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Management of sustainability and well-being for individuals and society

Conference Proceedings

Short Papers

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Short Papers

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To the reader,

this volume contains the long papers of the Sinergie-SIMA 2024 Management Conference, hosted by the University of Parma on June 13th and 14th 2024.

Theory and practice in the field of management have been challenged by the emergence of sustainability and well-being as major global policy priorities. Both sustainability and well-being are complex, value-laden, and strongly interconnected; however, they tend to exist in separate realms.

Sustainability literature has recorded an evolution in the way the concept of sustainable development is understood, leading to the articulation of sustainable development as human “well-being” and “flourishing”, rather than “needs”. Nevertheless, some scholars have pointed out a lack of clarity in the conceptualization, which causes some ambiguity in terms of definition (Ronen & Kerret, 2020). Kjell (2011) observed that human needs and well-being are poorly understood, characterized, and developed by sustainability research. Along the same vein, Helne & Hirvilammi (2015) observed that the overarching goal of sustainable development (i.e., well-being) has often been narrowly interpreted, mainly in economic terms, while connections between the natural environment and human flourishing have been overlooked. More recently, O’Mahony (2022) remarked that the literature conceptualizing human well-being continues to exist largely outside sustainable development. Hence, placing well-being more clearly within the sustainability framework could be highly beneficial to sustainability.

Concurrently, the literature on well-being is almost entirely dissociated from the contributions of nature or the relationships with ecological and planetary systems (Roberts et al., 2015), and the importance of social dimensions is an emergent conclusion. Therefore, the rationale of contextual systems inherent to sustainability research (incorporating views of times, society, and biosphere) could significantly enrich well-being research, fostering a more holistic perspective on well-being and an increased awareness of the limits of individual well-being pursuits (Kjell, 2011).

In brief, though well-being has major implications for sustainable development and vice versa, the body of literature that effectively integrates sustainability and well-being remains in an embryonic stage.

The above considerations aim to act as catalysts for an interdisciplinary debate within the field of management. Enriching the conception of flourishing well-being in sustainability and the contribution of nature to well-being can produce impactful scientific research, as O’Mahony (2022) points out. Equally important is the analysis of the links between sustainability and well-being, encompassing synergies and trade-offs at the organizational level, in value chains, and in interactions with stakeholders across various industries.

The Sinergie-SIMA 2024 Management Conference welcomed contributions based on different theories, methodological approaches, and units of analysis with the potential to empower a transformation for flourishing individuals, society, and the natural world alike. More precisely, the Conference was a great occasion to discuss the research efforts of our research community within tracks related to the:

- Conference theme (Management of sustainability and well-being for individuals and society),
- SIMA thematic groups (Entrepreneurship, Innovation & Technology Management, Intelligenza manageriale nel management, International Business, Marketing, Purpose-driven Businesses, Retailing & Service Management, Small & Family Business, Strategic Communication, Strategy & Governance, Supply Chain Management, Logistics & Operations, Sustainability, and Tourism & Culture Management),
- special tracks (Examining the social and environmental relevance of sustainable digital business models: Impact on business practices and consumers, Growing resilient Italian SMEs, and Perspectives on grand challenges in international business and implications for companies),
- Management Case Studies.

The Conference call for papers gave the opportunity to submit either short and long papers. Overall, the editorial staff received 277 submissions of which 215 short papers and 62 long papers.

For the *short and long papers*, the evaluation followed the peer review process, with a double-blind review performed by, respectively, one or two referees - university lecturers and experts about the topic - selected among SIMA and the community of Sinergie members.

In detail, the referees applied the following criteria to evaluate the submissions:

- clarity of the research aims,
- accuracy of the methodological approach,
- contribution in terms of originality/innovativeness,
- theoretical and practical contribution,
- clarity of communication,
- significance of the bibliographical basis.

The *peer review* process resulted in full acceptance or rejection of the submissions. In the case of disagreement among reviewers' evaluations, the decision was taken by the Chairs of the SIMA thematic groups or conference track. Each work was then sent back to the Authors together with the referees' reports. The suggestions received by the referees were used by the Authors during the presentation of their research works at the Conference.

The evaluation process ended with the acceptance of 211 short papers and 58 long papers. This volume proposes the papers whose Authors have authorized their publication.

All the long papers published in this volume were presented and discussed during the Conference and published online on the web portal of Sinergie-SIMA Management Conference (<https://www.sijmsima.it/>).

While thanking all the Authors, Chairs, and participants, we hope that this volume will contribute to advance knowledge about the management of sustainability and well-being for individuals and society.

The Conference Chairs

Guido Cristini, Beatrice Luceri, Arabella Mocciaro Li Destri, and Marta Ugolini

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Modern slavery in mining supply chains: the role of social enterprises and the institutional context

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Abstract

Our research focuses on evaluating the impact of institutional pressures and agency effects on modern slavery in mining supply chains in Africa. We studied the policies, challenges, practices, and supply chain's actors involved in understanding how interventions can mitigate modern slavery and promote sustainable development. In particular, we explored the role of social enterprises in modern slavery, such as those empowering women in the mining sector to address gender inequality and promote economic empowerment. By adopting a case study approach and through a combination of literature review, desk research, and interviews, we aim to provide insights that can contribute to institutional and agency theories' development and support effective strategies to combat modern slavery in mining supply chains, to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals in Africa.

Keywords: *modern slavery, supply chain, institutional theory, agency theory, esg, mining, Africa*

Framing of the research. *Africa continues to face numerous Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) challenges, such as poverty, hunger, lack of access to good health care, lack of development, gender inequality, lack of clean water, and environmental issues (Juju et al., 2020). These challenges not only hinder the overall progress and development of the continent but also affect the quality of life of its inhabitants (Zaman et al, 2023). This objective can be achieved under the United Nations Agenda 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which aim to address social challenges without forgetting the environmental ones (Omisoro, 2018).*

Modern slavery, particularly in the supply chain, represents one of the challenges faced by Africa. The International Labour Organization (ILO) defines modern slavery as a broad category that encompasses various forms of forced labour, including indentured labour, debt bondage, forced labour, servitude, and human trafficking. The exploitation of labour, especially in industries like mining, agriculture, and manufacturing, perpetuates poverty, inequality, lack of development (Gold et al., 2015), and environmental degradation (Sparks et al., 2021). The supply chain's unethical practices violate human rights and undermine efforts to achieve the SDGs. Hence, it is crucial for businesses and organisations to address modern slavery in their operations to contribute to sustainable development and social justice in Africa (Moussa et al., 2022).

The characteristic of modern slavery that distinguishes it from the ancient concept of slavery is its foundation on the exercise of specific powers over human beings rather than on direct property, which is currently illegal almost everywhere (Crane, 2013). As such, there are various antecedents that create the conditions for power to be exerted over workers, especially in global supply chains (Hilend et al., 2023). Among socioeconomic factors, poverty and lack of social mobility play a critical role, creating a fertile environment for any kind of labour exploitation (Crane, 2013; Hilend et al., 2023). Moreover, when the population does not have the economic and educational resources to invest in their way of life, it raises the risk of the so-called "poverty trap", where extreme poverty levels persist because of this lack of awareness (Penh, 2009). Among the regulatory factors, political instability and weak governance favour firms' likelihood of adopting modern slavery behaviours (Crane, 2013; Hilend et al., 2023).

Supply chain management (SCM) literature has demonstrated the positive relationship between the adoption of ESG practices and the supply chain performance, at least in the long term (Zhu & Sarkis, 2004; Zhu and Sarkis, 2006; Lee et al., 2012; Le et al., 2022; Truant et al., 2024). However, the work of New (2015) highlighted that modern slavery differs

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from other ESG issues and necessitates specific attention, as the standard anti-modern slavery ESG initiatives can be seen as part of the enabling mechanism that allows this issue to persist: indeed, although policy statements and sustainability disclosure of firms might appear to be fighting against the problem, “the brutal exercise of commercial power, hard negotiation on prices and trading terms generates the conditions in which forced labour emerges” (p.703). However, research on modern slavery within business and management discipline remains highly underdeveloped. Under the framework of SCM, there is inadequate attention to the effects of core SCM practices in giving rise to modern slavery (Caruana et al., 2021). Flynn and Walker (2020, p. 296) acknowledge the suitability of using the institutional theory view to study modern slavery as the institutional context “is imposed on firms from the outside by legislation, non-government organisation (NGO) campaigning, professional standards, stakeholder initiatives, media coverage, and consumer activism.” In the same vein, Moussa et al. (2022) provide evidence supporting institutional theory's role in the study of modern slavery. Their research revealed that nations with robust institutions, increased democratic practices, better regulatory standards, greater press freedom, and improved corruption control demonstrate higher accountability and responsiveness to modern slavery threats. Moreover, the occurrence of modern slavery practices in supply chains may be limited or inhibited by the monitoring, governing, and enforcing of regulations related to illegal natural resource extraction (Hilend et al., 2023). However, the most influential contribution to modern slavery in the management literature was provided by Crane (2013), who conceptualised modern slavery as an institutional deflection. As a matter of fact, he offers a comprehensive and perceptive model demonstrating how the ongoing presence of modern slavery poses a theoretical challenge for institutional theory. He elucidates how illegitimate practices can endure over time within the gaps of prevailing regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive systems. Essentially, his model seeks to elucidate the viability of modern slavery despite its contradiction to the primary institutional dynamics in contemporary societies.

In this context, two theoretical frameworks offer insights into introducing ESG criteria in supply chains to contrast modern slavery. On the one hand, institutional theory's view suggests that such practices should diminish over time due to the impact of prevailing regulative, normative, and mimetic pressures fostering isomorphism (Scott, 2001). Institutional theory in SCM has been widely studied as it may explain how external drivers promote sustainable SCM practices (Sarkis et al., 2011). Normative pressures from consumers have driven the adoption of sustainable SCM practices for downstream firms (Ball & Craig, 2010), inducing buyers to exert normative pressure over upper-tier suppliers to enforce the sustainability of the overall chain. Nonetheless, the continued presence of isolated instances of slavery indicates that within specific contexts, structural inertia resists broader societal changes and environmental shifts (Hannan & Freeman, 1984), revealing that the institutional pressures that delegitimise slavery are somehow diverted by both external and internal contingencies (Crane, 2013). In this regard, agency theory offers indeed valuable insights into supply chain management (Fayezi et al., 2012), shedding light on the relationships between upper and lower-tier supplying firms, as well as between the focal buyer and upper and lower-tier supplying firms (Aßlander et al., 2016; Wilhelm et al., 2016). By acknowledging the inherent information asymmetry and potential for opportunistic behaviour within these complex networks, agency theory helps design governance mechanisms that incentivise efficient and trustworthy behaviour from agents towards the principal. This ultimately contributes to smoother information flow, reduced transaction costs, and improved overall supply chain performance (Panda and Leepsa, 2017). Indeed, as modern slavery instances typically occur in the upstream, geographically isolated and most labour-intensive stages of the supply chains (Crane, 2013), principal-agent relations are crucial to fight modern slavery since the principal's social responsibility might lead to the resolution of conflicts of interests and the introduction of contractual incentives and information transparency, which have a proven positive influence on the effective adoption of ESG practices of upper-tier suppliers (Wilhelm et al., 2016).

Purpose of the paper. Our research focuses on evaluating the impact of institutional pressures and agency effects on modern slavery in the mining sector in Africa. By adopting a multiple case study approach, we studied the policies, practices, and actors involved in the sector to understand how interventions can mitigate modern slavery and promote sustainable development. Particularly, we explore the role of a social enterprise (Doherty et al., 2014), which empowers women in the mining sector to address gender inequality and promote economic empowerment. We conceptualize this organization as a hybrid organization (Pache & Santos, 2012), as “by spanning the boundaries of the private, public and non-profit sectors, they bridge institutional fields [...] and face conflicting institutional logics” (Doherty et al. 2014, p.418). As a matter of fact, this organization occupies a particular position into the mining supply chain, being a connector between mining communities/workers and mining companies. This supply chain positioning leads the organization to span different institutional domains and face potentially conflicting pressures. Thus, we investigate if this actor is legitimated by both sides and if it acts as a principal or an agent in the promotion of ESG practices in the mining supply chain, with a particular reference to anti-modern slavery practices. Finally, we try to uncover, from an institutional point of view, if the presence of a hybrid organization in the mining supply chain facilitates the elimination of modern slavery practices, limiting the institutional deflection phenomenon envisioned by Crane (2013). Through a combination of literature review, desk research, and interviews, we seek to provide insights that can contribute to institutional and agency theory and that can support effective strategies to combat modern slavery and achieve the SDGs in Africa.

Methodology. The research employs a case study approach (Yin, 2014), mainly based on several interviews conducted with representatives of the focal social enterprise, working and living in different African countries. The interviews' evidence was complemented by collecting secondary information and integrating it with other interviews from other sources, i.e. mining industry experts who have directly worked in the sampled African countries.

We first conducted two desk research activities, one related to exploring the normative frameworks of the sampled African countries and the other related to the review of ESG challenges in the mining sector. The first desk research was mainly on grey literature, composed of governmental reports and laws, consulting firms' reports, outlooks, sustainability

reports and mining company websites. This search informs the study of the institutional context of the different case studies considered as part of our sample. The second desk research was structured as a literature review of contributions from scientific peer-reviewed journals. We included papers dealing with ESG issues and the mining context published until 31st dec 2023. We used keywords such as environmental, social and governance or corporate social responsibility and mining or extractive and challenge or issue. The outcomes of the review led us to map the relevant sustainability challenges under the mining context's three ESG pillars (Environmental, Social and Governance). The ESG dimensions inform the design of the protocol for the interviews conducted with the organization representatives and with the other experts.

After two desk research, we formulated an interview protocol for in-depth semi-structured interviews based on previous results. We then selected 15 experts in the African mining sector to validate the regulatory framework contexts and the ESG challenges detected. We selected the informants based on a shared database of partners and stakeholders of AfricaMaVal, a Horizon Europe project on Sustainable Mining. We then added a snow-balling technique to identify further informants, based on the first sample. The validation step allowed us to identify which were the crucial challenges on the ground, and the country specific ones. Moreover, we identified with a more precise degree causes and effects of the challenges. We went much further in respect to the indirect observation through desk research and this was essential to structure the interview protocol for the following phase.

Considering our focus, the fourth and last phase consisted in interviewing the social enterprise's components in the different sampled countries. The social enterprise selected has been currently pseudonymized because, due to their job, they have been several times subjected to threats and verbal attacks. The interviews protocol was based on the results of the previous three phases, with the specific goal to understand how they perceive and react to different institutional pressures and their role in pursuing the ESG challenges faced by the mining communities/workers, with a particular focus on modern slavery. The interviews are still ongoing, and they are supposed to end in May 2024. In addition, by interviewing the social enterprise's members, we also limited the social desirability bias (Bergen and Labonté, 2020). In fact, some practices of modern slavery can be at the border of illegality and, in any case, damage the company's reputation. Therefore, interview mining companies may face this risk. At the same time and for the same reasons, including possible threats, we decided to exclude miners because of their possible problems in administrating such practices and, also, considering the possible consequences on their jobs.

Table 1 presents the different steps of data collection.

Table 1: data collection phases

DC phase	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4
Method	Grey literature desk research	Literature review	Interviews with mining experts	Interviews
Objective	Explore the normative frameworks of the African countries under study	Map relevant ESG challenges in the mining sector	Validate the regulatory framework contexts and the ESG challenges detected	Explore the role of a social enterprise in contrasting modern slavery practices in mining supply chains
Data collected	Governmental reports and laws, consulting firms' reports, outlooks, sustainability reports and mining company websites	78 scientific papers	15 interviews	On-going

Results. As this research represents an on-going project, complete results still cannot be provided. Nevertheless, we expose some preliminary results. Phase 1 has targeted Democratic Republic of Congo, Gabon, Madagascar, Morocco, Mozambique, Namibia, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe. At the end of this phase, we obtained a clear pictures of mining policies in those countries. We primarily identified the social, economic, technological and environmental context of each country. Then, we review mining and mineral policies, taking care about gender issues, land-use and mineral rights, taxation and royalties, environmental and water issues, societal and community aspects, including artisanal and small-scale mining, tangible and intangible cultural heritage, and health and safety in mines. Phase 2 led to detect 270 ESG challenges, of which 85 were attributed to the environmental pillar, 117 to the social pillar and 68 to the governance one. The environmental pillar covers 8 dimensions (Air, Biodiversity, Energy, Land, Materials, Noise, Waste, Water). The social pillar has 3 dimensions (Indigenous People, Local Community, Workforce). The governance pillar has instead 5 dimensions (Business Ethics, Corporate Structure, Policies, Stakeholders, Supply Chain). All of the dimensions cover various sub-dimensions which are omitted here.

Combined results of phases 2 and 3 show that there is a great focus on challenges which happen at the local level, on all the three pillars. Environmental, social and governance issues detected jointly indicate that without poverty alleviation sustainability cannot be reached in the mining context: poverty is the cause of poor working conditions (i.e, both social and environmental) which, at the same time, foster a perpetuation of poverty, installing a vicious cycle. Our results show that poverty affects both social, environmental and governance dimensions. As a matter of fact, from the environmental point of view, poor working conditions lead to the use of cheap processing substances, i.e. mercury and cyanide, which are highly polluting for water and soil. From the social perspective, poverty sustains the existence of scarce employment

conditions among the mining workers: this ranges from artisanal miners which daily works without tools and protections, being exposed anytime to toxic substances, to the phenomenon of school dropout with kids following their parents in the working activities, perpetrating the same conditions generations over generations. Finally, regarding the governance pillar, poverty affects public policies implementation. The most serious and widespread issue is corruption which happens at all stages of the mining supply chain and normally regulates institutional relationships. Corruption leads to a difficult enforcement of policies, even where advanced legislative frameworks are present, as in the case of mostly all African countries. Our interviewed experts detected corruption is mainly led by poverty, as government officers see it as a normal and due compensation to compensate very poor salaries. Public policies implementation is also related to lack of public resources, again caused by poverty.

These results sustain our inquiry of modern slavery driven by poverty in the mining sector, its link with institutional factors, and the analysis of the role that the social enterprise under study may play in promoting anti-modern slavery practices. Further results will be available once the fourth phase, the round of interviews with the social enterprise, will be carried out and the impact of institutional pressures and agency effects on modern slavery in the mining sector in Africa will be clear.

Research limitations. Our research presents some limitations. First, our desk research has highlighted the poor available scientific outputs on the mining sector in the African context. This led us to the need of interviewing experts, which although carefully selected, expressed their opinions based on their personal experience, which could be biased in several ways. Moreover, in the fourth phase, the presence of safety threats impeded us to reach mining workers.

Managerial implications. Our paper presents interesting managerial implications both for interested scholars and practitioners. Addressing modern slavery in the supply chain is crucial for businesses and organizations to uphold human rights, promote social justice, and contribute to sustainable development on the continent.

Originality of the paper. The study of modern slavery inside the management literature lacks empirical contribution, thus we believe that our paper is an important step towards the development of modern slavery stances in the supply chain management literature. Moreover, to the best of our results, previous scholars have not yet delved in modern slavery with a combined institutional and agency theories' perspective, using the context of the mining sector in Africa.

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