

## FRONTIERS IN INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS CONFERENCE

### MULTINATIONAL COMPANIES AND SUSTAINABILITY IN GLOBAL SUPPLY CHAINS

**Hosted by the Darla Moore School of Business, University of South Carolina  
in collaboration with the Academy of International Business,  
Northeastern University, Villanova University, and University of Groningen**

**October 20-22, 2022  
Charleston, South Carolina**

The issue of sustainability has become one of the central “big challenges” of our times. The role of corporations for both negative and positive impacts on sustainability has been front and center in social discourse as well as board rooms around the world. International business scholars have contributed to this conversation specifically by examining the role of multinational corporations (MNCs) in the diffusion of sustainable practices and the conditions that facilitate or impede this process. Much of this research has taken an institutional perspective trying to explain the degree, pattern, and cross-country variation in the adoption of sustainable practices based on firm embeddedness in home and host country institutions (Ioannou & Serafeim, 2012; Surroca, Tribó, & Zahra, 2013), and considering both direct and distance-related institutional effects (Campbell, Eden, & Miller, 2012). Several firm-level drivers and consequences of sustainable practice adoption by MNCs have also been identified (Pisani, Kourula, Kolk, & Meijer, 2017), including, for example, headquarters-subsidiary dynamics (Asmussen & Fosfuri, 2019; Jacqueminet & Durand, 2020; Moon, Gold, & Chapple, 2020). Although historically focused on advanced economy MNCs, this work has recently considered companies emanating from emerging markets (e.g., Doh, Husted, & Yang, 2016; Kolk & Lenfant, 2010; Marano, Tashman, & Kostova, 2017). While expanding in scope, for the most part, the focus in this literature has remained on the transfer and diffusion of sustainable practices through MNCs’ foreign direct investment networks.

Increasingly, though, multinationals are also expected to consider the sustainability implications in their sourcing decisions and take some responsibility for the social and environmental performance of the other actors in their supply chains, including first- and even second tier suppliers (McKinsey, 2020; Kim & Davis, 2016; Parmigiani, Klassen, & Russo, 2011). Moreover, a number of countries, such as the UK, US, Australia, and France have adopted legal provisions requiring companies to seek to mitigate business and human rights violations along their supply chains or report on what steps they have taken to do so (e.g., Section 1502 of Dodd–Frank Act of 2010, 2012, Californian Transparency in Supply Chains Act, UK Modern Slavery Act). The combination of social and legal expectations has led to unprecedented pressures for MNCs to contribute to the sustainability agenda in their global supply chains. Yet, international business research in this area is rather limited, with only a few notable exceptions (e.g., Narula, 2019; Serdijn, Kolk, & Franssen, 2020).

The objective of the conference is to address this gap and strengthen the role of IB scholarship in studying MNCs' social and environmental impacts in global supply chains. We look for cutting edge scholarly contributions that offer novel theoretical insights and practical understandings. We recognize the importance of methodological diversity and a multidisciplinary approach, and hope to engage with ongoing research in a number of related fields including business ethics, corporate governance, strategy, supply chain management, development studies, labor and employment relations, political science, and economic geography.

The conference follows a *Journal of International Business Studies (JIBS)* Special Issues on the same topic, which is currently in progress <https://resource-cms.springernature.com/springer-cms/rest/v1/content/18416482/data/v2>. The following are examples of research topics of great interest to the conference:

- Inter-firm transfer of sustainability practices between MNCs and their suppliers: How do firms diffuse such practices among their global suppliers given that they are outside of their organizational and legal boundaries? What are the main challenges and mechanisms that have proven effective in such efforts? What are the main differences and possible synergies between intra-firm and inter-firm practice transfer in this area?
- Supply chain governance: What are the most effective ways in which MNCs can control global suppliers, given the difficulty of monitoring their daily operations? How effective is “horizontal” multi-stakeholder governance of supply chain sustainability (involving industry associations, NGOs, labor unions, and local communities) vs. “vertical” governance that links MNCs to local suppliers? What are the strengths and limitations of these various approaches and what is the ultimate role of MNCs in them?
- Institutional embeddedness of supply chain sustainability: What is the role and relative salience of various institutions (e.g., home, host country, transnational, and global) impacting environmental and social performance in global supply chains? What are the limits to institutional “reach” beyond the usual organizational and political boundaries?
- Microfoundations of sustainability in global supply chains: What are the microfoundations of social and environmental performance in global supply chains? How do values and cognitions of business leaders affect the adoption and diffusion of social and environmental practices in that context? Is there a role for “intermediaries” in translating social and environmental expectations to suppliers, and bridging the inherent distances between the different parties? How and when sustainability practices become institutionalized or “taken-for-granted” among the various participants in global supply chains?

### **Submissions**

To ensure a vigorous discussion with novel ideas and insights, we seek participation from both leading scholars as well as colleagues who are newer to these areas of research. We encourage multidisciplinary submissions as well as manuscripts that are in different stages of development. If interested, please submit a max. 7-page (single spaced) proposal or extended abstract of your paper here: <https://meetings.aib.msu.edu/frontiers/2022/> in the period July 1 – 20, 2022. The 7-page limit does not include references, tables, figures

and appendices. Proposals will be reviewed by a committee and acceptance decisions will be conveyed to authors by August 10, 2022. The conference will be limited to about 16-20 presentations and 40 participants.

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