



**LUMSA**  
UNIVERSITÀ

**SMS SPECIAL CONFERENCE CALL  
FOR PROPOSALS**

***THE STRATEGIC ROLE OF BUSINESS IN ADDRESSING  
UNSOLVED GRAND CHALLENGES: FIRMS, PLATFORMS AND  
ECOSYSTEMS***

**LUMSA Palermo, May 21-23, 2025**

**PROGRAM CHAIRS**

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Societal grand challenges represent multifaceted, intricate, and unsolved societal problems (Berrone, Gelarbert, Massa-Saluzzo & Rousseau, 2020) such as political instability, wars, social inclusion, poverty, climate change-induced natural disasters, and clean water scarcity (Kistruck & Shulist, 2021; Kistruck & Shantz, 2022). Despite unremitting technological, economic and social progress, we are facing unprecedented times as the world is overwhelmed by a set of grand challenges to society. As such, it is difficult to understand the dynamic evolution of these challenges and to foresee the consequences of present actions and future activities (Ferraro et al., 2016; George Merrill & Schillebeeckx, 2021).

As strategic management researchers and scholars, we cannot afford to be blind to this situation. Academic research has already started to devote attention to unsolved grand challenges that echo concerns about tackling societal, environmental, and economic crises (Berrone et al., 2016).

Although we understand that coordinated actions are necessary, we also need to increase the debate on the strategic role of businesses in responding to these grand challenges and in disentangling novel solutions (Ferraro et al., 2016). Especially important is examining how firms, platforms, and ecosystems can develop stakeholder-responsive initiatives to generate value, as well as identifying the tradeoffs involved in such initiatives. Specifically, how can firms, platforms and ecosystems, together with their managers, orchestrators and stakeholders, create joint value through crafting equitable decisions and solutions (George et al., 2021)? Addressing grand challenges inescapably requires scholars, managers, researchers, entrepreneurs, and orchestrators, to take a deep dive into novel approaches with fresh lenses and an interdisciplinary focus.

### **CONFERENCE THEME TRACKS**

#### **TRACK A: Business Solutions to Address Poverty Alleviation**

Track Co-Chairs: Jeff Harrison (University of Richmond) and Michelle Montague-Mfuni (University of Richmond)

This track aims to create a forum to discuss how business can address poverty. We invite scholars to explore how business goals impact the effectiveness of firms, platforms, and ecosystem initiatives to contribute in finding solutions for poverty alleviation. In addition, the track solicits contributions on how firm, platform, and ecosystem strategies can be better equipped to deal with significant societal challenges. A key argument of this track is that firms, platforms, and ecosystem resources and capabilities have an influence on society, when facing the trade-off between pursuing performance outcomes and collective goals. Therefore, it is of paramount interest to discern the mechanisms addressing resource allocation and capabilities deployment to tackle societal challenges. This track crosses several areas of interest for strategic management scholars spanning from identifying resources and capabilities for poverty alleviation, sustainable choices for poverty alleviation, social entrepreneurship for poverty alleviation, and collaboration strategies with governments, NGOs, and local communities to address complex poverty-related challenges.

#### **Key areas and guiding questions:**

- What CSR initiatives with firms, platforms, and ecosystems can be addressed to create both economic and social value, especially in poor areas or regions of the world?
- How firms, platforms, and ecosystems leverage digital technologies to provide access to financial services, education, and healthcare, especially in low-income markets?
- How can firms navigate and potentially fill institutional voids in developing economies to address poverty?
- How successful poverty alleviation initiatives developed by firms, platforms, and ecosystems can be scaled or replicated across different contexts?
- How firms, platforms and ecosystems can effectively collaborate with governments, NGOs, and local communities to address complex poverty-related challenges?
- How can social firms measure and scale their activities in order to address poverty alleviation more effectively and develop inclusive value chains that integrate low-income individuals as producers, employees, and distributors?
- What are CEO and TMT characteristics (political ideology, and religion, etc.) that make them well equipped to explain managerial propensity to engage firms, platforms, and ecosystem actions in tackling grand challenges that improve poverty alleviation?

#### **TRACK B: Business Solutions to Address Climate Change and the Environment**

Track Co-Chairs: Sharon Alvarez (University of Pittsburgh) and Sybille Sachs (University of Applied Sciences Zurich)

Climate change is related to more severe and frequent storms, droughts and water scarcity, broad fires, warming and acidification of oceans, rising sea-levels, biodiversity decline, and food shortages. These environmental issues related to climate change increase tensions and worsen geopolitical strains. This track aims to build a fertile discussion on the strategic role of business in addressing climate change and the environment at large. In this track, we invite submissions delving into the trade-offs between competitive advantage and environmental challenges.

**Key areas and guiding questions:**

- How customers react to the irresponsible practices of firms, platforms, and ecosystems that destroy value and, on the other hand, how can firms, platforms, and ecosystems restore their legitimacy after irresponsible practices?
- How do policy actions at global level (e.g., G7/G20, FAO, Paris Accord, COP gatherings) influence firm approaches to tackle societal grand challenges?
- What is the role of entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial education in fostering societal grand challenges related with the environment at large?
- How can firms, platforms, and ecosystems develop strategies that simultaneously address environmental concerns and poverty in the context of climate change that impacts vulnerable communities?
- How do MNCs anticipate and react to external sustainability pressures in and across countries?
- What is the role of MNCs in promoting sustainable practices?
- How do MNCs transfer sustainable practices from a national unit to another?

**TRACK C: Business Solutions for Tackling Issues Associated with Refugees and Migrants**

Track Chair: Exequiel (Zeke) Hernandez (University of Pennsylvania)

Associate Co-Chairs: Ashley Gomez (University of Pittsburgh) and Ileana Maldonado Bautista (Iowa State University)

Migrants are usually defined as people residing outside their home countries permanently or for an extended period of time. In our era of mobility, millions of people migrate each year for a variety of reasons. Voluntary migrants move away from their home countries for economic, family, educational, or other reasons. Involuntary migrants, such as refugees and asylees, are forced out of their home countries due to persecution or conflict. Regardless of motive, cross-border migration has deep implications for markets and societies. But scholars and policy makers interested tend to overlook the critical role of firms in creating and solving the grand challenges associated with migration.

This track invites scholars and researchers to submit proposals investigating how migration affects and is affected by firms. Migration is central to the management and performance of organizations for several reasons. Firms are the primary entities that hire workers and determine their mobility across borders—which requires building and managing diverse teams within and across locations. As such, firms are also the main context in which migrants assimilate and develop new identities. Migrants diffuse knowledge and foster innovation as they work for established organizations or start their own firms through entrepreneurship. And organizations strategically respond to the movement of people as they develop products, investment, and deploy resources in new markets created by ever-evolving migrant communities.

This track seeks to stimulate discussion on these and other themes to advance strategic management inquiry and to inform policy, to better address approaches to global migration challenges and opportunities.

**Key areas and guiding questions:**

- How is the performance of firms, platforms, and ecosystems affected by the movement of migrants across sending and receiving locations?
- What role do migrants play in organizational knowledge transfer, innovation, and entrepreneurship across borders?
- How can firms effectively integrate migrants into their workforce to address skill scarcity and promote diversity and inclusion?
- What corporate, global, and non-market strategies do firms deploy in response to changing migration patterns and policies?
- How do firms' international strategies—product, talent, supply chain, or non-market— influence cross-border migration flows?
- How do “external factors” like institutions, public opinion, and geopolitics affect the way firms, platforms, and ecosystems approach migration-related issues?

## **TRACK D: New Challenges Posed by Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Other Advanced Technologies**

Track Co-Chairs: Francesco Castellaneta (SKEMA Business School) and Anna Minà (University of Rome LUMSA)

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has rapidly taken center stage in today's technological innovation processes. Looked upon as a new factor of production, AI is able to provide intelligent automation and potential labor augmentation, thereby affecting how firms develop their businesses and achieve competitive advantage. Other advanced technologies in areas such as healthcare, pharmaceuticals, green energy, synthetic and bioengineered foods, advanced robotics and aerospace likewise have the potential to dramatically alter the way businesses operate and people live. This track aims to build a fertile discussion into the new grand challenges posed by AI and other advanced technologies. We invite scholars and researchers to submit proposals shedding light into the consequences of AI and other advanced technologies on humankind and the environment, as well as ways these consequences might be addressed so as to enhance productivity and increase the well-being of people around the world.

### **Key areas and guiding questions:**

- What influences is AI likely to have on poverty and how might firms, platforms, or ecosystems address these influences in a positive manner?
  - What influences are any number of other advanced technologies (i.e., health care, pharmaceuticals, green energy, synthetic and bioengineered foods, advanced robotics, aerospace) likely to have on poverty and how might firms, platforms, or ecosystems address these influences in a positive manner?
  - What influences is AI likely to have on the environment and sustainable practices, and how might firms, platforms, or ecosystems address these influences in a positive manner?
  - What influences are any number of other advanced technologies likely to have on the environment and sustainable practices, and how might firms, platforms, or ecosystems address these influences in a positive manner?
  - What influences is AI likely to have on the refugees and migrants and how might firms, platforms, or ecosystems address these influences in a positive manner?
  - What influences are any number of other advanced technologies likely to have on refugees and migrants and how might firms, platforms, or ecosystems address these influences in a positive manner?
  - What are other potential influences of AI and other advanced technologies on humankind, society, and business that go beyond those listed here, and how might they be addressed by firms, platforms, and/or ecosystems in ways that benefit humans and societies, generate sustainable profits, and protect the environment?

### **PROPOSAL SUBMISSION**

It is a hallmark that presentations made at SMS Conferences are on the cutting edge of research. Therefore, SMS invites proposals rather than finished, complete papers for the SMS Special Conference in Palermo. Interested authors should review [the submission guidelines](#) prior to preparing and submitting their research. The submission deadline for SMS Palermo is **January 15, 2025**.

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