

Resource interaction for sustainability in business networks

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One of the main causes and challenges of sustainability lies in the inefficiency of current resource management approaches. Overcoming this challenge requires rethinking how resources and activities are developed, combined, and mobilized through stakeholder engagement and network relationships so they support economic, social, and environmental objectives across firms and their business networks (Høgevold et al., 2015; Runfola & Monteverde, 2023). Such a transformation involves changing the well-established inter and intra-organisational activities for meeting the sustainability goals. Examples of these activities include shifting from fossil-based to bio-based materials, implementing circular economy models, and integrating sustainable materials with existing resources. It also entails dealing with the growing complexity brought about by raw material shortages and natural resource scarcity, which together demand a reconfiguration of how products, facilities, organizational units, and business relationships are structured and interact.

The IMP tradition concerned with the analysis of resources in business networks has long recognized resource interdependence and embeddedness as key concepts for understanding how actors create value through resource interaction (Baraldi et al., 2012a; Håkansson & Waluszewski, 2002; Prenkert et al., 2022). Resource interaction is defined as “the processes of combination, re-combination, and co-development of resources that happen through the interaction among organizations” (Baraldi et al., 2012b). This lens is particularly well-suited for the study of sustainability transition. First, resource embeddedness explains why sustainability challenges cannot be solved by individual firms, as embedded resources require coordinated transformation across multiple actors and organizational levels (Tunisini et al., 2023; Harrison et al., 2023). Second, resource heaviness captures the dual nature of sustainability transitions: it creates friction that makes change difficult, yet provides the stability needed for coordinated transformation (Wagrell et al., 2022; Vellesalu et al., 2025). Third, focusing on resource interfaces reveals where economic, environmental, and social values conflict, making visible the tensions that emerge in sustainability transitions (Tura et al., 2019). Recent IMP research has begun applying this lens to sustainability, showing how resource interaction dynamics shape transformation processes at network levels (Keränen et al., 2021; Vellesalu et al., 2025).

This special track originates from the IMP Resource Special Interest Group's sustainability subgroup and invites conceptual, empirical, and methodological contributions that, building on recent IMP scholarship, address one of the following topics:

- Mechanisms through which actors develop, adapt, and combine resources to achieve sustainability, including how different coordination mechanisms function across various industry contexts and network configurations (Aarikka-Stenroos et al., 2022; Vellesalu et al., 2025).
- Processes of adapting resource interfaces when substituting specific materials (e.g., fossil-based to bio-based, virgin to recycled), examining how technological, organizational, and relational resources must be reconfigured in different production contexts. (Keränen et al., 2021, 2023)
- Tensions and paradoxes emerging when economic, environmental, and social values conflict at resource interfaces, and how these paradoxes are managed in sustainability transitions through longitudinal studies in resource-intensive vs. low-resource industries (Tura et al., 2019; Runfola et al., 2025).
- How different types of resource deficiency (one-off vs. time-limited vs. durable vs. structural) shape network responses, and what strategies enable successful resource substitution across different network structures and industries (Tunisini et al., 2023).
- How resource interaction approaches - compared to other analytical and theoretical tools - can inform policy analysis of sustainability challenges (Baraldi & Wagrell, 2022) and how regulatory frameworks affect resource development in business networks.
- Frameworks for understanding nature as a resource, whether as common pool resources, as production inputs, or as actors in business networks, and examine how different conceptualizations can lead to distinct patterns of resource interaction in business networks. (Harrison et al., 2023).

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