

Towards intellectual globalization: A theoretical exploration and its implications for research

Balaji C. Krishnan *

Department of Marketing and Supply Chain Management, University of Memphis, Memphis, TN 38152, USA

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Abstract

Globalization is a complex process which changes as well as has the potential to change the various events in the world at multiple levels. It is widely recognized that there are multiple facets of globalization including political, economic and cultural. In this paper, I advance the concept of intellectual globalization—a process of knowledge creation, transformation, and diffusion that goes beyond the immediate theoretical confines of knowledge management. The roots and functioning of this process are examined at the level of the nation, organization, and the individual. Implications for future research on the relationship of this aspect of globalization with various cultures of the world are discussed.

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During the past five decades research in globalization has been a significant area of inquiry in the economic and management sciences. Globalization, often defined as the cross border flow of goods and services in a relatively boundary-less world, has become the most important phenomenon in the current era with economic, political, and cultural underpinnings. Globalization especially cross-border flow of goods, commodities, information and knowledge has been an area of interest to economists, managers of multinational and global corporations, and national governments that are active participants in the global economy and the World Trade Organization (WTO) (Greider, 1997; Micklethwait and Wooldridge, 2000; Kigundu, 2002).

Recently, an area of interest seems to be evolving that go beyond the three traditional facets of globalization: economic globalization that involves relatively unrestricted flow of materials, goods, information, and capital across national borders (Friedman, 2005; Kigundu, 2002;

* Tel.: +1 901 678 2786; fax: +1 901 678 2685.

E-mail address: krishnan@memphis.edu.

Govindarajan and Gupta, 2001); political globalization (Micklethwait and Wooldridge, 2000) that actively concerns itself with encouragement and perhaps development of political systems that strongly reflect Western-type patterns of democracies in different parts of the world; cultural globalization (Huntington, 1996)—a form of globalization that actively tends to foster homogenization of various cultures of the world and perhaps destruction of some weak ones.

A new form of globalization, called *intellectual globalization*, which is the focus of the present paper, deals with the evolution of an ongoing process of developing new sources of data, information, and knowledge in different geographical and national contexts of the world in such a manner that they can be integrated with relative ease with the existing organizational mechanisms of the multinational and global corporations. Some of the characteristics of this form of globalization are noted below:

1. Creation of regional centers of (and strategically important) excellence in different national contexts of the world for producing valued organizational knowledge that can be utilized on an ongoing basis.
2. Fostering political and economic relationships with national governments, educational, legal, and other relevant institutions so that this process of developing regional centers of excellence can be maintained without much difficulty.
3. Emphasizing the need for creating the kind of organizational knowledge that can be transferred from these regional centers of excellence to the various subsidiaries and networks of the global organization or other strategically important alliances. It is also important to ensure that the various knowledge and intellect-based resources that are inherent in the various regions are effectively cultivated for their absorption, not only in the local context but also for the global context as well.

In order to focus on the nature and functioning of intellectual globalization, it is important that we consider some relevant examples:

- General Electric registered the largest numbers of patents in 2004 based on a stream of innovative activities. Most of these patents were developed in the Jack Welch Research Center in Bangalore, India. A closer inspection as to why this was the case reveals that technical and related management resources available in that center were superior to those that were available in other subsidiaries of General Electric. The competitive cost advantages were also significant in getting these innovations and patents implemented in the Bangalore subsidiary.
- A number of major multinational firms have set up intranets with the specific purpose of integrating the various types of expertise that evolve and are present in dissimilar geographical regions of the world. One might be inclined to think that such intranets are specifically utilized by the various high technology firms such as Microsoft, IBM, etc. However, this method of integrating information and knowledge bases has expanded beyond the traditional domains of high tech firms to include various management consulting firms (i.e., McKinsey and Co., etc.). In addition, we find evidence of strong intranet use in manufacturing firms (i.e., Toyota) and other global organizations such as the World Bank Institute.
- Drip irrigation, an innovative technique in agriculture, was developed in Israel. This innovation was particularly effective in the arid environment of Israel. It is interesting to note that this technique has spread successfully to other parts of the world which have similar climatic conditions. The practice of converting sea water into drinking water by the technology of desalination which has been implemented in the Middle East is finding applications in other parts of the world where drinkable water is in relative short supply. Innovations of similar kind are creating important changes in the global landscape.

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