

Call for Papers

Special Issue of *Production and Operations Management* “Modern Slavery in Supply Chains: A Socio-Technical Perspective”

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Background

Modern slavery affects over 40 million individuals around the world; many of them are part of multi-tier, complex supply chains across developed, emerging, and subsistence economies. These individuals work in extremely harsh conditions, are underpaid, deprived of freedom, and often labor in very risky situations that can affect both their physical and mental health. This societal problem may be seen as a ‘wicked problem’ involving high levels of complexity, uncertainty and multi-causality, and is reflected in various UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) such as Goal 8 promoting *Decent Work and Economic Growth*. Slavery is nourished by vulnerabilities and inequalities and has various manifestations such as human trafficking, forced labor, child labor, neglected worker health and safety, and unfair worker treatments (e.g., payments, benefits, entitlements, and maternity/paternity leave). Recently, different legislations have been produced to tackle the problem of forced and slave labor, such as the US-California Transparency Act (2010), the UK Modern Slavery Act (2015) or the Australian Modern Slavery Act (2018). These legislations face challenges to detect and then ameliorate modern slavery and other severely exploitative practices because their roots are often buried in invisible supply chains, both local and international including the gig economy.

This Special Issue aims to motivate research and practice on modern slavery that encompasses social, technical, and contextual systems (e.g. business context) and their interplay within supply chains. This integrative perspective offers opportunities to adapt existing solutions or advance new solutions that consider reciprocal interactions within and between *socio-technical systems* of supply chains to develop a holistic view of this societal problem. For example, corporations may seek to escalate transparency—focal firms being able to extend their visible horizon—and gather supply chain-wide information to detect and report instances of modern slavery according to legislative demands. In this regard, the socio-technical configuration and manipulation of supply chains is central to the development and sustenance of effective transparency regimes that are not primarily or overwhelmingly driven by focal firms. Similar comments can be made for institutional,

structural, and market-based solutions such as regulatory pressure, bottom-up governance, and NGO campaigning.

The relationships that connect social and technical systems have the potential to hurt efforts to reduce modern slavery. For example, companies may declare that they treat their workers fairly and report the same via disclosure mechanisms, but they do not walk their talk. Moreover, technologies that monitor productivity create potential problems including other forms of oligarchy in organizations where individuals with deep technological resources exert significant power over others. Some technological solutions have also the potential of being used for surveillance and control of workers rather than helping them. As such, human rights should be embedded and normalized within socio-technical processes of supply chains. On the other hand, new technologies have the potential to play an instrumental role for advancing the social sustainability in supply chains. Blockchain, social media, big data analytics, machine learning, and the internet of things offer significant information processing capacity for improving labor-related information flows across the supply chain. Such new technologies present a valuable opportunity to access modern slavery information that is otherwise invisible or hidden in supply chains.

Approaches to reduce modern slavery are exposed to the larger economic, industrial, and cultural business context wherein supply chains operate. For example, some evidence suggests that COVID-19 has further accentuated modern slavery and exploitative behaviors across the global supply chains due to issues such as rushed decisions, less informed actions, tight turnarounds, financial distress, lockdown production, and delayed payments. Furthermore, the crisis has prompted managers to rethink their operations and supply chain practices. Contextual factors, such as COVID-19, are expected to slow down progress made toward social responsibility in supply chain and struck the wellbeing and livelihood of the workers including gig workers and those at the base-of-the-pyramid. In the absence of mature regulatory frameworks, programs (and pertinent social and technical systems) centred on tackling modern slavery risks can be benefited by exploring worker empowerment through hearing their voices as well as social institutions and advocacy as a way to advance agency for neglected parts of supply chains.

Objectives

In this special issue, we call for rigorous research that borrows from a range of disciplines (e.g., political science and sociology) and presents relevant and original work related to the issue of modern slavery in supply chains. We are particularly interested in stimulating research that is anchored in socio-technical perspective; this can be rendered in various forms such as a new way of framing the issue via problematization, design approaches and constraint inducements, and behavioral as well as technological solutions. We are interested in research that explores factors that contribute to or ameliorate modern slavery, as well as initiatives that generate positive or negative outcomes. Examples of topics of interest include (but are not restricted to):

- Trust and technology to develop theory on whether, how and to what extent entities can empower workers at the bottom of their supply chains (e.g. bottom-up sustainability governance strategies)

- Social, technical, and contextual systems that are conducive to advancing transparency regimes (for detection and remediation of modern slavery)
- Unintended consequences of creating transparency through supply chain transformation and use of technology for tackling modern slavery
- Supply chain transformations driven by socio-technical solutions such as smart detection and remediation
- Innovative anti-slavery practices/strategies for dealing with paradoxes and tensions associated with pursuing financial and social goals in COVID-19 environments
- Responses (policy, procedure, and process) to mistreatment of workers or increased workers' vulnerability to exploitation due to rapid supply chain change, adjustment, or adaptation across developed and developing economies
- Innovations that combine not-for-profit entities and other non-traditional supply chain actors in partnership with supply chains (e.g., multi-stakeholder initiatives and meta-organizations) to tackle modern slavery as the COVID-19 pandemic evolves
- Interventions and transformations associated with upholding labor rights including gig workers and maintaining decent work despite significant business shocks in global supply chains

All submissions must make clear managerial contributions and must be built on strong research methodologies consistent with the high standard of the journal.

Please follow the detailed submission guidelines provided at http://www.poms.org/journal/author_instructions/

The paper should be submitted to manuscript central (<https://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/poms>). While submitting the paper, please be sure to identify in Step 1 that the paper is being submitted for the special issue. In the Department Editor list, please choose this special issue.