

# Impact pathways: a home for insights from relevant and impactful operations and supply chain management research

Federico Caniato

*School of Management, Politecnico di Milano, Milan, Italy*

Gary Graham

*Management Division, Leeds University Business School, Leeds, UK*

Jens K. Roehrich

*School of Management, University of Bath, Bath, UK, and*

Ann Vereecke

*Vlerick Business School, Ghent, Belgium and  
Ghent University, Ghent, Belgium*

## Abstract

**Purpose** – *International Journal of Operations and Production Management (IJOPM)*'s Impact Pathway (IP) section has been launched in 2020 to host short contributions grounded in current managerial practices and/or policy development, challenging established operations and supply chain management (OSCM) knowledge and highlighting innovative and relevant research directions. This commentary reflects on the achievements of the section, delineates the key features of IP papers and stimulates further development.

**Design/methodology/approach** – This commentary provides a brief overview of the *IJOPM*'s IP section, taking stock of the contributions that have been published so far, analysing their topics, methodologies, insights and impact.

**Findings** – The 19 contributions published over the last three years have dealt with a variety of emerging topics, ranging from the COVID-19 response to additive manufacturing, leveraging on key evidence from managerial practice that challenges consolidated knowledge and theory, providing clear research directions as well as managerial and/or policy guidelines.

**Originality/value** – The commentary reflects on the importance of phenomenon-driven research that seeks to bridge the gap between theory and practice, thus increasing the impact and reach of OSCM research. This is a call for contributions from scholars, business leaders and policymakers to develop further impact-oriented research.

**Keywords** Impact, Impact pathways, Research, Industry, Policy, Research agenda, Practice, Theory

**Paper type** Impact pathways

## 1. Introduction

With technological, social, economic and wider societal changes happening all around us at a faster pace than ever, operations and supply chain management (OSCM) scholars face the critical task of remaining relevant as well as impactful and influential to business, government and society in the research they conduct. The focus of the *International Journal*



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of *Operations and Production Management's (IJOPM)* Impact Pathways (IP) section, founded in early 2020, is to capture those changes in industry, policy and society that are vital for OSCM scholars and advance our understanding, thinking and practices. IP represents a category and type of article that differs from the traditional empirical or conceptual research articles that comprise the majority of *IJOPM's* published outputs. IP articles are brief thought-pieces that clearly position and explain a contemporary issue, problem and/or challenge that business leaders or policymakers are facing, and which we, as OSCM engaged scholars, should bring to the attention of the journal's readership.

OSCM has been conceptualised as a field encompassing traditional internal operations management and connected relationships with suppliers and customers at multiple tiers of supply chains and networks (Voss, 1995; Cooper *et al.*, 1997; Van Hoek *et al.*, 2001; Srari and Gregory, 2008). It has a range of distinct features - such as its roots in practice, its research methodologies and its theoretical underpinnings - that allow its researchers to study the various challenges faced within and outside a firm and across multiple levels (Srari *et al.*, 2020; Harland and Roehrich, 2022). OSCM research studies are often deeply embedded in individual behaviours, organisational, supply chain or network practices and challenges, they build on a wide range of theoretical underpinnings, and they are conducted by deploying a range of methods, including in-depth case studies, surveys, ethnographic, action research studies and experiments (e.g. Voss *et al.*, 2002; Choi *et al.*, 2016; Coughlan and Coughlan, 2002).

While OSCM studies often build on, test, elaborate, or develop theory (e.g. Meredith, 1998; Walker *et al.*, 2015), the focus of the IP section in *IJOPM* further zooms in on the relationship between theory and practice. This relationship is important for management scholars in general and for OSCM scholars in particular, as “*management theory provides the basis for management practice and the practice in turn helps to reinforce the development of management theory. [...] Management practitioners and professionals are in the vanguard of management practice and their practice provides the opportunity for reviewing existing management theories and even developing new ones*” (Inyang, 2008, pp. 124–125).

Management scholars (e.g. Alvesson and Kärreman, 2007; Van Maanen *et al.*, 2007), alongside OSCM scholars (e.g. Binder and Edwards, 2010; Walker *et al.*, 2015), have repeatedly emphasised the relationship between the validity and power of a theory and its empirical reality. It is widely recognised that the empirical nourishes the conceptual, as data provide evidence to support, refine, elaborate, or develop a theory (Van Maanen *et al.*, 2007) and thus improve our understanding of and insights in the managerial reality. The practice of many OSCM scholars to engage with practical problems in their research reveals avenues for theories to emerge, to be elaborated and to be tested (Tate *et al.*, 2022).

Deploying “gap spotting” and “problematization” (Alvesson and Sandberg, 2011), it is common for OSCM researchers to identify and challenge assumptions and spot gaps in current OSCM thinking and practice. Based on this, researchers formulate research questions (RQs) and hypotheses to then leverage empirical evidence to formulate, test and refine (OSCM) theory and thinking. This then leads to the development of new insights and new or expanded theory. *IJOPM's* IP section is part of a movement towards further emphasising a problem-driven empirical scholarship, complementing conceptual and theory-driven developments.

We advocate here that IP submissions should be phenomenon-driven (derived from practice and/or policy) and should aim at closing the gap between OSCM theory and practice/policy. IP's objective is to discover new variables and relationships, thus many IP papers are characterised by an abductive approach which allows for creativity to inform and build theoretical insights from unpacking the generalisable and specific facets of the empirically observed phenomena (Dubois and Gadde, 2002). This may further ensure that the development of our field is grounded in practices, processes and policy. Thus, IP articles are based on frontline insights whereby business leaders and policymakers, through their

interactions with scholars, help to identify future problems, questions and directions for fruitful investigations. The IP section expects high quality, succinct and focused writing that shows engagement from and interaction with practice and/or policy, that produces original and researchable insights and that identifies pathways for future research and impact.

Since its inception in early 2020, the IP section has published 19 manuscripts and we, as (consulting) editors, believe that it is time to not only take stock of what has been achieved with this timely initiative, but to also provide further guidance and a clear outlook for future contributors.

## 2. Taking stock

This section provides a brief history of the IP section in *IJOPM*, followed by an overview and discussion of the IP manuscripts that have been published in the period from 2020 to mid-2023.

### 2.1 A brief history of IP's initial motivation and development [1]

There is a rich tradition of special tracks and workshops at past EurOMA (and other OSCM) conferences - facilitated by distinguished academics - focused on the impact, relevance and reach of OSCM research. This has motivated a small team of OSCM scholars to meet with *IJOPM*'s Editors in Chief to discuss new ideas for publishing impactful and relevant research. The meeting took place in November 2019. After a careful review of top OSCM journals which were operating more interventionist and developmental papers, the team proposed to set up *IJOPM*'s Impact Pathway section.

The IP section focuses on contemporary and relevant work, aiming to become a seedbed for catalysing future OSCM scholarship. We want to provide OSCM scholars (and their co-authors from practice, policy and other fields) an opportunity to disseminate timely insights on pressing topics and issues (e.g. COVID-19 during 2020) in an accessible (i.e. using clear language), concise (up to 3,000 words) and time-sensitive manner (published in a shorter timeframe than regular *IJOPM* submissions), while retaining the critical elements of authenticity and scholarly rigour for submissions to one of OSCM's premier journal outlets. Thus, we ensured to align IP submissions with *IJOPM*'s goals in four ways by: (1) spurring new and exciting research informed directly by practice and policy challenges; (2) providing unique insights from scholars, business leaders and policymakers making a valuable contribution to future research debates; (3) acknowledging that manuscripts are shorter and less theoretically informed than "typical" *IJOPM* manuscripts; and (4) achieving fast "time-to-market" for timely and strategically important thinking to kickstart viable and impactful OSCM debates and practices.

Our motivation was for the IP section to enable authors to be recognised more quickly, in comparison to regular academic submissions, by the OSCM community as (developing) experts in a particular sector, research area, theme and/or emerging topic that is highly relevant to and timely for OSCM. We were keen for authors who successfully publish their latest research in the IP section to benefit from a significantly enhanced reputation as experts in a specific topic at the cutting edge of OSCM practice and/or policy. Thus, we aim for timely and insightful manuscripts that are well-written, mostly grounded in interactions with individuals, teams or organisations that are directly involved in relevant OSCM challenges, impacting the OSCM community by advancing our collective knowledge.

Our initial announcement of the IP section - published in early 2020 - called for manuscripts meeting the following key characteristics:

- (1) interesting to read and advancing the field of OSCM by suggesting directions for future research;

- (2) creating scholarly and wider (business or policy) impact for *IJOPM*;
- (3) creating opportunities for further development into full empirical research submissions (e.g. offering a liaison with organisations and providing an opportunity to co-author with industry and government); and
- (4) outlining which methods are used to identify the problems or challenges, gather data and develop actionable solutions.

### *2.2 Overview of IP manuscripts and their wider impact*

Since the official launch of the IP section in early 2020, there has been a steady flow of manuscripts on topics such as, but not limited to, digital transformation, 3D printing and the vaccine supply. We are thankful for all authors to have submitted their timely and impactful research for consideration at *IJOPM*. [Table 1](#) provides an overview of the published IP manuscripts and their key insights. Given that the early stages of the IP section coincided with the occurrence of the COVID-19 pandemic - an unprecedented event of continuous waves of supply and demand disruption that was evolving rapidly ([Van Hoek, 2020](#)) - OSCM scholars were keen to explore the range of challenges that came with it. Not surprisingly, this has led to eight IP manuscripts offering different OSCM perspectives on how to address COVID-19-related challenges.

Across the published IP manuscripts, authors have used a variety of research methods and data collection instruments, with case studies and interviews (sometimes combined with secondary data) being most frequently deployed. Some manuscripts rely on data collected through workshops and roundtables with leading decision-makers. The IP contributions have in common that they leverage recent and relevant empirical evidence. This evidence is either stemming from a single case or from observations of multiple managers, firms and institutions, challenging existing knowledge and consolidated models and theories. The manuscripts demonstrate that new research is required to understand and explain new phenomena, or to find answers to new challenges. They also provide some preliminary proposals for new explanations, models and theories, which of course need further empirical investigation and theoretical refinement. As such, they are paving the way for new and relevant research.

[Table 2](#) shows some metrics for assessing reach and impact of the published IP manuscripts. For IP manuscripts, both the number of citations (a metric subject to the typical delay of the publication process), and the number of downloads are high, indicating that IP publications attract significant attention. The Altmetric indicator - capturing the dissemination in non-academic outlets such as news outlets, blogs and social media - shows that the reach beyond the academic community is so far rather more limited.

Feedback received from authors of IP manuscripts - albeit anecdotal - indicate the wider impact of their work, for example through engaged discussions on social media (e.g. LinkedIn and Twitter), referrals and invitations for workshops with business leaders and policymakers and further research opportunities, as exemplified in the following quotes:

My digital transformation Impact Pathway piece is generating a lot of interest - not only from academics, but also from many business leaders and consultants. I am already receiving requests from businesses [...] to give talks to senior leaders.

(Professor Feng Li, Head of Technology and Innovation Management, Bayes Business School, UK)

My LinkedIn post on the Impact Pathway research paper has attracted 6,000+ views in 24 hours and many researchers are commenting publicly or directly that they are going to use the paper - thank you for the opportunity.

**Table 1.**  
Published IP  
manuscripts (from  
2020 to mid-2023)

ID	Authors	Publication year/Vol./No.	IP title	Method	Key insights
1	van Hoek, R.	2020, Vol. 40 No. 4, pp. 341–355	Research opportunities for a more resilient post-COVID-19 supply chain - closing the gap between research findings and industry practice (van Hoek, 2020)	Virtual roundtables with supply chain executives, supplemented with interviews and publicly available datapoints	The COVID-19 crisis has caused major supply chain disruptions, and these can be traced back to basic supply chain risks that have previously been well identified in literature. The paper suggests a pathway for closing the gap between supply chain resilience research and efforts in industry to develop a more resilient supply chain. The research finds that at least three new approaches are emerging in leading organisations, which are (1) innovating by experimenting, (2) radical transformation via successive incremental changes and (3) dynamic sustainable advantages through an evolving portfolio of temporary advantages
2	Li, F.	2020, Vol. 40 No. 6, pp. 809–817	Leading digital transformation: three emerging approaches for managing the transition (Li, 2020)	Research with a group of global digital champions, including Amazon, Alibaba, Baidu, Google, JD.com, Uber, VMware and Slack	The research finds that at least three new approaches are emerging in leading organisations, which are (1) innovating by experimenting, (2) radical transformation via successive incremental changes and (3) dynamic sustainable advantages through an evolving portfolio of temporary advantages
3	Frei, R., Jack, L. and Brown, S.	2020, Vol. 40 No. 10, pp. 1613–1621	Product returns: a growing problem for business, society and environment (Frei et al., 2020)	Multi-case study approach, whereby returns processes were mapped, vulnerabilities identified and a returns cost calculator was developed	Product returns are increasing, due to growing e-commerce. Many retailers and academics are oblivious to the nature and scale of this challenge. Interdisciplinary research is needed to develop supporting theory, and cross-functional teams are required to implement measures addressing economic, ecological and social sustainability issues

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ID	Authors	Publication year/Vol./No.	IP title	Method	Key insights
4	Handfield, R.B., Graham, G. and Burns, L.	2020, Vol. 40 No. 10, pp. 1649–1660	Corona virus, tariffs, trade wars and supply chain evolutionary design (Handfield <i>et al.</i> , 2020)	Interviews from case studies in the USA and the UK	Using the constructal law of physics this study provides guidance to future scholarship on global supply chain management. This study suggests how recent events will impact the design of future global supply chains
5	Seyedghorban, Z., Samson, D. and Tahernejad, H.	2020, Vol. 40 No. 11, pp. 1685–1693	Digitalisation opportunities for the procurement function: pathways to maturity (Seyedghorban <i>et al.</i> , 2020)	Case study of three firms. Interviews with managers, investigation of processes and documentary materials and in-depth follow-up discussions were conducted	The paper investigates how procurement can be reinvented, from being digitised to digitalised to digitally integrated, ultimately contributing in business terms beyond supply chain effectiveness but also to profit generation. This initial research phase led to mapping a model of digital maturity as well as identifying its underlying constructs
6	Chaudhuri, A., Naseraldin, H., Søberg, P.V., Kroll, E. and Librus, M.	2021, Vol. 41 No. 1, pp. 55–62	Should hospitals invest in customised on-demand 3D printing for surgeries? (Chaudhuri <i>et al.</i> , 2021)	The research design included interviews, workshops and field visits. Design science approach was used	Deploying customised on-demand 3DP can reduce surgical flow time and its variability while improving clinical outcomes. We outline multiple opportunities for research on supply chain design and performance assessment for surgical 3DP
7	Sarkis, J.	2021, Vol. 41 No. 1, pp. 63–73	Supply chain sustainability: learning from the COVID-19 pandemic (Sarkis, 2021)	Published literature, personal research experience, insights from virtual open forums and practitioner interviews	Sustainability implications of pandemic events and responses bring short-term environmental sustainability gains, while long-term effects are still uncertain and require research. Sustainability and resilience are complements and jointly require investigation. Substantial open questions for investigation are identified

(continued)

Table 1.

Table 1.

ID	Authors	Publication year/Vol./No.	IP title	Method	Key insights
8	Finkenstadt, D.J. and Handfield, R.B.	2021, Vol. 41 No. 8, pp. 1302–1317	Tuning value chains for better signals in the post-COVID era: vaccine supply chain concerns (Finkenstadt and Handfield, 2021)	The supply chain operating reference (SCOR) model is used as a framework, validated through the ongoing research and interviews in the field	The paper identifies the critical bottlenecks in the vaccine supply chain that are preventing a robust coronavirus disease (COVID) response. Improved supply chain signals can result in improved handling and distribution of vaccines in a post-COVID world. Recommendations for redesign of the vaccine supply chain as well as future research questions for scholars are presented
9	Schleper, M.C., Gold, S., Trautrimis, A. and Baldock, D.	2021, Vol. 41 No. 3, pp. 193–205	Pandemic-induced knowledge gaps in operations and supply chain management: COVID-19's impacts on retailing (Schleper et al., 2021)	Collaborative research based on more than five hours of interviews and several iterative paper writing steps between management scholars and Marks & Spencer's Head of Procurement - Logistics and Supply Chain	This paper highlights the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on operations and supply chain management (OSCM) in the retail industry, structured in upstream, internal and operational and downstream and customer perspectives. The paper concludes with a practice-infused research agenda, which aims to trigger relevant research about the current and potential future crises

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ID	Authors	Publication year/Vol./No.	IP title	Method	Key insights
10	van Hoek, R. and Loseby, D.	2021, Vol. 41 No. 10, pp. 1579–1592	Beyond COVID-19 supply chain heroism, no dust settling yet - lessons learned at Rolls Royce about advancing risk management thinking (van Hoek and Loseby, 2021)	The co-author from Rolls Royce (RR) illustrates the risks experienced and risk management approaches taken in its manufacturing and supply chain operations	The impact of the pandemic is multifaceted, global and experienced throughout the entire supply chain, across industries and over an extended timeline with multiple time horizons. In manufacturing operations, there have been major instances of supply chain heroism in the first year of the pandemic and there is a lot more work ahead. This paper aims to posit that at least four more theoretical advancements are needed
11	de Vries, H., Jahre, M., Selviaridis, K., van Oorschot, K.E. and Van Wassenhove, L.N.	2021, Vol. 41 No. 10, pp. 1569–1578	Short of drugs? Call upon operations and supply chain management (de Vries <i>et al.</i> , 2021)	Review of stakeholder reports from six European countries and the academic literature	The paper discusses three pathways of impactful research on drug shortages to which OSCM could contribute: (1) Developing an evidence-based system view of drug shortages; (2) Studying the comparative cost-effectiveness of key government interventions; (3) Bringing supply chain risk management into the government and economics perspectives and vice versa
12	Huang, Y., Evers, D.R., Stevenson, M. and Thürier, M.	2021, Vol. 41, No. 12, pp. 1844–1861	Breaking the mould: achieving high-volume production output with additive manufacturing (Huang <i>et al.</i> , 2021)	Abductive reasoning applied to a case of using AM to compete with conventional production, winning a contract to supply 7,700,000 products	It is empirically shown that an AM shop can achieve economies of scale and compete with conventional manufacturing in high-volume, standardised production contexts. Comparing this case to existing theories and contemporary practices reveals new research directions and practical insights

(continued)

Table 1.



ID	Authors	Publication year/Vol./No.	IP title	Method	Key insights
13	Harland, C.M., Knight, L., Patrucco, A.S., Lynch, J., Telgen, J., Peters, E., Tatrai, T., Ferik, P.	2021, Vol. 41, No. 13, pp. 178–189	Practitioners' learning about healthcare supply chain management in the COVID-19 pandemic: a public procurement perspective (Harland <i>et al.</i> , 2021)	Interviews with 58 senior public procurement practitioners in central and regional governments, NGOs and leaders of professional organisations from 23 countries	This study shows how increasing system preparedness for future emergencies depends both on developing critical capabilities and understanding how awareness and motivation influence the effective deployment of those capabilities
14	Wiengarten, F., Durach, C., Franke, H., Netland, T., Schmidt, F.	2023, Vol. 43, No. 13, pp. 50–67	Towards an updated understanding of the development of operational capabilities (Wiengarten <i>et al.</i> , 2023)	Series of repeated in-depth interviews and discussions with the head of continuous improvement and the accountable manager of Lufthansa	Traditional models for operational capabilities building cannot explain (anymore) why some companies succeed and others fail in efficiently developing their capabilities. This paper offers a new model of operational capability building, the "Hub-and-Spoke Capability View," which sees capabilities as a network structure that is context-specific
15	Bryde, D.J., Shahgholian, A., Joby, R., Taylor, S., Singh, R.	2023, forthcoming	Managing relational risk in project operations (Bryde <i>et al.</i> , 2023)	Panel of six experts in Project Management and a pilot survey of PM practitioners	This paper provides insights into how Project Relational Risk Management is practiced. Three pathways are identified: 1) how PM deliverables act as a Key Success Factor for effective PRRM, 2) how the duality of roles carried out by PM actors influences PRRM practices, 3) how companies innovate to enhance their PRMM capability

(continued)

ID	Authors	Publication year/Vol./No.	IP title	Method	Key insights
16	Srai J, Graham G., Van Hoek R., Joglekar N., Lorentz H.	2023, <i>forthcoming</i>	Unhooking Supply Chains from Conflict Zones – Reconfiguration and Fragmentation Lessons from Ukraine–Russia (Srai <i>et al.</i> , 2023)	Six key informant interviews, each with different supply chain interactions with the conflict zone (inbound, outbound and within)	Unlike previous work on “unhooking” and “rehooking” this pathway is the first to develop a supply network reconfiguration perspective. The paper also develops a framework that integrates institutional shifts in trade policy with supply network reconfiguration. As well as “unhooking” firms are having to consider that at some stage, they may need to rehook back into Russia given their huge sunk costs and assets they have invested in and left behind This pathway aims to provide an understanding of the breadth of illegal supply chain activity and the broad implications for society. Secondly, the authors propose some theoretical approaches to understand the structure and resilience of these chains and, more importantly, potential research in supply chain interdiction that could disrupt illegal activity
17	Pullman, M., McCarthy, L., Mena, C.	2023, <i>forthcoming</i>	Breaking bad – how can supply chain management better address illegal supply chains? (Pullman <i>et al.</i> , 2023)	Observations are based on evidence from industry practitioners, law enforcement experts, investigative journalism and academic sources	

(continued)

Table 1.

ID	Authors	Publication year/Vol./No.	IP title	Method	Key insights
18	Legenvre, H., Hameri, A.	2023, <i>forthcoming</i>	The emergence of data sharing along complex supply chains (Legenvre and Hameri, 2023)	14 interviews with representatives from different automotive manufacturers and tier1 and tier2 suppliers, plus secondary data	The paper discusses data sharing along supply chains, showing how the automotive sector is working towards establishing a digital infrastructure for data sharing that could support a wide range of use cases. The article emphasises the importance of studying the governance of data ecosystems using new theoretical approaches and suggests three areas for future research on data ecosystems, including their governance, the learning dynamics that will drive their adoption and their relationship with broader system-level changes
19	Karaozman, H., Marshall, D.	2023, Vol. 43, No.13, pp. 226-237	Impact pathways: just transition in fashion operations and supply chain management (Karaozman and Marshall, 2023)	Multi-level field research approach to investigate multiple fashion supply chains	Fast-fashion giants work with industrial associations to create top-down governance tools, but they exclude workers, while the physiological and psychological effects on the workers are routinely ignored. These issues impede a just transition to a low-carbon fashion industry. This impact pathways paper proposes that operations and supply chain management (OSCM) can help to ensure that the transition in the fashion industry takes place in a just, inclusive and fair way

Source(s): Authors own creation

ID	IP authors	Year of publication	Downloads	Google Scholar citations	Scopus citations	Altmetrics
1	Van Hoek, R.	2020	24,715	621	384	46
2	Li, F.	2020	6,292	126	57	49
3	Frei, R., Jack, L. and Brown, S.	2020	2,100	34	18	0
4	Handfield, R.B., Graham, G. and Burns, L.	2020	8,224	215	123	4
5	Seyedghorban, Z., Samson, D. and Tahernejad, H.	2020	3,435	31	18	0
6	Chaudhuri, A., Naseraldin, H., Søberg, P.V., Kroll, E. and Librus, M.	2021	657	14	8	3
7	Sarkis, J.	2021	21,376	438	267	4
8	Finkenstadt, DJ. and Handfield, R.B.	2021	1,477	13	11	0
9	Schleper, M.C., Gold, S., Trautrim, A. and Baldock, D.	2021	15,098	65	39	1
10	van Hoek, R. and Loseby, D.	2021	1,270	15	11	0
11	de Vries, H., Jahre, M., Selviaridis, K., van Oorschot, K.E. and Van Wassenhove, L.N.	2021	1,086	8	7	0
12	Huang, Y., Eysers, D.R., Stevenson, M. and Thüner, M.	2021	587	10	9	0
13	Harland, C.M., Knight, L., Patrucco, A.S., Lynch, J., Telgen, J., Peters, E., Tatrai, T., Ferk, P.	2021	3,438	21	15	0
14	Wiengarten, F., Durach, C. F., Franke, H., Netland, T., Schmidt, F.	2023	655	1	1	0
15	Bryde, DJ., Shahgholian, A., Joby, R., Taylor, S., Singh, R.	2023	140	0	0	1
16	Srai J, Graham G., Van Hoek R., Joglekar N., Lorentz H.	2023	0	0	0	0
17	Pullman, M., McCarthy, L., Mena, C.	2023	0	0	0	0
18	Legenvre, H., Hameri, A.	2023	0	0	0	0
19	Karaosman, H., Marshall, D.	2023	0	0	0	0

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Table 2.

Some wider impact measures for published IP manuscripts as of June 2023

Source(s): Authors own creation

(Professor Remko van Hoek, Professor of Supply Chain Management, Walton College of Business, University of Arkansas, USA)

### 3. Dissecting IP manuscripts and charting a path ahead

Having discussed the IP manuscripts that were published since the launch of the IP section, we will now provide some insights for authors interested in submitting their research study to *IJOPM*'s IP section. We do not seek to be prescriptive and limiting future contributors who seek to publish their timely and impactful work in *IJOPM*'s IP section, but rather to provide some guidance and tips for shaping future submissions for the benefits of the wider OSCM community.

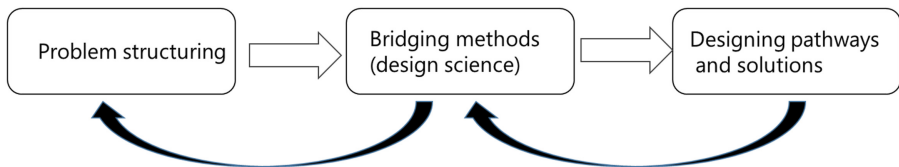
We remind the reader that the IP section offers a home for manuscripts written and organised in an accessible (e.g. simple and clear language; logic flow of argumentation) and concise (up to 3,000 words) manner, while retaining the critical elements of authenticity

and scholarly rigour for submissions expected for *IJOPM*. Also, the structure of the submission ideally meets the following criteria. The introduction to the IP submission clearly positions (What are the study's boundaries?) and motivates (Why is this topic/challenge important, timely and relevant for the OSCM community?) the IP manuscript. A condensed theoretical background section briefly synthesises and critiques what we know about a specific topic or challenge, and where the gaps are in our current thinking and understanding (What have prior studies not considered?; What is new to the OSCM community?). This is supported by (a condensed list of) references as evidence that the work builds on prior research in OSCM. The IP manuscript clearly states its contribution to the advancement of a specific area within OSCM.

This is supported by a brief discussion of the methodology implications (What data has been collected and how?; What is the sampling logic for the team, organisation, industry, or other unit of analysis under study?). As IP manuscripts are not opinion pieces nor detailed literature reviews, empirical data are important. Authors should build on their data and provide clear insights from their data to show advancement of OSCM's thinking, understanding and practices (What are key insights from the data that the reader will learn?). We do not expect extensive data collections and sophisticated data analyses, nor full methodology sections as in regular manuscript submissions. For instance, exemplary cases, interviews with relevant managers or expert panels are sufficient, if they provide insightful and thought-provoking evidence. Findings should then illustrate key insights to set up the back-end of the IP manuscript. Bringing this all together, the manuscript's back-end provides a rich and insightful discussion to advance OSCM community's understanding and thinking as well as identifies research opportunities and shape future research agendas (What can the OSCM community learn from this IP manuscript?; How can future research further develop our thinking, understanding and insights with regards to the topic or challenge under investigation?; What are the manuscript's pathways for future research and impact?).

Through the IP section, we aim to build a community of scholars who produce high quality practice and applied work and stimulate future relevant and impactful research. [Figure 1](#) summarises the overall approach of the IP section. The figure suggests that the researcher works with the business leaders/policymakers to collaboratively formulate and reformulate the research problem to be investigated. Then appropriate research methods need to be designed to intellectually bridge across from problem(s) to the discovery of potential solution(s). This bridging is achieved over time through the careful analysis and synthesis of the data collected by the researcher ([Groop et al., 2017](#)).

Also, the researcher continually shares findings with business leaders/policymakers who provide regular (re-) iterations into solution/insight formulation. Therefore, there are feedback loops in [Figure 1](#) to show that the output of the process of (re-)iteration is then input



**Figure 1.**  
A simplified approach  
to *IJOPM*'s IP section

Reflexivity, iteration, reiteration  
Grounded approaches

**Source(s):** Authors own creation

back into the bridging and problem structuring step, causing new outputs from each part of the process. For instance, the design and adoption of a “human-centric” analytics forecasting system took three years to build through on-going interactions between researcher and client. The pharmaceutical company participating in the project sought to develop and improve the accuracy of forecasts to counter “bullwhip effects” in inventory caused by “cherry-picking” customer behaviour, in a complex product-market scenario (Phillips and Nikolopoulos, 2019).

We now briefly discuss some selected, but by no means all, possible future impact pathways. Our selection is considered to be representative, but not all encompassing. We call upon you, our OSCM colleagues, to work closely with business leaders and policymakers to explore these, and many other, impact pathways. In Table 3, we outline some possible trends and future pathways which may be emerging over the next few years for both scholars and practitioners. We do not intend to restrict the range of topics and methods. Rather, we encourage authors to propose new and emerging ones, stemming from empirical evidence, and based on challenges that firms, institutions and the society in general are facing. The IP section welcomes highly original impact pathways, in these as well as in other areas, that utilise frontline evidence to benefit and propel the development of OSCM.

We have entered an era of supply chain disruptions and unprecedented high levels of uncertainty such as Brexit, COVID-19, the Ukraine–Russia war, EU-China and USA–China trade wars. They have exposed the fragilities of the global supply chain model based on transactional economic efficiency. World trading organisations no longer provision free trade but implement tariffs and embargoes as pressure to unhook countries such as Russia from the global supply chain. The resulting fragmentation and shifting mental models (Gary and Wood, 2011) to deal with “de-globalisation” offer opportunities for researchers.

The area of geopolitical risks upon supply chains is still under-developed and we seek pathways breaking new frontiers and boundaries on policy making and its links with and impact on supply chains (Moradlou *et al.*, 2021; Roscoe *et al.*, 2022). For instance, reshoring supply chains and rejuvenating post-industrial areas to create new capacity in the EU, to reduce the strategic dependence from oversea, is a new challenge that requires high consideration. Several emerging supply chain risk sources, such as wildlife trafficking, illegal trading activities, modern slavery, etc. are under-investigated and lack conceptualisation and problematisation. New regulations are emerging at different levels, such as the EU Supply

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#### Possible IP research opportunities

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- Supply chain shocks: USA–China Trade War, Weaponization of supply chains, new mental models
- Ukraine–Russia War: War rooms, shifts in KPIs, supply chain reconfiguration, new freight routes
- Accelerating Digitalisation and the AI revolution
- Workforce shortages
- Supply chain politicisation and designs – The role of Russia and other conflict areas in global supply chain designs
- New supplier payment systems
- Supply chain and procurement technology solutions such as machine learning
- Increasing supply chain visibility and more frequent disruptions
- Supply chain HR capabilities - leadership, talent development, skills
- Human centric design of warehousing, logistics, analytics systems
- Electrification of freight and transport
- Focus on value conservation and social value creation (rather than mere economic value creation) as part of ESG (environmental, social and governance)
- Infrastructural technologies (5G) emerging operating models, process and workflow contradictions

**Source(s):** Authors own creation

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**Table 3.**  
Possible emergent IP  
research opportunities

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Chain Due Diligence Directive, creating new strict requirements that affect not only single firms, but also their supply chain, thus requiring new research on their impact and on how to make them really effective.

Recently, we have witnessed a shift in the supply chain policy landscape in reaction to the Ukraine–Russia war. For instance, [Alexander \*et al.\* \(2022\)](#) have argued for building OSCM research in what some have termed the “new normal,” including war and some of the repercussions stemming from it. [Chipman \(2016\)](#) has made a case for firms to have a “foreign policy”, implying that they have to consider the geopolitical context and decide how to position themselves, as demonstrated at the outbreak of the war in Ukraine. This will be more and more important in the future. Increasing attention has been given to the “weaponisation” of supply chains by governments ([Srai \*et al.\*, 2023](#)). What is the nature and form of such weaponisation and what does this mean for future supply chain design, network reconfiguration and supplier relationships? This offers opportunities for researchers to investigate the influence of international relations and geopolitics on supply chain management.

In terms of technology, the 5th generation wireless network (5G) is at the top of government and business leaders’ agenda as it holds the potential to stimulate economic growth through creating employment and business opportunities ([Dolgui and Ivanov, 2022](#)). A growing number of 5G studies have argued that it is a disruptive technology enabling smart, connected solutions and eco-systems as part of digital transformation ([Li, 2020](#)). However, we call for more empirical research into real-world practices ([Choi \*et al.\*, 2022](#)).

OSCM solutions based on artificial intelligence (AI) are expected to be potent instruments to help organisations tackle the new challenges. They can be applied in, for instance, demand forecasting, product recommendations and customisation, dynamic pricing, real-time production tracking, prevention of order shipment delays and inventory shortages, customer feedback collection for product development and supplier monitoring for procurement costs reduction ([Fosso Wamba \*et al.\*, 2022](#)). There are gaps in our understanding of the development of appropriate theories, concepts and models for firms and supply chains to benefit from and manage the possible risks of AI (and other emerging technologies).

The radical changes that AI and automation are driving in operations will also affect human labour and employment, eliminating some low-skilled jobs while creating the need for new, high-skilled jobs. Workforce shortages in the supply chain have recently become a major problem in Europe, the USA and other parts of the world. The warehousing and transportation sector suffers from shortages in skills and capabilities. Therefore, future impact pathway research may develop around human resources (HR) capacity and capability issues. HR management is largely an underdeveloped area of knowledge in OSCM and its role in the supply chain requires more substantive pathway development. While AI/automation might solve (some of) these labour shortages, research is emerging on its failure through the lack of “human centricity” in the design and adoption of digital technology in operations ([Nguyen Ngoc, 2022](#)). Human centric design is a concept that offers a fertile ground for researchers to explore OSCM systems that are built more in empathy with workers and managers.

Beyond what has been briefly discussed in this section, business leaders and policymakers have to grapple with other big and emerging “trends” that are ripe for investigation. This includes, but is not limited to, resilience or sustainability (especially climate change, deforestation, or biodiversity). We further encourage OSCM scholars to closely work with business leaders and policymakers to continue exploring future possible impact pathways and to consider submitting their insightful work to *IJOPM*’s IP section.

#### 4. Concluding thoughts

For OSCM research to be relevant and impactful and to further increase in reach, OSCM research needs to advance management theory, translate into teaching and interactions with students and/or make a difference in business, policy and society. IP manuscripts seek to enable and encourage OSCM scholars to work with business leaders and policymakers, to jointly present evidence and to showcase insights derived from data to develop insightful research agendas for the advancement of OSCM scholarship.

Authors successful in publishing their research insights in the IP section potentially enhance their reputation as experts for industry and policy relevance in a specific topic. This is evidenced to date by the comparatively high numbers of citations and downloads of published IP papers. Through the joint promotion (e.g. via social media) of IP insights by the publisher, editors and authors, these insights can be disseminated to wide networks of not only academics but also – increasingly – business leaders and policymakers. As the IP section matures and attracts a growing number of high-quality manuscripts, the reach and impact of IP insights will further expand. We will continue, as OSCM community, to provide a platform for disseminating timely and impactful insights for academics, business leaders and policymakers and thus create opportunities to further develop collaborative and impactful collaborations.

#### Note

1. A podcast is now available on the IP section: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_85R9Kjogr8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_85R9Kjogr8)

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**Corresponding author**

Federico Caniato can be contacted at: [federico.caniato@polimi.it](mailto:federico.caniato@polimi.it)