**COVID–19: I saw it coming and was vilified for taking it serious!**

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The priority of any serious nation is public health, education, economics and security (in that order). Not the other way round. My appreciation of how global health crises and international business reinforce each other and impinge on socioeconomic life is filtered through the lens of my fieldwork experience in the “West” and in the “global South”. However, I am both bemused and encouraged by the sudden interest of some academics in this global pandemic**-** COVID-19. After all, as management and international business (IB) scholars/sustainability researchers, there are better topics than a peripheral subject like this. Epidemics just happen in the Third World; we watch them on TV from a distance or read about them in the news and brush them off as if they were the natural order of things in Asia or Africa. SARS, Ebola, cholera outbreaks, ever-present malaria and others have mostly been seen as just the risk of doing business over there or simply a biosecurity risk. We’re safe over here...

No, we are not! In global health and international business there is neither ‘here and ‘us’ nor ‘there’ and ‘them’; there is everywhere and everyone. It should not have needed tens of thousands of mortalities and over two million morbidities to teach us that globalization also entails people serving as vectors for viruses globally.

It seems “super-cool” to focus on all other fancy topics while discouraging those who seek to research on non-traditional topics or even vilifying them for being *Freigeist* in their thinking. In a speech, someone took a jab at my thesis work on global health that focused on counterfeit medicines and suggested that this is not IB, while praising another colleague for his studies in a traditional IB area. Some mocked, disdainfully infantilized or even went to the extent of referring to my work as a conspiracy theory. They are not laughing now. Are they?

Fortunately, a few others have understood the importance of research on the nexus between global health and international business, acknowledging it as a new-found territory. With great foresight, the Turku Finnish University Society gave me an award for my thesis, and, inspired by my recent article arguing that global health is indeed IB, the editors of critical perspectives on IB, Christoph Dörrenbächer and Snejina Michaelova organized a special meeting in Copenhagen and made global health in IB one of the programmatic issues for the next decade. They, too, saw COVID-19 coming.

**Blinded by Return on Investment (ROI)-search**

COVID-19 has vindicated me – albeit not in the way that brings me satisfaction. Many are asking why academics or companies did not see it coming. It is because scholars who ought to study about certain pertinent global issues in management to inform decision-makers thought it was ROI-less or didn’t see its implications on their own lives.

In Germany and Scandinavia, I learned about ‘Lehrfreiheit’, ‘Lernfreiheit’ and ‘Forschungsfreiheit’ based on the Humboldtian approach. Armed with ideas about independent/critical thinking, I thought everyone in academia works with these principles until I realized that many were in for ROI-search to use the words of Professor Mats Alvesson. All of a sudden they have something to say. We saw COVID-19 coming but ignored it because it did not add to our bottom-line (not-attracting-funding or interesting for A\* journals). Some indifferent gatekeepers and purists saw pertinent social/health issues in management as a deviation from accepted paradigm. Now, however, many will make calls for special issues, form groups and consortia to apply for funding to do research on calamities and pandemics. The ROI-searchers will take over as if they cared. How convenient. My fear is that this one too will be hijacked.

**Humbling Lessons**

The world is not interested in self-serving articles that will never be read by practitioners or societal actors. In the democratic republic of viruses, we live in one world; not in the First or Third World. We usually listen only when certain people speak. However, we will now have to be open-minded. We read mostly what is published in top-journals with which we have tribal affinity. Now, we will look for relevance, not the impact factor, per se. Henceforth, we will give PhD students a chance to explore non-traditional intellectual territories (as did my former supervisors) and be original instead of putting them into the boxes of management discipleship.

These are lessons/self-criticism for now and tomorrow. A return from irrelevant topics to the humanistic aspects of management will hopefully ennoble scholars once again. Maybe COVID-19 is not only a virus after all, but a powerful game-changer in academia whose time has finally come to creatively disrupt the status quo.