with McKinsey & Company, providing strategic consulting for firms in Latin America. Professor Alcacer's research focuses on the dynamic relationship between innovation and the geographic dimension of strategy. His recent work has explored the long-term consequences of outsourcing in innovation and product introduction. His work has been published in Management Science, Research Policy, American Journal of Sociology and the Review of Economics and Statistics. At Harvard he taught the core class in strategy and developed an elective title Competing Globally. At Stern, he taught courses in Multinational Business Management and Corporate Strategy at the graduate and undergraduate levels.
Giovanni Dosi is Professor of Economics and Director of the Institute of Economics at the Sant'Anna School of Advanced Studies in Pisa; Co-Director of the task forces “Industrial Policy” and “Intellectual Property Rights”, IPD - Initiative for Policy Dialogue at Columbia University; Continental European Editor of Industrial and Corporate Change. Included in “ISI Highly Cited Researchers”. His major research areas - where he is author and editor of several works - include Economics of Innovation and Technological Change, Industrial Economics, Evolutionary Theory, Economic Growth and Development, Organizational Studies. A selection of his works has been published in Innovation, Organization and Economic Dynamics. Selected Essays, Cheltenham, Edward Elgar, 2000; a second volume is forthcoming. Full profile and publications at http://www.lem.sssup.it/.

Sergio Mariotti is Professor of Industrial Economics at Politecnico di Milano. His scientific activity can be divided in three branches, different yet closely related: Economics and Industrial Organization, International Business, Theory of the Firm and Corporate Strategy. Since 1985 he has been Director of the research on the internationalisation of the Italian economy sponsored by CNEL (National Council for Economy and Labour), and ICE (National Institute for Foreign Trade). He coordinated and participated in various applied research projects, promoted by the EC, the Italian National Research Council, and the Italian Ministry of Research. He published articles in journals such as Journal of Economic Geography, Journal of International Business Studies, Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization, Industrial and Corporate Change, Cambridge Journal of Economics, Economics of Innovation and New Technology, Regional Studies, Research Policy, Futures, Small Business Economics, among others. He is currently co-editor of Journal of Industrial and Business Economics (Economia e Politica Industriale). He teaches extensively in undergraduate and graduate programs, customized executive education, MBA and Executive MBA programs.

Lucia Piscitello is Professor of International Business at Politecnico di Milano. Her research interests cover the economics and management of MNEs and the international aspects of technological change. Her recent studies focus on the internationalization of R&D, offshoring of service activities, emerging MNEs, spillovers and externalities stemming from the entry of foreign MNEs, agglomeration and MNEs' location behavior. Her work has appeared in the Journal of Economic Geography, Journal of International Business Studies, Global Strategy Journal, Strategic Entrepreneurship Journal, Industrial and Corporate Change, International Business Review, Cambridge Journal of Economics, Regional Studies, Research Policy, among others. In addition to serving on the editorial review boards of several journals, she is currently co-chair of the COST-EIBA/EIASM Doctoral Think Tank. She teaches extensively in undergraduate and graduate programs, customized executive education, MBA and Executive MBA programs.

John Cantwell is the Editor-in-Chief of the Journal of International Business Studies from 2011-16. He is Distinguished Professor (Professor II) of International Business at Rutgers University. He was previously Professor of International Economics at the University of Reading. John Cantwell's main research areas are the analysis of corporate technological change and international business. He is the author of Technological Innovation and Multinational Corporations (Basil Blackwell, 1989), which remains one of the most cited books in the international business field, since it helped to inspire a new literature on the role of international networks in technology creation, which now lies at the center of the international business research area. He was the President of the European International Business Academy (EIBA) in 1992, and in 2001 he was elected as one of four EIBA Founding Fellows. In 2005 he was elected as a Fellow of the Academy of International Business (AIB), and he was Vice President of the AIB in 2006-08, when he was responsible for the program of the annual conference of the AIB held in Milan in 2008.