

IMP 2026 Special Track Proposal

Title: Socio-Cultural and Ethical Dimensions of Sustainability Transformations in Industrial Networks

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Industries face increasing societal and institutional pressure to transition toward more sustainable practices that address the negative environmental and social effects embedded in the entire value creation process—from resource extraction to production and post-consumption phases. These pressures highlight the necessity of reimagining not only technological and economic structures but also the cultural, ethical, and narrative foundations that underpin industrial transformation. Numerous IMP studies already examine sustainability-oriented innovations, network reorganization, digitalization, and circular industrial processes within B2B contexts (e.g., Dziubaniuk et al., 2024; Haaja & Evers, 2025; Keränen et al., 2021; Li, 2022; Satornino et al., 2024). Collectively, these works have advanced understanding of the mechanisms driving sustainability transitions. Yet, a growing body of research (e.g., Narayan & Laine-Kronberg, 2024) suggests that transformation toward sustainability is not only a technological or managerial endeavor but also a cultural and narrative process rooted in the ways actors envision, enact, and communicate sustainable futures.

From this perspective, effective transformation requires system-level change in both industry and society, driven by innovations, consumption patterns, cleaner production, and transformed communication practices. However, business actors' proactive stances toward sustainability are often grounded in their personal values, ethical norms, and socio-cultural imaginaries that shape how they conceptualize and enact sustainability (Dziubaniuk & Aarikka-Stenroos, 2025; Elg & Hånell, 2023; Ivanova-Gongne et al., 2022; Melé, 2009). These imaginaries operate as antenarratives — fragmented, emergent stories through which organizations and networks collectively envision what sustainable industry might become (Narayan & Laine-Kronberg, 2024). Such antenarratives bridge grand narratives (e.g., circular economy, climate neutrality, decarbonization) and the lived, localized practices of actors embedded in interorganizational networks (Halinen & Törnroos, 1998). They illuminate how sustainability transformations emerge through relational sensemaking, ethical business conduct and cultural negotiation within actors' networks.

The IMP tradition provides a powerful lens to explore these processes because it emphasizes the embeddedness of firms in ongoing relationships and interaction patterns that structure industrial systems. Through the IMP framework, we can examine how ethical and cultural transformations unfold as living stories co-created across network boundaries—where values, technologies, and material infrastructures are intertwined. Thus, communication of sustainability values becomes not

merely a signalling mechanism but a form of narrative enactment that shapes the social-cultural identities and ethical behaviors of network actors.

This special track calls for papers that reflect on businesses as integral parts of society and seek to advance understanding of the socio-cultural and ethical dimensions of sustainability transformations. We welcome conceptual and empirical contributions that examine how antenarratives, imaginaries, and value-laden stories influence network evolution, actor roles, and governance forms in sustainable industrial systems. Contributions might explore how ethical embeddedness and cultural sensemaking inform sustainable value creation, how material culture reshape industrial logic, or how pro-sustainability ideologies circulate across networks through communicative, technological, and material infrastructures. In line with the IMP approach, we particularly encourage interdisciplinary studies that bridge industrial marketing and purchasing research with sociology, cultural studies, and industrial ecology to investigate how sustainability emerges from the living stories of networked actors. Such work can deepen our understanding of how ethical, cultural, and narrative forces coalesce in shaping the transition toward system-level sustainability.

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