

# Just Another BRIC in the Wall? The Rise of the BRICs and Educating Tomorrow's Global Managers

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**THE BRIC COUNTRIES** (Brazil, Russia, India, and China) comprise 40 percent of the world's population (approximately 2.8 billion people), cover more than a quarter of the world's land area over three continents, and account for more than 25 percent of global GDP (by purchasing power parity). In the ten years since the term BRICs was first coined by Jim O'Neill, chief economist of the investment bank Goldman Sachs, all economies (except Brazil) have exceeded their predicted growth rates (Müller, 2011). Integration into the global economy coupled with rising spending power prompts flows of students (and expatriates) to, and from, the BRICs—positioning international business educators at the helm of this sea-change. In this article, we reflect on the implications of the rise of the BRICs for educating the next generation of business managers and leaders. We argue that rather than just another “brick in the wall,” educating tomorrow's managers requires adoption of a global mindset by international business educators. This enables them to build on, or indeed begin to dismantle, existing theoretical and pedagogical foundations, brick by brick.

## Global Mindset in a Multi-polar World

In the multi-polar world, the BRIC economies (closely followed by Indonesia) will be major contributors to global growth, key players in financial markets (three quarters of official foreign exchange reserves are already held in emerging markets), and active participants in international institutions (World Bank, 2011). Integration of the BRICs into international economic groupings and institutions through trade, investment, and political engagement will increasingly shape the macro-environment of international business. Such changes herald new rules of the game (e.g., business practices, inter-company and -country alliances), new players (e.g., BRIC managers, MNEs, NGOs, and governments), and rising competition for global resources and markets.

Multi-polarity will also influence the institutional, cultural, and technological landscape of international business. Today, the onus for learning falls on firms from BRIC countries as they seek access to developed markets by integrating into the existing institutional and cultural foundations of Western-style business. As the influence of the BRICs grows, however, today's approach of accommodation and assimilation into the Western-oriented system of business will shift further toward integration and inclusion of business practice approaches from emerging markets. Indeed, in countries where business infrastructure is less well established and investment by BRIC

MNEs is high (such as Chinese investment in extractive industries in parts of Africa and Latin America; Gugler & Fetscherin, 2010), such business practices may become the norm — and may even provide an advantage. BRIC companies, having developed in emerging markets for labor, products, and capital, are often adept at operating in such institutional voids.

In business, as well as education, cultural influence has been unidirectional — from the US center to the UK and European semi-periphery, and then to the peripheries (i.e., the rest of the world). With the rise of the BRIC economies we expect the span and direction of such influence to be more complex in the future. For example, despite the semblance of widespread adoption of Western culture in BRICs, Behrman (2006: 515) suggests that deeply rooted value-sets (such as the importance of family, belief systems, and social class) will endure, bringing about a “complex hybrid” model of society. Such a model is already emerging in advanced nations that are attractive to waves of immigrants and students seeking better opportunities.

The multi-polar world is also changing the nature of innovation. Corporate imperialism, or the view of emerging markets as locations to extend margins for existing products and exploit technology rapidly obsolescing in Western markets (Prahalad & Lieberthal, 2003), is not only dead but being buried by companies that adopt a global mindset from the outset. Take the recent reinvention of the “reverse innovation” concept as a case in point (Govindarajan & Trimble, 2012). Citing such examples as Gatorade (inspired by a rehydration formula used to treat cholera patients in Bangladesh) and Indian company Mahindra & Mahindra (whose low-cost tractors compete for John Deere's hobby farmer customers in the US), the authors argue established companies risk losing markets at home and abroad to competitors using technologies developed in emerging markets.

What becomes clear from such examples is that the rise of the BRICs is fueling a shift toward a multi-polar world where cooperation, inclusion, and integration are needed on multiple levels (e.g., countries, companies, cultures, institutions, and individuals) to confront the controversies and challenges that arise. Integral to incorporating these institutional shifts into teaching approaches is an explicit adoption of a global mindset. For this to be achieved, a combination of knowledge, behavior, and critical acculturation and reflexivity is needed (Witte, 2010). Both educators and global managers need a global mindset

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in order to tackle the heterogeneous business world of the future: to understand not only differences between the Western world and the BRICs but also those among the BRIC countries themselves (Ardichvili, Jondle, Kowske, Cornachione, Li, & Thakadipuram, 2012).

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The first step toward a global mindset is to reject the expectation that the world should conform to norms, values, and business models of the West. With this in mind, two key challenges for IB educators we focus on in the remainder of this paper are: (1) optimizing teaching experiences and ensuring learning outcomes of diverse student groups (including students from BRIC countries as well as those who will work in, or alongside others from, the BRIC countries) and (2) keeping up with theoretical and empirical developments to inform research and teaching.

## The Challenge of Diversity

International integration of the BRICs means that classes are increasingly diverse in terms of the educational background, culture, age, and experience of the students. The major issues for teaching and learning quality in the multicultural classroom concern language problems, effective participation of international students in discussion-based activities, and integration of local and international students.

Successful integration of BRIC students into the classroom is the first step toward global awareness (Witte, 2010). Yet, in many instances, opportunities for cross-cultural integration and learning are missed with all students tending, naturally, to gravitate towards their own culturally similar peers. It is therefore important that educators carefully plan for and support the work of mixed student groups (Violet & Ang, 2012). Teachers must be sensitive to learners' needs, for instance how receptive and comfortable they are with different teaching mediums (e.g., interaction, web-based education, and case analysis). Variation among different audiences, languages, and cultures calls for different approaches (e.g., an American way of encouraging discussion vs. an Asian way of high-context communication vs. a Russian respect for hierarchical authority of the teacher) or at least awareness of which approach is being used and why. Educators need to pay attention to different ways of evaluating learning outcomes (e.g., some students still perform better in traditional written exams than orally in the classroom discussions).

The challenges that the rise of the BRIC economies create lead us to advocate active use of problem-based learning and interactive teaching

methods. Inclusion of teaching materials and cases developed around experiences in BRICs and BRIC companies rather than focus solely on trials for Western firms doing business abroad is important (Sexty, 1998; Whitla, 2012). Understanding of new situations can be created jointly if multiple participants (e.g., teachers, students, outside experts) are

actively involved and alert to new developments but aware of the influence of historical and institutional contexts. IB educators can actively extend existing mental frames and better understand the realities of the BRICs by drawing on a wider set of human

resources in the classroom and by encouraging inquiry-based learning and relational linkages between participants. For example, using multicultural teaching teams, facilitating knowledge sharing amongst participants, and promoting open dialogue with those who can provide insights on alternative perspectives fosters curiosity, visibility, and flexibility of deeply rooted cultural values and worldviews. Students can be encouraged to bring to the classroom their own experiences to enrich the discussions.

One such discussion, for example, might be centered on ethics. Ethics remains at the core of international business, but being culturally, historically, and religiously bound is interpreted very differently across different countries (Ardichvili et al., 2012; Sexty, 1998). Thus, incorporating ethics into the curriculum is a critical challenge for IB educators (Whitla, 2012). Sexty (1998: 1316) argues, however, that educators should “avoid being ethics missionaries with preconceived ideals.” Rather, renewed emphasis on ethics in business from a broader socio-cultural perspective and fostering a better appreciation of the role of key values in societies is critical. Finally, it may be instructive to point out that the need to instill guiding principles in corporate behavior and governance is underscored by the recent examples of fraud and corruption in the emerging BRICs and in developed economies.

In a multi-polar world, teaching in international business will remain a moving target; thus, less emphasis should be placed on content and more on developing skills and capabilities that enable future managers to deal with such complexities. These include research and analytical skills, which shape the ability to monitor change and to act with foresight and flexibility; interpretation and an appreciation of context, which shape understanding of current events from a historical lens; and skills in dialogue, discussion, and debate, which foster open-mindedness, argumentation, and an ability to see others' perspectives. Perhaps the most important skill given the turbulence anticipated in the global economy, however, is critical thinking and reflection, which shapes students' ability to question existing theories and ideas. The curriculum must be flexible enough to incorporate shifts in trends and knowledge in several areas while simultaneously honing the skills to deal with such change.

## The Challenge for Theory

The multidisciplinary aspect of international business calls for education at the meta-cognitive level – to compare and contrast different viewpoints in order to reveal the foundations of knowledge as well as to advance knowledge. This also provides opportunities for theoretical development. The rise of the BRICs to the helm of a multi-polar world calls for theoretical advances that not only incorporate but also extrapolate the dynamics and turbulence evident in both spatial and temporal contexts; that embrace exploratory rather than explanatory approaches; and that seek to build on and adapt, rather than to apply Western theories indiscriminately or inappropriately. Certainly there is also scope for new theory.

Contemporary scientific logic, language, and theory shared and replicated by Western-based managers and researchers remains largely representative of Anglo-American institutions and capitalist systems. Yet differences in experiences of BRIC companies may reaffirm or call extant theories into question. For instance, asset-seeking investment by BRIC companies reinforces the importance of foreign direct investment for firm-specific advantage rather than the other way around; different competitive dynamics, involving network structures, social and political ties, encourage diversity in business models; and political embeddedness of economic transactions (such as the dominant role of government driving international investment by Chinese SOEs, for example) is a feature that cannot be ignored in the BRIC countries (Gugler & Fetscherin, 2010). Such differences suggest a need for the development of both locally-relevant theories and holistic paradigms.

Scholarly frameworks that transcend national, cultural, and economic boundaries help IB researchers and educators to adopt wider perspectives for understanding the key changes which are occurring as a result of the growing presence of the BRICs on the global stage. Alternative and complementary theoretical perspectives should inform curricula and teaching and underscore the need not only to draw on past theories and events, but also to simultaneously encourage a critical and constructivist approach to capturing the turbulence that will characterize future business.

## BRICs and the Global Mindset

The increasing role of BRICs in the world economy is in our view challenging education of global managers in a fundamental way. International business curricula and teaching must reflect current trends, accepted and emerging models for company and managerial behavior, leading-edge research, and evolving company experiences. We argue it is inadequate to merely integrate the BRIC phenomenon into theories based on Western experiences; rather there is a more critical task of changing the focus to an integrative, multi-polar paradigm that builds in the divergent approaches of BRIC firms and BRIC economies. Education of tomorrow's global managers should be based on, and promote, global awareness and global mindset (Kedia & Englis, 2011; Scott-Ken-

nel & Salmi, 2008; Witte, 2010). Adopting a global mindset presents "a way to cope with increasing cultural diversity and environmental complexity of the global arena" beyond reliance on Western perspectives (Levy, Beechler, Taylor, & Boyacigiller, 2007: 248). The nexus of change toward new ways of thinking in international business will be tomorrow's entrepreneurs and managers, operating in and coming from the BRICs, thus learning and skill development of the students of today is crucial.

Educators in international business play an important role in this development but face the dual challenges of optimizing learning outcomes of diverse student groups whilst working from predominantly Western theoretical foundations. Addressing these challenges, however, provides opportunities for IB educators. The key building blocks of educating tomorrow's global managers can be summarized as follows:

- drawing more heavily on those involved in the "action at the front" and actively incorporating their experiences and new knowledge into teaching;
- using interactive teaching methods based on problem-based learning as preparation for the continuously changing international business environment;
- cultivating a willingness to question existing business models and established theory; and
- fostering a global mindset that encourages inclusion of a diverse set of economic, cultural, institutional and technological starting points and solutions.

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