

Proposal special track IMP 2026

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The role of the B2B sales function in building business relationships to contribute to a sustainable world

One responsibility of marketing & sales researchers and practitioners is managing business relationships in networks that foster both economic and sustainability strategies. They have the role to help firms to engage network partners for sustainability purposes (Sharma et al., 2025) to build a sustainable world. This special track specifically focuses on the interaction processes within and between business actors and the role of the B2B sales function in customer engagement for sustainability purposes and how firms ensure such engagement (Gabler et al., 2023).

Building relationships and networks between organizations and the outcomes classically depend on individual behaviors on each side of the (organizational) exchange, with or without a formal organizational structure. The B2B Sales function, being the boundary-spanner of one side of the coin (Blocker et al., 2012), tend to have close and interactive relationships with customers (La Rocca et al., 2016). This puts them in the challenging opportunity to build and enhance B2B relationships based on circular interactions and interventions and thus contribute to a sustainable world.

This special track invites researchers to present their work on the roles, tasks and practices of the B2B sales function in interaction mechanisms, business relationships, and networks that help to build a sustainable world.

We welcome both empirical and conceptual papers to this Special Track. Possible topics include, but are not limited to:

- Supply chain coordination, as transportation is inherently contributing to pollution, how can interactions in the network contribute to reducing the collective footprint
- Knowledge brokering, how can salespersons gather and disseminate information that helps to address societal challenges and advance sustainability in the network
- Alignment, how can salespersons align the different perspectives on sustainability in the network
- Value creation, how can salespersons balance the different forms of value
- Orchestration, how can salespersons oversee, coordinate and communicate the initiatives in the network

References:

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- Gabler, C. B., Landers, V. M., & Itani, O. S. (2023). Sustainability and professional sales: a review and future research agenda. *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management*, 43(4), 336–353.
- La Rocca, A., Moscatelli, P., Perna, A., & Snehota, I. (2016). Customer involvement in new product development in B2B: The role of sales. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 58, 45–57.
- Sharma, A., Borah, S. B., Haque, T., & Adhikary, A. (2025). Engaging customers and suppliers for environmental sustainability: Investigating the drivers and the effects on firm performance. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 53(2), 341–366.