



National Technical University  
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# Stepping into the enigma: Teaching international business 4.0

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**As more and more evidence demonstrates the abrupt and radical change of the international business (IB) realities caused by the fourth industrial revolution, it's time to accommodate these new developments into the learning experiences of future international managers.**

## **What is the Fourth Industrial Revolution & how does it matter for the IB education?**

The Fourth Industrial Revolution is a fundamental paradigm shift caused by the convergence of evolving digital technologies into the Industry 4.0 cyber-physical solutions. The current coronavirus crisis amplifies this leap to an unprecedented scale. The Fourth Industrial Revolution has many overwhelming implications for modern society, economy and business. In particular, it causes volatile structural shifts of the global markets and unpredictable disruptions of the global value chains.

The exponential pace of technological changes puts international business on a brink of a tipping point. These new developments lead international business thinkers to several fundamental questions. How will the fourth industrial revolution change international business practices and theory? Even more importantly, how will international companies survive the Fourth Industrial Revolution?

At the level of companies, there is a distinction between those who have recognized the major challenges that are evoked by the Fourth Industrial Revolution and those who choose to downplay them. The first set of companies tend to take a more proactive stance towards those challenges in terms of their timely strategic response. Though the second set is affected no less, these companies are reacting in a more sporadic way. Yet, despite those differences, in both cases, the workplaces of international managers change dramatically.

To gain resiliency and remain competitive, international companies learn and adopt new emerging managerial practices caused by the Fourth Industrial Revolution. They have to nurture new capabilities like future thinking, digital enablement, agility and platform marketing. They also have to rethink and redesign many operational areas starting with strategic innovation up to global value chains orchestration. They require managers who are troubleshooters, problem solvers, business designers and process developers. All this gives a rise to what one would call an International Business 4.0 paradigm.

In their turn, in order to remain relevant in the area of business and management education, universities need to upskill, to provide proper learning opportunities for the next generation of managers who are preparing for the implications of International Business 4.0. Attempting to this, educators face a classic Fourth Industrial Revolution paradox, that is to make quick, right and thought-through

decisions addressing multiple unique challenges with no ready good answers at the hand.

Of course, in a longer perspective, there is a way for higher education to gradually transform towards the University 4.0 concept that manifests a humanity-centric approach through the challenge- and research-based digital-led learning with collaboration, co-creativity, agility, and mindfulness at the core. Actually, in my personal opinion, though it will take time, this transformation is the only way for universities to survive the implications of the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

## **How to teach International Business 4.0?**

As for now, in anticipation of the arrival of the Universities 4.0 breed, if you ask me how to teach International Business 4.0 today, I'd start with the course design outlining appropriate learning outcomes and methods.

In terms of learning outcomes, the goal is to explore and prepare to exploit the new ways of conceiving and delivering international business strategy, organization and operations in the Fourth industrial revolution era. The starting point should be the awareness of the Fourth industrial revolution's challenges to international business. The next stage of the journey should be the touring of existing managerial responses to the fourth industrial revolution with particular emphasis on the foundations of international company's sustainability and resilience, value creation, strategy and road mapping, managing abrupt change and organizational innovation in a global context, deploying new International Business 4.0 capabilities as well as redesigning current operations and processes infused by Industry 4.0 technologies. The final important aspect is understanding global value chain 4.0 concept implementation.

Further on, a vital part of learning outcomes is an international manager's 4.0 set of skills that includes business and process innovation, problem-solving, co-creation, future thinking, agility, and digitalization.

To achieve these ambitious learning outcomes, we have to curate a proper learning-by-doing environment supported by collaborative networking, digitalization, and gamification. An important part of it might become research-oriented or challenge-based hackathons. We have to strive towards joint discovery, not drilling.

"Fortune favors the bold." The key to unlock these learning possibilities is networking to educators, researchers and practitioners who are open to shared experimentation with unknown. International business 4.0 is the future in making. The more of us look into it, the more intensively we interact, the more we exchange our raw opinions and ideas, the more vigorously we argue, the more we engage in collaborative conceptual framing, the better experts we become.

## **How to continue discussion on this topic?**

Where to start? As the pathway to bring this experience real-time into the class, I suggest the International business 4.0 LinkedIn Group (<https://www.linkedin.com/groups/4971802/>). This is the evolving online community where you find partners who might be willing to help you configure right learning-by-doing environment for your class. As it makes its first baby steps now, I see the potential for it – with sufficient trust and passion pumped inside – to grow an ecosystem of outstanding International business 4.0 projects and solutions very soon.