

Under the umbrella of sustainable supply chain management: emergent solutions to real-world problems

Over the past year, we have had the pleasure of working with scholars focusing their research efforts on tangible solutions to supply chain sustainability challenges. Our call for papers, which was announced on the *IJPDLM* website in December 2014, specifically encouraged submissions that focused “under the umbrella of sustainable supply chain management.”

Our chosen focus “under the umbrella” was a specific and intentional effort to encourage sustainability research at more contextually specific levels than has typically been the norm in supply chain research addressing sustainability. As scholars and practitioners increasingly recognize the importance of addressing supply chain sustainability issues, the emergent discussion in the literature has continued to evolve. Early research naturally has focused on identifying the importance of supply chain sustainability, developing definitions, and frameworks for organizing our scholarly thoughts around sustainability. The extant dialogue in the literature has become rich with broad but valuable insights on the theory and practice of sustainable supply chain management (Carter and Easton, 2011; Winter and Knemeyer, 2013).

Yet, supply chain sustainability is in danger of becoming an “umbrella concept” (Hirsch and Levin, 1999), that while understood by many, has little actual meaning or relevance at a practical level. It is time for researchers to move beyond the broad perspective in order to delve into narrower and more focused aspects of sustainable supply chain management. Thus, we called for research that addressed specific and emergent solutions to real-world sustainability problems faced within the decision scope of supply chain managers. We specifically called for narrower, context-specific research that can complement the broader framework perspectives being developed, while augmenting relevance to practitioners.

In total, 29 submissions were received for consideration in the special issue. Approximately half of them were sent out to the reviewers. All successful papers went through multiple rounds of revisions. We would like to take this opportunity to thank all those reviewing colleagues who served as the gatekeepers and gardeners for this special issue. The reviewers have done an excellent job in helping the authors further develop their manuscripts.

We are proud to present four papers in this special issue that truly represent the context-specific, real-world problem-solving approach while maintaining a high level of theoretical and methodological rigor. A variety of interesting methodologies were employed by the authors, as well as a variety of theoretical lenses. The mix of theories and methodologies demonstrates the richness that can be generated when conducting research in contextually specific arenas that exist “under the umbrella of sustainable supply chain management.”

Lutz Kaufmann and Stephane Timmer address the factors that influence a company’s ability to determine the provenance of their inputs in “Conflict minerals traceability: a fuzzy set analysis.” Traceability and provenance have proved difficult for many firms that are now required to report their sourcing practices related to conflict minerals. The authors introduce the fuzzy set qualitative comparative analysis (fsQCA) analysis to *IJPDLM* readers to investigate practices of individual firms, thus providing managers with practical approaches for achieving conflict mineral traceability. The practical approach provided in this manuscript also sets the stage for theoretically grounded propositions to guide other researchers working on supply chain traceability. In our view, this paper is an excellent read not only because conflict minerals represent a critical sustainability-related issue of concern



to numerous stakeholders, but also because fsQCA offers new avenues for a more fine-grained analysis of necessary vs sufficient causes of supply chain phenomena.

Using a qualitative interview approach, Chris Ellegaard, Ulla Normann, and Morten Munksgaard Moller address the justice perceptions of Asian textile suppliers relative to their key customers' sustainable sourcing initiatives in "Supplier perceptions of distributive justice in sustainable apparel sourcing." Interestingly, suppliers often perceive sustainability initiatives to be unfair, which suggest significant opportunities for researchers and practitioners to better explore how sustainability initiatives are managed with upstream suppliers to ensure mutually satisfactory outcomes. Given that sustainability revolves to a large extent around fairness, we strongly encourage scholars of supply chain sustainability to read this piece which substantially questions the legitimacy of buying firms' pressures for better sustainability performance of their suppliers.

Based on an embedded case study approach, authors Evi Hartmann, Angelo Canzaniello, and Matthias Fifka explore the realm of intra-industry strategic alliances with respect to sustainability initiatives in "Intra-industry strategic alliances for managing sustainability-related supplier risks: motivation and outcome." The authors elucidate the ability of firms to manage their sustainability risk through the formation of an intra-industry alliance. This research represents a very interesting read because such strategic alliances provide a valuable practical tool for rendering supply chain sustainability risks more manageable.

Finally, in "Distributing wine globally: financial and environmental trade-offs," Mohsen Varsei, Katherine Christ, and Roger Burritt employ a case-based modeling approach for assessing wine supply chain scenarios with respect to both economic and environmental impacts, particularly including water usage and carbon emissions. The authors highlight the possibilities of reshaping global wine supply chains based on the tradeoff analysis of cost vs environmental impacts, using the Australian wine distributor's case exemplar. This paper illuminates very well how the analysis of specific sustainability problems in specific topical contexts can help decision makers to understand which decision-making alternatives are worth being pursued or, conversely, which are dominated by others. Therefore, we recommend this article to scholars with a topical interest in wine distribution as well as others who are interested in looking under the umbrella of supply chain sustainability.

We thank all the authors for their fine contributions to this special issue, offer another round of thanks to the many reviewers who contributed to the high-quality contributions in this special issue, and hope that all *IJDPLM* readers will appreciate the outcome of our joint efforts.

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