

Business, Conflict, and Peace: A Systematic Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

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ABSTRACT There is growing recognition that business activity can promote peacebuilding, yet contradictory claims have emerged about company roles in peace and conflict. The research field of business and peace has focused on this issue, as have scholars in related fields like political science, economics, law, and ethics. This has led to definitional variations, alongside unit and level of analysis differences, which generate contradictory claims that hamper future research on this critical topic. To reconcile extant research around companies and their place in peacebuilding scholarship, we undertake an organizational-level examination of the field, cataloguing the research by scholars across disciplines through a systematic review of 215 publications. Our review maps the known ways by which businesses can engage in peacebuilding, while demonstrating how organizations exercise their agency to create heterogenous effects on peace and conflict. Our analysis highlights the need for businesses to advance peace-positive ends across a range of activities to reduce the conflict-causing effects of business. By showing that businesses, intentionally or not, create peace or conflict through their activities, this article issues a call to action for scholars and decision-makers to advance knowledge concerning peacebuilding organizations.

Keywords: business, conflict, corporate social responsibility, peace, responsible management

INTRODUCTION

Over the past 20 years, business and management scholarship has increasingly addressed questions about whether and how companies can contribute to ‘peacebuilding’ – which

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examines the role of businesses in transforming societies toward peace (Anderson, 2004). Such examinations are informed by research across a range of scholarly disciplines, all working within the field of ‘business and peace’ (also called ‘business for peace’ or ‘peace through commerce’). The largely practitioner-driven contributions to business and peace have created a rich, diverse body of knowledge. However, the different analytical and methodological approaches adopted by scholars have also created divergent claims, resulting in limited theoretical consensus about the role of business in conflict and peace (Melin, 2021).

Business and peace has provided both the ethical and business case for why organizations should engage in peacebuilding (e.g., Fort and Schipani, 2007; Nelson, 2000; Oetzel et al., 2010). Early contributions to the field laid important foundations by establishing links between peacebuilding and the economic development created by businesses. Unlike broader debates concerning the private sector, firm-level examinations have offered descriptive catalogues of how businesses exert their agency to address some, though not all, areas of business-based peacebuilding (e.g., Bray, 2009; Forrer, 2009; Fort and Schipani, 2007; Miklian et al., 2016; Oetzel et al., 2010). Such catalogues are aspirational in nature, detailing strategies for businesses to engage in peacebuilding if they choose to do so. However, they also overlook the potential conflict-causing role of business, falling short of providing comprehensive frameworks that explain business interactions in conflict settings, such that these catalogues have not gained broader consensus. Furthermore, scholars have criticized the foundational link between economic development and peacebuilding (Ganson et al., 2022a; Joseph and Van Buren III, 2022; Miller et al., 2019), while multiple views have emerged on what defines ‘peace’, with these discussions often failing to distinguish between an individual business and the private sector at large, using country-level data to draw organizational-level conclusions (Ford, 2015). As a result, the conceptualization of the organization’s role remains limited, leaving management scholars and practitioners with few tools to unpack how organizations impact conflict zones.

In response, we undertake a systematic review of extant scholarly research, focused on consolidating an understanding of how the organization affects peace and conflict. We begin by providing an overview of business and peace, which includes underlying assumptions that have emerged (Fort and Schipani, 2004, 2007; Gerson, 2001; Nelson, 2000; Oetzel et al., 2010; Williams, 2008), conflicting views, and key critiques and inconsistencies. We highlight the gap in conceptualizing the organization in peacebuilding and then detail our methodology. The method centres on the organization as the unit of analysis and examines how organizations exert their agency through intended peacebuilding activities and normal operations to effect peace and conflict, providing a systematic review of 215 interdisciplinary contributions. Drawing on business and management research, alongside a rich array of contributions from a variety of disciplines, this paper offers a consolidated view of how businesses can both engage in peacebuilding, while also advancing conflict.

In turn, we offer several scholarly advances. First, we clarify the role of business in peacebuilding, illustrating that firms, intentionally or not, are heterogeneous in that they can concurrently participate in promoting peace and conflict. Second, we decouple a broader private sector analysis of business and peace from our organizational-level analysis, narrowing the role of the organization. Third, we conceptualize the peace-positive organization as one that advances positive effects across the range of interactions it has

within a conflict environment. In summary, to address the societal challenge of conflict, we offer scholarly advances on business and peace while also providing research-supported recommendations to help organizations create peace-positive outcomes (Wickert et al., 2021).

THE CONTEXT: BUSINESS AND PEACEBUILDING

Businesses have long been said to play a role in peacebuilding (Brown, 1966; Perlmutter, 1969), however, research on the topic saw little progress until the beginning of the 21st century, when a small group of scholars began to advance the field of business and peace. Building on work by Nelson (2000), Fort and Schipani (2007) asked whether businesses should concern themselves with issues of peace; they emphatically answered in the affirmative. Their work, and the scholarship that followed, largely informed the peace-focus underpinning the formation of the UN Global Compact which has since become the world's largest voluntary sustainability initiative. This work marked the beginning of the business and peace field, which has laid the foundation for peacebuilding research in management studies. Unlike the broader examination of business in conflict which considers both the peace and conflict-causing elements of private sector activity, business and peace adopted an aspirational and strategically orientated thrust focused on the reasons and avenues by which businesses can engage peace-positive activities.

Business and peace research has claimed that, in addition to moral justifications, organizations have three reasons to be concerned about peace and its potential effects on it. First, the global interconnectedness of markets entangles many companies in global conflicts (Fort, 2007; Nelson, 2000). Second, violence inflicts major costs on companies: In 2023, those costs reached \$19.1 trillion, or roughly 13.5 per cent of the world's gross domestic product (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2024). Third, developing and conflict-affected countries represent growth opportunities for companies, yet countries that have experienced conflict in the previous decade suffer a 40 per cent risk of returning to violence (Collier et al., 2008), constituting opportunities and risks for business growth. Business and peace scholarship has therefore established a business case for peacebuilding, laying an essential foundation for scholars to explore the instrumental strategies by which businesses can enhance peace.

Citing empirical evidence from other fields, Fort and Schipani (2007) argued that ethical businesses can engage in peacebuilding in several ways. They asserted that four strategically orientated business activities – economic development, corporate political activity, building a sense of community, and promoting the rule of law – if conducted ethically, can promote peacebuilding. Williams (2008) and Oetzel et al. (2010) retained Fort and Schipani's (2007) assertions, and subsequent studies have embraced the same framework (Forrer and Katsos, 2015; Forrer et al., 2012; Joseph et al., 2023; Katsos, 2016, 2020). Although several alternative frameworks have emerged in other fields (e.g., Banfield et al., 2005; Ghimire and Upreti, 2012), these four strategically orientated assertions persist among business and management scholars.

However, these assertions have not been without critique. The first criticism is that ethical economic conduct might not be linked to peacebuilding, because economic benefits can be captured by elites (Ganson, 2019; Hermes and Lehto, 2021) and then distributed

in a way that enhances inequality (Ganson et al., 2022a). Another criticism is that the cited examples of track-two diplomacy (i.e., when businesses mediate between conflict groups) and corporate political activity to alleviate violence (Westermann-Behaylo et al., 2015) are relatively rare (Katsos and Alkafaji, 2019) and more often than not represent the efforts of extraordinary organizational leaders (e.g., Hayward and Magennis, 2014) rather than being a common element on the corporate agenda. Another criticism is that community development through corporate social responsibility (CSR) can disrupt local power and resource balances, creating community movements to assert minority rights (e.g., Hoelscher and Rustad, 2019), which, if left unaddressed, can lead to violent conflict (e.g., Abuya, 2016; Bezzola et al., 2022; Joseph et al., 2024). Finally, scholars have noted that few real-world examples exist of businesses advancing the rule of law as a means to enhance peace. Instead, more common cases cite actors; both local (Joseph et al., 2021; Katsos and Alkafaji, 2019) and multinational (Miklian, 2019), undermining the rule of law (Andreas, 2009).

Therefore, despite the progress made in foundational business and peace scholarship, the lack of data to support the existing assertions, which themselves overlook the potential conflict-causing role of business, stand as criticisms that are yet to be addressed. The assertions and the field more broadly remain aspirational, with a focus on explaining how varying business strategies can engage in peacebuilding (if they so choose), rather than theorizing the role of the organization in peace and conflict. Accordingly, the claims in business and peace have not gained widespread acceptance, while hosting conceptual weaknesses that undermine the field.

Challenges Facing Business and Peace

Although advances have been made in understanding how businesses can create peace, divergent research has led to broad and often conflicting claims about what role businesses can and should play in creating peace. Key differences in scholarship relate to definitions of core terms, disparate units of analysis, varying levels of analysis, and divergent claims about the impact of business on conflict zones and whether businesses promote peace, or undermine it.

First, disagreement exists over the definition of 'peace'. In empirical studies outside of management studies, 'peace' is usually defined negatively (Anderson, 2004) i.e., as the absence of violent conflict. However, negative peace is a limited concept because the risk of returning to violence remains high, whereas a positive definition of peace implies a transition toward increased stability at societal and communal levels (Anderson, 2004; Dunfee and Fort, 2003). This transition takes place through inclusive processes such as the advancement of democracy, poverty eradication, the reduction of inequality, transparent government, sustainable development, and strengthening the rule of law (Bull and Aguilar-Støen, 2019). Such processes, however, cannot be created by any one actor, and instead requires input from a combination of stakeholders including politicians, government, humanitarian actors, and businesses (Hermes and Mainela, 2014). Therefore, although a business (or group of businesses) may not be able to bring about peace, businesses can function as allies that make important peacebuilding contributions (Joseph et al., 2023; Oetzel et al., 2010).

Second, researchers often use varying units of analysis that define 'business' differently (Ford, 2015). That is, some scholars describe for-profit organizations (e.g., Katsos and

Alkafaji, 2019; Tobias et al., 2013), while others do not differentiate for-profit organizations from the broader private sector (e.g., Fort and Schipani, 2004; Melin, 2021). In this latter view, scholars draw conclusions about what organizations should (not) do by comparing the broadly construed private sector with other sectors, such as governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), or intergovernmental organizations (Ford, 2015). Adding to this complexity, organizations are never perfectly linear, so the operations of a subsidiary located in a conflict zone may differ from those of the corporate headquarters located elsewhere (Miklian, 2019). Due to the unit of analysis concerning 'business' being ambiguous, scholars naturally arrive at different conclusions, undermining a coherent view of the role of the organization in peace.

Third, business and peace scholarship also features varying levels of analysis, further compounding the complexity of the field. For example, to justify the micro- and meso-level peace-positive link to economic development (e.g., through job creation, foreign direct investment [FDI], shareholder value, and technology transfer) (Oetzel et al., 2010), core arguments have relied on country-level data that links economic growth in industrialized countries to reduced levels of violence (Fort and Schipani, 2004). Conversely, studies of intra-organizational factors (e.g., peace-positive human resource practices) have been used to draw implications for macro-level conflict dynamics and peaceful societies (Bishara and Schipani, 2009). Although some connections might exist between individual organizations and broader social processes, inconsistencies in analysing organizational influence produce additional contradictory claims about their role in peacebuilding.

This complexity has resulted in a range of views about whether businesses create peace, or undermine it, many of which are mutually exclusive. Berdal and Mousavizadeh (2010) describe two extremes: On the one side, market fundamentalists who view business as a positive force for peace rely on the 1989 Washington Consensus, which established a set of policies for fragile and conflict-affected economies centred on fiscal discipline, privatization, and open trade, guided by the International Monetary Fund and World Bank. On the other side, conflict scholars argue that business has no role (or a substantially circumscribed role) in peacebuilding and that the need for profit inherently drives, rather than mitigates conflict. Concurrently, business and peace research has angled toward an aspirational view, with the adjoining business and peace assertions describing what businesses *can* do but not what businesses *actually* do in conflict settings, omitting businesses' potential conflict-causing role.

In summary, there is little consensus on the role of business in peacebuilding. It is suggested that businesses that support peacebuilding need extraordinary willingness and talent (Miller et al., 2019); alternatively, some indicate that peacebuilding can be achieved through efforts that focus on alternative ends (Oetzel and Miklian, 2017). Beyond these debates, there is growing recognition that businesses will, intentionally or not, impact upon conflict and peace (Ganson et al., 2022a; Joseph et al., 2023, 2024). The existing conceptual development in business and peace scholarship has yet to identify these impacts or account for the range of interactions, both positive and negative, that businesses have with their environment. As Miklian and Medina Bickel (2020) point out, existing typologies cluster around broad effect categories, such as economic growth, which cut across other issues related to conflict and peace. As a result, the impact categories of

business and peace require further development, and conceptual work is needed to respond to both the criticisms and the complexities introduced by prior research.

Conceptual Basis for the Review

Considering these challenges, we undertook several steps to establish a theoretical position centred on the role of the organization in peacebuilding.

To conceptualize peace, we adopt Anderson's (2004) approach and focus on peacebuilding, as opposed to peacekeeping or peacemaking. A focus on peacebuilding enables us to analyse how businesses affect the transformation of society toward positive peace, rather than focusing on the termination of violence (peacemaking) or measures used to prevent renewed violence (peacekeeping). Although this distinction is only occasionally made explicit in research (Iff and Alluri, 2016), business and peace scholars frequently adopt a peacebuilding approach when describing business activities. A focus on peacebuilding allows for an examination of how individual organizations exert agency to make contributions to systems-oriented issues, these issues being the ones that make the role of business difficult to disentangle from broader societal concerns (Ganson, 2019; Ganson et al., 2022b).

Regarding the unit and level of analysis, we take an organizational-level approach, such that organizations and their members (e.g., leaders) are unique entities that serve as the unit of analysis. This perspective matches a growing trend in management studies which examine the organization and its effects on peace (Fajardo et al., 2019; Ganson et al., 2022a; Joseph and Van Buren III, 2022), rather than using broader definitions that blend organizations within the private sector (Melin, 2021). Because we focus on the organization and how it exerts agency, our analysis pertains to how individual businesses interact with the conflict environment in which they are embedded. This view recognizes that impacts on peace frequently occur within the organization's sphere of operations (Joseph et al., 2021; Katsos and Alkafaji, 2019; Miller et al., 2019), among networks and social relations (Ganson et al., 2022a), or through political CSR activities (Dunfee and Fort, 2003). Finally, our organizational-level perspective contrasts with the dominant business and peace framework, which identifies economic contributions on the basis of country-level correlations between economic development and peace (Forrer, 2009; Fort and Schipani, 2007; Katsos and Forrer, 2022), as well as with frameworks developed in narrow institutional contexts (Hayward and Magennis, 2014) or applied to limited organizational types such as multinational organizations (MNEs) (Hanekom and Luiz, 2017) or entrepreneurs (Joseph et al., 2023). Rather, we seek to establish a framework that applies to the various organizational forms that can operate in conflict settings.

Furthermore, our attempt to establish the known effects of business on peacebuilding differs from investigations of business intentions (e.g., Rettberg, 2016), which we consider in our study and is an important area of inquiry, but which does not properly address the actual effects that organizations have on conflict and peace. Notably, a business' intention to engage in peacebuilding can have the opposite effect in practice (Miklian et al., 2016). Accordingly, we focus on effects related to peace as distinct elements of businesses' social impact on society. To delineate how business affects peace, we consolidate (1) the array of effects that arise when organizations exercise their agency in a conflict environment, with (2) the adoption of conflict-sensitive processes, used as an operational approach to

reduce conflict risk and intensity, with (3) peacebuilding, which requires an active goal to promote peace (Ford, 2015; Miller et al., 2019). With this focus, we seek to consolidate the existing body of interdisciplinary research on how the activities of organizations affect peacebuilding, which is essential for creating a foundation for business and management scholars to engage in the field, and for organizations, managers, and employees to leverage in operational settings.

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

We review existing research insights into how business activity is linked to peacebuilding and examine the resulting organizational effects on peace and conflict. To bridge the disciplinary silos of business and peace, we pursue an integrative review (Kunisch et al., 2023) that can blend different conversations (Ethiraj et al., 2017; Post et al., 2020) and categorize areas of business engagement and their effects on peace by drawing on the diverse interdisciplinary contributions to the field (Booth et al., 2016). We adopt an approach inspired by Denyer and Tranfield (2009; see also Tranfield et al., 2003), which includes a five-stage sample selection process followed by a series of analytical steps, designed to promote procedural transparency and outcome reproducibility.

Review Scope, Boundaries, and Sample Selection

With a systematic, flexible, five-stage process, we undertook a structured and comprehensive sample selection process (Kunisch et al., 2023) focused on an organizational-level view of business and peacebuilding. First, we established conceptual boundaries for our review. To identify relevant sources from various disciplinary backgrounds, we defined relevant publications as focusing on the following elements: (1) the activities and behaviours of businesses (2) active in conflict-affected settings, and (3) intending to contribute to peace and/or to the considerate sustainment of their operations. Publications focused on businesses intentionally engaged in conflict-fuelling initiatives or active in warfare-oriented activities (e.g., armament, military activities) fall outside the boundaries of our study.

Second, we sought to balance academic rigour with item inclusion by conducting a broad search of the Web of Science (WoS) Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI); this is one of the most comprehensive databases of peer-reviewed journals and also the most selective (Singh et al., 2021). To acknowledge different terminologies across disciplines, we relied on a list of search terms with inclusive coverage, with the recognition that it would yield superfluous records. Our search of titles, abstracts, and keywords combined generic business-related terms (e.g., 'compan*', 'corporat*', 'business', 'commerce', 'private sector', 'entrepren*') with peace-related ones ('peace', 'war', 'conflict'). We did not restrict our search to a certain time period. This search resulted in an initial list of 15,115 records, as of April 2023.

Third, we applied several inclusion and exclusion criteria. Specifically, we limited our search to academic articles and excluded any articles not in English. With a manual check of titles and abstracts of the remaining 13,716 records, we removed articles that were outside the review scope. This involved excluding topics such as family firm succession, labour conflicts, trade wars, destructive entrepreneurship, how trade and FDI

at the macro-level foster peace or conflict, or how conflicts or peace affect business performance and development, as well as theoretical studies that account for conceptual considerations across different fields but do not refer to organizational-level dynamics. This stage reduced our pool of articles to 123.

Fourth, we relied on Google Scholar to conduct a backward-forward search to evaluate the references used in our initial body of records to identify items that were frequently cited, but not yet included in our sample (Hanelt et al., 2022). The 12 relevant articles we identified through this search process that were published in an SSCI-indexed journal were included in our sample. We also selected thematically relevant articles published before 2019 in journals indexed in the more inclusive WoS Emerging Sources Citation Index (ESCI) and/or in Scopus. If these supplementary articles earned at least 15 citations in Google Scholar, we included them in our sample, such that we focused on relatively impactful articles. To acknowledge citation biases and time lags, we also included all recent (since 2019) articles published in the ESCI- or Scopus-indexed journals with fewer than 15 citations (see Hanelt et al., 2022). These processes left us with a total of 135 articles published in SSCI-indexed journals and 45 supplementary articles published in ESCI- and/or Scopus-indexed journals that met our citation criteria. The backward-forward process revealed 14 articles published in academic journals not indexed by WoS or Scopus, such as specialized, active, peace-centred academic journals (e.g., *Peace and Change*), as well as journals that had published influential articles in the field (e.g., *Vanderbilt Journal of Transnational Law*). We required these articles to have earned at least 15 citations in Google Scholar to be included. The total number of academic articles in our sample at this stage was 194.

Fifth, to avoid the risk of missing influential, academically grounded practice- or policy-oriented reports, we incorporated nine such contributions with 15 or more citations in Google Scholar (e.g., Nelson, 2000). Through discussion with two experts active in business and peace research, we also identified 12 books that contributed to orienting the field (e.g., Fort and Schipani, 2004; Ganson and Wennmann, 2016) or that had been recently published (e.g., Melin, 2021). The literature review, drawing on interdisciplinary research with an integrative and classifying purpose, thus includes 215 sources, published between 1997 and 2023.

Coding and Analytical Process

To identify concepts and arguments we used inductive analysis based on the grounded theory-inspired approach which is often applied to assess interview data in qualitative research (Gioia et al., 2013). In the open coding phase, two authors engaged with all the retained sources to generate an initial set of preliminary, text-based codes, focused on the effects of business on peace. The coding focused on peace- (or conflict-) related content, omitting more generally discussed activities. In some cases, two codes would be applied when a business activity affected multiple peace-related areas, and if any classification inconsistencies arose, a third author would contribute, which ultimately produced full agreement (Salvi et al., 2023). This iterative process generated a list of more than 45 first-level codes; the most prominent of which are illustrated in Figure 1. The first-level codes were grouped into 22 thematic categories (second-level codes) in an axial coding phase,

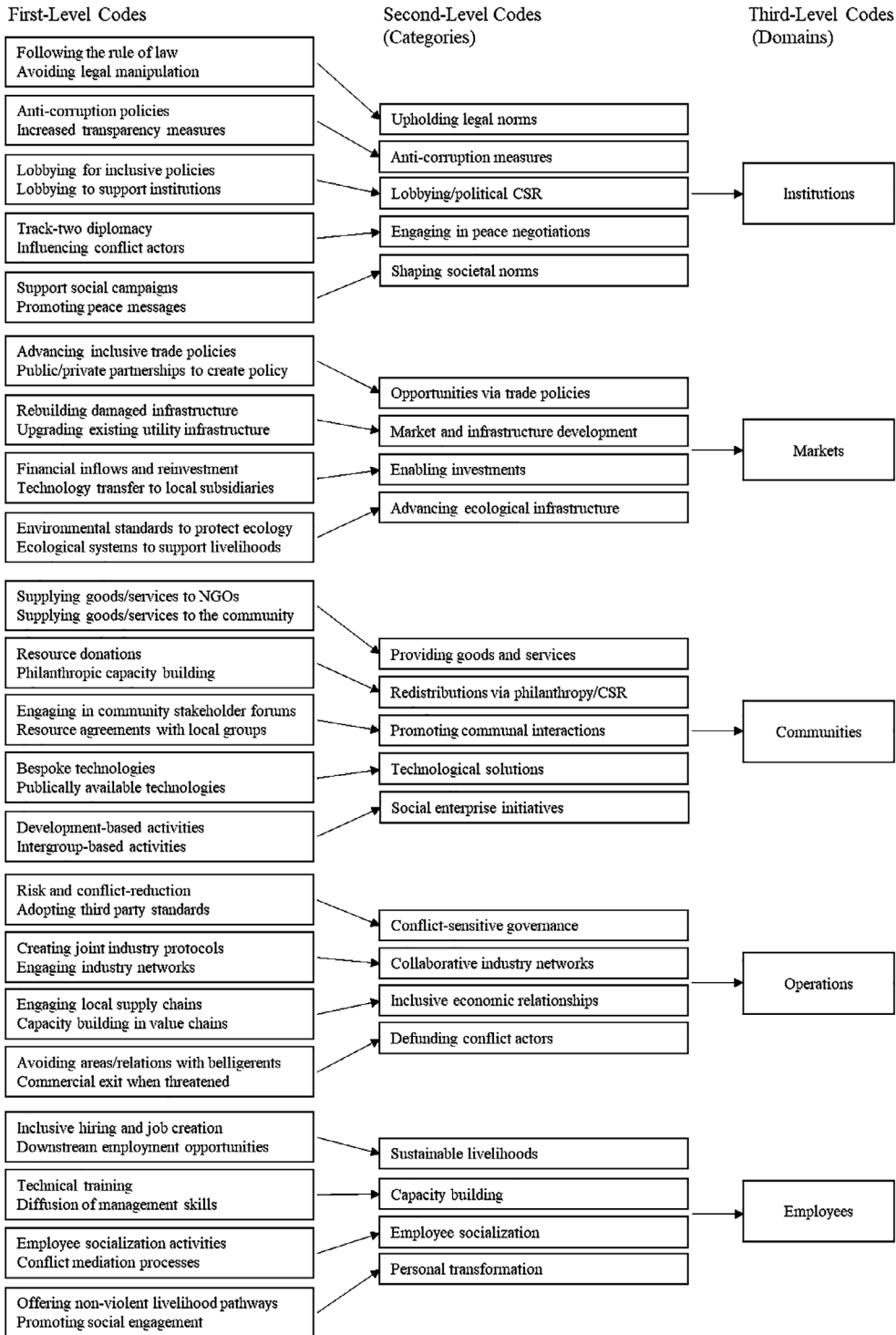


Figure 1. Catalogue of business peacebuilding

during which time the authors shifted back and forth among texts, existing concepts, and emerging theory.

As a final step, the 22 categories were grouped and archived as meta-concepts under five aggregated domains of activity by which businesses interact with a conflict environment: institutions, markets, communities, operations, and employees. These domains represent points at which the organization (firm-level) interacts with varying individuals, groups, and systems. Grouping articles into these domains provides four key benefits. First, it represents the spectrum of engagement possibilities between the organization and peace/conflict. Second, it facilitates our firm-level approach to cataloguing peacebuilding activities from an organizational view. Third, it provides scholars with a more complete view of how organizations engage in conflict settings (see existing assertions) sourced from a range of interdisciplinary contributions. Fourth, it offers a visual framework for practitioners who seek to integrate peacebuilding into their business agenda.

Article Characteristics

As Table I describes, nearly two-thirds (64.7 per cent) of the publications refer to one or several regional contexts; among these publications, sub-Saharan Africa (23.3 per cent) drew the most attention, followed by articles focused on Latin America (9.3 per cent), Asia and the Pacific (6.0 per cent), the Middle East and North Africa (5.1 per cent), and Europe (4.2 per cent). In addition, a notable proportion of articles discuss multiple regions (15.3 per cent).

For each publication in the sample, we compiled journal-related subject categories, as listed in the Scimago Journal & Country Rank (SJR). Table II details the assigned subjects. For the few journals that did not receive topic assignments from SJR, we assigned the subject categories according to thematically similar journals that are noted in the SJR. As Table II illustrates, the field draws on a broad range of interdisciplinary research, which is central to understanding the persistent debates that have emerged (Vergne and Wry, 2014).

Table I. Regional context of the sample publications ($N=215$)

<i>Region</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage [%]</i>
Sub-Saharan Africa	50	23.3
Latin America	20	9.3
Asia Pacific	13	6.0
Middle East & North Africa	11	5.1
Europe	9	4.2
North America	3	1.4
Multiple	33	15.3
None	76	35.3
Total	215	100.0

Table II. Subject categories of peer-reviewed publications ($N=194$)^{a,b}

<i>Journal topics where relevant studies appear at least twice</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage [%]</i>
Business and International Management	75	38.7
Political Science and International Relations	60	30.9
Law	50	25.8
Business, Management and Accounting (miscellaneous)	46	23.7
Sociology and Political Science	45	23.2
Economics and Econometrics	35	18.0
Development	27	13.9
Arts and Humanities (miscellaneous)	26	13.4
Strategy and Management	20	10.3
Marketing	20	10.3
Geography, Planning and Development	17	8.8
Social Sciences (miscellaneous)	13	6.7
Safety Research	10	5.2
(Environmental) Management, Monitoring, Policy and Law	9	4.6
Management of Technology and Innovation	9	4.6
Industrial Relations	5	2.6
History	4	2.1
Environmental Science (miscellaneous)	4	2.1
Economics, Econometrics and Finance (miscellaneous)	4	2.1
Renewable Energy, Sustainability and the Environment	4	2.1
Organizational Behaviour and Human Resource Management	3	1.5
Philosophy	3	1.5
Education	2	1.0
Economic Geology	2	1.0
Applied Psychology	2	1.0
Others	13	6.7

^aMost peer-reviewed journals are listed by Scimago Journal & Country Rank (SJR) in more than one subject.

^bFor the eight journals included in our study that were not ranked in the SJR, we assigned subject categories based on those associated with thematically similar journals included in the SJR. This represents 14 articles out of 194.

The contributions mainly pertain to two subject categories: ‘business and international management’ (38.7 per cent) and ‘political science and international relations’ (30.9 per cent). These categories reflect the two streams of thought that have primarily underpinned the field (Hauffer, 2015). However, we also note a substantial number of contributions from ‘law’ (25.8 per cent), ‘business, management and accounting’ (23.7 per cent), ‘sociology and political science’ (23.2 per cent), ‘economics and econometrics’ (18 per cent), ‘development’ (13.9 per cent) and ‘arts and humanities’ (13.4 per cent). Five further fields (‘strategy and management’, ‘marketing’, ‘geography-planning-development’, ‘social sciences’, and ‘safety research’) contribute to over 5 per cent of the sample. Therefore, although the field

is led by two categories, contributions originate from a broad range of disciplines, reflecting the complexity that surrounds the examination of business and peace.

FINDINGS

We present the findings in two sections. First, we outline the codes, categories, and aggregated domains identified by our review, which reveal the range of peace-positive activities that businesses engage in. Our categories and domains represent an expansion of the existing business for peace assertions, consolidating the known links between business and peace. We then describe how these activities can be exerted both positively and negatively, which, can either promote peace or drive conflict. A focus on the conflict-causing elements of business broadens the aspirational boundaries of business and peace, better depicting the real-world role that business plays in conflict settings.

Business and Peace Categories

From our sample of interdisciplinary research, we identified first-level codes of how businesses affect peace, which we grouped into 22 second-level codes (i.e., categories) and then aggregated these into five domains of business activity (Figure 1). The domains reflect the intersections between an organization and its environment. We opted for this approach purposefully, with the recognition that the known business and peace categories are not fixed but can expand with new research under each domain. In the following section, we focus on the peace-positive effects that are generated from these interactions, then we describe how such interactions can also be enacted negatively to drive conflict.

Domain 1: Institutions. Businesses interact with institutions, and these interactions can either promote inclusion and economic equality or undermine it. Advancing inclusive institutions is central to peacebuilding (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2012; Austin and Wennmann, 2017), and although it is unlikely that any single organization can fundamentally change an institutional system, firms can contribute to moving institutions toward peace-promoting (or conflict-causing) patterns. This can be done by advancing (or undermining) legal norms.

The rule of law is notably weak in conflict-affected regions (Bray, 2009), but businesses can institute legal norms through several avenues. In particular, they can uphold the rule of law themselves, with legal compliance playing an important role in peacebuilding (Forrer, 2009; Forrer et al., 2012). Incentives can be present for following the rule of law, which can promote economic benefits for companies (Fort and Schipani, 2002), especially for those who can gain additional financial opportunities from legal compliance (Joseph et al., 2021). Businesses can promote the rule of law by adopting internal standards that maintain legal norms, which is not just based on internal compliance but can also include respecting the property rights and contract rights of stakeholders (Fort, 2007). Due to the weakness of institutions in conflict zones, and norms that undermine the rule of law, often firms are required to be adaptive to uphold the rule of law (Dunfee and Fort, 2003), which can be helped when constellations of businesses commit to these ends.

Furthermore, legal compliance is not always ethical, so some companies selectively dodge legal mandates to avoid being manipulated, extorted, or drawn into unethical

acts. As cited by Banfield et al. (2005), MNEs are often required by law to contract their security management to the government, which in turn can be used to violate rights and strengthen repressive regimes, all of which give rise to grievances in the local community. Accordingly, some businesses selectively choose to avoid legal structures to maintain their integrity with common examples including businesses who choose not to formalize from fear that this would incite perdition from civil servants or avoid government-based financial arrangements for the same reason (Katsos and Alkafaji, 2019). For example, in South Africa during apartheid, the Consultative Business Movement (CBM) formed to create an independent power base sufficient for them to flaunt apartheid laws forbidding contact with the African National Congress (ANC), which the CBM used to engage in negotiations to promote the end of discriminatory policies (Ganson, 2019).

Similarly, businesses can adopt distinct anti-corruption policies and increased transparency measures to fight against corruption. Violence and corruption are intimately connected (Fort, 2007), and without anti-corruption policies, companies can become complicit in undermining institutions and promoting violations by making such transfers. Furthermore, companies can implement enhanced transparency measures that undermine internal corruption. When organizations promote transparent practices, they build confidence among stakeholders in the local community, which can avoid creating the resentment that larger companies often face when they operate in conflict zones (Williams and Steriu, 2022). As a general good governance practice (Dunfee and Fort, 2003; Fort, 2007), transparency is inherently linked to peacebuilding (Fort and Schipani, 2002). It is thus both advocated for as a positive organizational characteristic and as a beneficial norm across various industries (Bezzola et al., 2022).

In addition to anti-corruption measures, businesses can use their influence through lobbying and political CSR to advance inclusive institutions (Rettberg, 2007). As various scholarly contributions outline, this activity occurs when businesses and their representatives exert power to influence decision-makers, whether they be political actors or other organizations, toward inclusive policies and practices that benefit those living in conflict-affected regions. Businesses can direct their efforts toward a variety of peace-positive ends. This can include promoting inclusive policies, including the protection of business rights (Alger, 2007), supporting state institutions (Forrer and Fort, 2016), policies to reduce poverty (Boyle and Boguslaw, 2007), or advancing legislative frameworks (Westermann-Behaylo et al., 2015).

Businesses can also use their influence to engage in peace negotiations, through track-two diplomacy or direct engagement with conflict actors. Track-two diplomacy refers to businesses' mediating role between conflict actors (Fort and Schipani, 2007; Ganson, 2014; Ghimire and Upreti, 2012; Rettberg, 2007), where they use their influence to create forums for conflict actors to resolve disputes (Austin and Wennmann, 2017). Such efforts can be led by extraordinary organizational leaders (Iff and Alluri, 2016) or by business consortiums that facilitate mediation (Oetzel and Getz, 2012). Although such activities usually are reserved for large, influential businesses, small businesses can also play a role in helping to resolve local conflicts (Musa and Horst, 2019). Additionally, businesses can use their influence to negotiate with conflict actors themselves and move them toward peaceful outcomes. Businesses and their leaders can lobby belligerents (Getz and Oetzel, 2009), which can include influencing government actors and politicians

(Golan-Nadir and Cohen, 2017), but also others, such as informal authorities (Miller et al., 2019), while also participating in negotiations to devise formal peace agreements (Gündüz et al., 2006).

Finally, businesses can exert their influence to shape societal norms, through communications that promote peace and social cohesion. Following the 2016 Colombian Peace Accords, businesses promoted products and undertook marketing campaigns that celebrated peace (Melin, 2021). Other avenues include supporting civic and democratic movements (Gallo et al., 2023), promoting peace narratives (Vekasi, 2017), or educating customers about how to support companies that advance inclusive business practices (Kolk and Lenfant, 2016). Although such activities do not directly result in conflict reduction or peace, they can shape societal norms toward peaceful ends, acting as a 'voice of peace' that provides legitimacy for peace-oriented initiatives (Ben-Porat, 2005).

Domain 2: Markets. Businesses can engage in activities that enable and strengthen market ecosystems and thereby promote a series of economic effects that undermine the drivers of conflict. Although market systems involve a multitude of actors, housed within broader institutional frameworks, at a firm-level businesses can engage in activities that enhance (or undermine) market system development, which has relevant implications for peace and conflict.

To these ends, companies can advance trade policies among countries and regions that promote economic interdependence between groups in conflict, which can then encourage the economic inclusion of previously marginalized groups (Abramov, 2009; Golan-Nadir and Cohen, 2017; Hayward and Magennis, 2014). Although less frequently cited in prior literature, this effort has the potential to generate sizable economic impacts if the trade policies are directed toward economic inclusion between the various groups in conflict. Businesses can undertake major market and infrastructure development projects, which include rebuilding efforts after conflict or infrastructure projects that support national development (Gündüz et al., 2006). Other types of investments can also be made to enable economic development for those in conflict settings. These enabling investments can be broad in scope; they might take the form of FDI that supports growth (Forrer and Katsos, 2015), reinvested profits in the local economy (Aaron and Patrick, 2013), or transfers of technologies to local subsidiaries (Katsos, 2020), all of which create financial opportunity in existing economic ecosystems. Finally, maintaining environmental integrity is essential to protecting livelihood systems in conflict settings (McKenna, 2016), and companies can promote market-based environmental processes to meet these ends (Banks, 2016; Jenkins, 2004).

Domain 3: Communities. Businesses interact with communities, which include stakeholders who can be directly or indirectly affected by their presence in a conflict zone. Communities are affected by conflict, but they also contribute to conflict. In turn, business activities might alleviate (or enflame) the processes that underpin conflict, depending on how its operations and voluntary activities intersect with community groups.

To alleviate the effects of conflict on communities, businesses can supply essential goods and services as part of their normal operations. Although not frequently discussed, this role is particularly important if such provisions address the immediate livelihood needs of

citizens and prevent the escalation of poverty and violence (Alger, 2007; Martin, 2012). The private sector can fill essential supply gaps by selling essential goods (e.g., food, and medicine) and providing services such as money transfers or transportation (Musa and Horst, 2019). Businesses can also work in partnership with governments to supply essential goods and services to the poor (Boyle and Boguslaw, 2007), or to supply the UN and other humanitarian agencies that offer humanitarian relief (Gerson, 2001). The peace-positive effects of such actions accrue if services are equally available to all social groups, rather than excluding segments of the population from accessing such provisions (e.g., due to cost) (Marijnen and Schouten, 2019).

In addition to products and services, businesses can engage in wealth and resource (re) distributions, often delivered through philanthropy or CSR programs designed to reduce poverty by addressing economic inequality. CSR activity is common among businesses and frequently cited in the literature, which can give companies a social licence to operate, while also reducing conflict risk (Bezzola et al., 2022). The documented forms of redistribution are diverse, spanning essential services (e.g., clean water, health care, blood banks, and schools) (Dresse et al., 2021), educational opportunities (Gallo et al., 2023), humanitarian donations (Ghimire and Upreti, 2012), and donations to other NGO-led causes (Gerson, 2001). This support is more effective when provided in consultation with communities to ensure that their needs are met (Aaron and Patrick, 2013; Hayhurst and Szto, 2016; Hoelscher and Rustad, 2019). Philanthropic capability transfers and training can also enhance community livelihoods, in that sharing key business or industry-related skills can equip individuals and groups to develop alternative profit-making tools that they did not have access to previously (Ledbetter, 2016). Such efforts can be enhanced by partnerships with NGOs to deliver this support effectively (Kolk and Lenfant, 2012).

Businesses can also engage in direct relationship building among the community, through activities that promote interaction, which improves intergroup cohesion. Prior research frequently cites businesses' role in promoting communal interactions, outlined through two main ways: by creating/engaging in community stakeholder forums and by entering into resource-based agreements with local communities. A key part of this process involves managing resource distributions, which companies can design strategically to limit conflict-drivers by ensuring that the distributions do not lead to disadvantage or discrimination. To engage in this type of activity, businesses need to mobilize resources (Banfield et al., 2005) in the form of deploying relational capabilities that are used to build trust within communities to facilitate mutually accepted resource agreements.

Alternatively, businesses can provide technologies that enable actors to address the humanitarian and societal challenges associated with conflict (Alger, 2007). These technologies can be critical for delivering humanitarian relief (Cheung et al., 2019), while also supporting social processes associated with peacebuilding. Such capabilities are often provided by foreign companies in the form of either bespoke technological solutions created and transferred to actors engaged in peace-related activities (e.g., providing technical solutions for local companies) (Roberts, 2010), alternatively, actors embedded in conflict zones can utilize existing technologies that are open to the public for peace-positive activities (e.g., social media platforms) (Cheung et al., 2019).

Finally, social enterprises play an important role in conducting activities that link to peacebuilding. Whether they take the form of entrepreneurial non-profits that

seek financial sustainability or social businesses that aim to encourage commercial growth (Cheung et al., 2019), both attempt to address social problems, often focused on development-based issues associated with conflict. Although many studies cite Grameen Bank, which provides loans for base-of-the-pyramid borrowers (Boyle and Boguslaw, 2007), the scope of development-based activities by social enterprises is broad, spanning employment for marginalized groups, education access, capacity building, and a range of social services (Cheung et al., 2019). Furthermore, social enterprises can promote intergroup relations (Friedman and Desivilya, 2010) by deploying applications and programmes that challenge beliefs and breakdown divisions between previously warring groups (Miklian and Hoelscher, 2018), which plays a direct role in promoting social cohesion in conflict scenarios.

Domain 4: Operations. A frequently discussed issue in the literature and common practice among businesses is the adoption of conflict-sensitive governance practices that can protect organizations from the effects of conflict and reduce a company's conflict footprint.

Companies adopt measures that shield them from the effects of conflict, for example, through performing planning and risk assessments (Ganson, 2014; Jamali and Mirshak, 2010; Westermann-Behaylo et al., 2015). These processes can be combined with a range of measures, such as best practice benchmarking (Hanekom and Luiz, 2017; Jenkins, 2004), regular monitoring and feedback (Slim, 2012), and reporting (Ralph and Hancock, 2018). Such efforts protect the organization from conflict, while also reducing its potential complicity or unintended missteps that enhance conflict. An important theme in advancing conflict-sensitive governance is the adoption of third-party standards (Getz and Oetzel, 2009; Miklian et al., 2016; Ralph and Hancock, 2018; Tripathi, 2005), which take several forms including multilateral agreements (e.g., the UN Global Compact), industry-based standards (e.g., the Kimberley Process) and fair-trade certifications (Levy and Hawkins, 2009). Whereas industry-based standards offer more specific guidance for businesses and have featured as a central theme in governance research (Forrer and Katsos, 2015; Haufler, 2009; Oetzel and Getz, 2012), companies also can join regional programmes, such as companies in Colombia signing the Voluntary Principles for Security and Human Rights (Tripathi, 2005). Therefore, companies can reduce the risk to themselves and lower their impact on conflict by adopting conflict-sensitive business practices, which are most effective when combined with organizational objectives that include peacebuilding (Ledbetter, 2016).

To advance governance practices, industry sectors also benefit from companies that can be a resource for diffusing governance norms among other market actors (Abramov, 2009). Such diffusion can be facilitated through collaborative industry networks that promote responsible practices and social cohesion through common trade and development protocols (Bray, 2009; Gündüz et al., 2006). These networks can enhance local standardization and the adoption of advanced practices by local partners (Getz and Oetzel, 2009; Melin, 2021), whether through public-private partnerships (Abramov, 2009), cooperatives (Kolk and Lenfant, 2016), or engagements with national and international donors (Miklian and Medina Bickel, 2020). Such networks offer the

potential to bring about industry-wide reform, with notable positive impacts for local conflict-affected populations.

Furthermore, business operations involve a series of stakeholders engaged in profit-generating activities, through which businesses can develop inclusive economic relationships that alleviate inequality and promote intergroup cohesion (Ghimire and Upreti, 2012; Joseph and Van Buren III, 2022). Ganson et al. (2022a) discuss how the structuring of stakeholder relationships and the distribution of wealth based on inclusive economic relationships can undermine horizontal inequalities in society. This entails the need to exclude conflict actors from business operations (Andreas, 2009; Ganson, 2019), as doing so defunds those who actively contribute to conflict and broader human rights violations. Businesses operating in conflict zones can come under the influence of violent actors and groups, and to defund these actors, businesses can either withdraw operations from areas that would expose them to this influence or refuse to enter into financial engagements with actors known for such activity (Dunfee and Fort, 2003).

Domain 5: Employees. Finally, businesses have direct impacts on and through their employees. Employment practices can bring together different social groups while helping to alleviate poverty, thereby promoting equality and stability.

Businesses can create sustainable livelihoods through inclusive hiring and job creation, which are featured as central topics in prior literature. Job creation, as the most common result of business activity, likely has a peace-positive effect (Forrer and Fort, 2016; Oetzel et al., 2010), though not all jobs lead to beneficial outcomes. Here, peace-positive jobs promote sustainable livelihoods and create revenue streams that reduce poverty, because they provide fair wages and good working conditions (Slim, 2012). Also central to sustainable livelihoods are the rights and protections offered to employees (Banks, 2016), such as ensuring a more democratic workplace (Forrer and Fort, 2016), gender equality, protection from harassment (Oetzel et al., 2010), anti-discrimination policies (Katsos and Alkafaji, 2019), and general labour rights (Melin, 2021).

Businesses can also develop the capacity of their existing staff, providing economic opportunities that lead to greater economic inclusion. When businesses engage in capacity building they diffuse knowledge (Nilsson, 2023), business capabilities (Franco et al., 2018; Ghimire and Upreti, 2012), and technical training (Martin, 2012). These diffusions enable employees to generate livelihoods beyond their immediate employment, which increases the prospects for poverty reduction and counteracts the resentment that some communities feel if local populations lack such opportunities (Franco et al., 2018).

Employment in conflict zones can also bring together members of social groups that have been in conflict. When members of warring groups are employed by the same organization, employee socialization processes can be used to promote cohesion, while conflict mediation practices can be deployed to manage inter-organizational conflict. To promote employee socialization, businesses can create a peaceable environment (Reade, 2015), using tactics such as team building (Katsos and Alkafaji, 2019), to promote intergroup cohesion among employees who belong to different social groups (Kolk and Lenfant, 2016). Furthermore, conflict resolution and conflict avoidance processes can be adopted (Reade and Lee, 2012), which purposefully and proactively engage and resolve tensions among social groups as they arise (Siedel, 2007).

The combination of these processes can have transformative impacts on individuals. Personal transformation refers to the psychological effect of business on actors who previously engaged in conflict, or who maintain intergroup biases. Entrepreneurship, for example, can effectively reintegrate previously violent actors back into society (Gündüz et al., 2006) and build shared identities among members of groups that were previously in conflict (Tobias et al., 2013). Such transformations not only disincentivize violence and provide avenues to reconciliation but also commit actors to livelihood building which helps to reduce poverty.

Positive Versus Negative Effects

Across the categories identified in our review (Figure 1), we find that businesses demonstrated the ability to create both *positive* and *negative* effects. That is, while some business activities reduce conflict and promote peace, others undermine peaceful societies and make them more violent. Business and peace scholars frequently cite positive effects alongside negative ones, with businesses hosting a greater ability to affect employees, while having varying levels of influence across all other domains (Figure 2). Important to note is that even though organizations can exert their agency to promote effects in one domain, they still might create secondary effects in another. For example, when an organization adopts third-party standards they can generate several secondary effects, such as increased transparency, and improved adoption of the rule of law (e.g., Forrer and Katsos, 2015; Fort and Schipani, 2003, 2007). From our sample of interdisciplinary research (Figure 2) the concentration of effects favoured some domains (e.g., communities and operations) over others (e.g., markets); similarly, some domain effects (e.g., businesses' positive effects on communities) are well researched while others (e.g., businesses' positive effects on employees) remain relatively unexplored.

In our review, some sources focused almost exclusively on the negative effects of businesses (e.g., Abuya, 2016; Gamu and Dauvergne, 2018), and others the positive (e.g., Banks, 2016; Strong, 2009), but more frequently, publications described companies that generate both effects concurrently (e.g., Miklian, 2019; Musa and Horst, 2019). In such cases, a business would generate positive effects, for example, by deploying a CSR program, while at the same time conducting operations that cause negative effects (e.g., enflaming resource disputes through environmental damage) (Gamu and Dauvergne, 2018; Hanekom and Luiz, 2017; Hoelscher and Rustad, 2019; Miklian, 2019). This point reflects the central tension of peace and conflict for organizations and explains the distribution of positive and negative effects that were observed across each domain (Figure 2). Accordingly, recent scholarship has moved away from casting business as either inherently good or bad for peace; rather, stating that business activities inevitably influence peace and conflict irrespective of each business' intentions (Gallo et al., 2023; Ganson et al., 2022a; Joseph and Van Buren III, 2022), showing how businesses create heterogeneous effects across the domains in which they interact.

When examining the negative effects created by businesses, although some are more frequently cited than others (e.g., the negative effects of business operations) (Figure 2), a key observation is that negative effects occur for a variety of different reasons. They can be unintended effects of initiatives that set out to do good, such as stakeholder engagement activities that unintentionally favour one identity group over another (Banfield

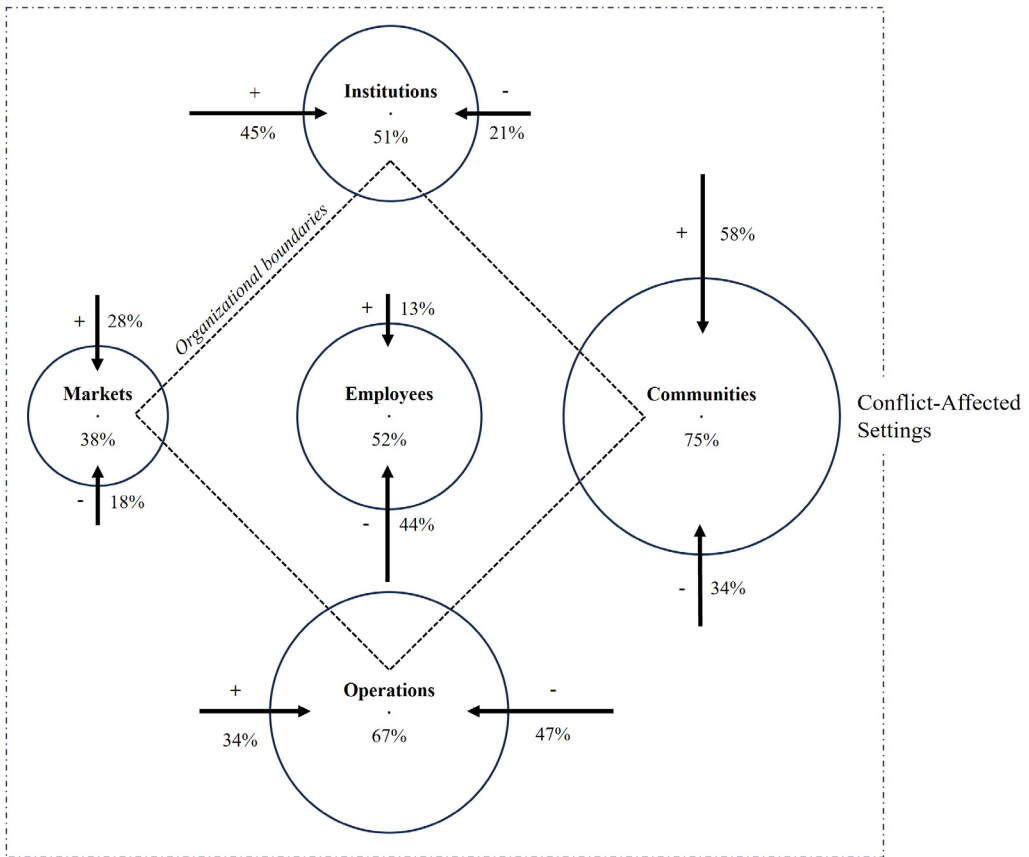


Figure 2. Literature distribution of business effects on peace and conflict across domains. [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

^aDiameters of circles are proportional to the percentage of articles that cite each domain (% noted in each circle). ^bArrow lengths are proportional to the percentage of articles registering a code for positive (peacebuilding) and negative (conflict-causing) effects (% noted on each arrow).

et al., 2005; Ganson et al., 2022a), or examples where companies provide services that unintentionally exclude one social group (Hoelscher and Rustad, 2019). Negative effects can also reflect activities that are engaged in to continue or advance operations; such as making transfers to violent regimes in order to continue operations (Boele et al., 2001; Penh, 2009), or paying bribes to warlords to have access to their areas of control (Miklian, 2019). Engaging in this activity may not constitute an intentional attempt to inflame conflict or subvert institutions, but rather is a necessary action to maintain operational functions (Banfield et al., 2005), which some argue is unavoidable when operating in conflict zones (Hanekom and Luiz, 2017). Either way, the review demonstrated the relative ease with which business operations, often unintentionally, can undermine peace, and the multiple reasons and ways in which this can occur (Table III).

Irrespective of the reasons or actions that constitute negative effects, these examples illustrate how the profit-motive of businesses can be at odds with peace. Although many argue that negative effects are often unavoidable and necessary to continue operations,

the institutional voids in conflict zones can also incentivize the predatory pursuit of profit that has a more direct impact on conflict and peace. This can include small businesses engaging in labour exploitation (Joseph et al., 2021; Joseph and Van Buren III, 2022), or large businesses influencing regulations and policies to favour their operations and exclude others (Ganson and M'cleod, 2019). These activities undermine economic opportunity in different areas, which can create financial winners and losers and therefore drive conflict. Additionally, companies can either fail to support, or obstruct peace agreements, sometimes due to their fear of reprisals (Cohen and Ben-Porat, 2008), but more often because peace is not in their economic interest (Iff and Alluri, 2016; Sattorova, 2023). This not only applies to businesses refusing to engage in peace negotiations (Bull and Aguilar-Støen, 2019), but also to elites who lobby against state-level reforms aimed at undermining the economic root causes of conflict (Musa and Horst, 2019). With the profit-motive often at odds with peace, a key lesson emerges for policymakers: They must ensure that firms, especially those linked to political elites, have seats at the negotiating table and are engaged in promoting (rather than undermining) progressive change.

Concerning the positive effects created by businesses, we find two themes that span across the peace-positive behaviours found in the review (Table III). First, commercial activities must be inclusive, at an intergroup level, to lead to positive effects. Activities, whether operational or voluntary, are inclusive when all sides of a dispute are involved, which can promote social cohesion between groups – or at a minimum, avoid inflaming existing divisions (Ganson, 2014; Ganson et al., 2022a; Joseph et al., 2021; Kolk and Lenfant, 2015; Shultz, 2022). In addition, companies often take on roles in conflict zones that states would normally occupy (Alger, 2007; Forrer and Fort, 2016; Wennmann, 2012). This state-like role should be transferred back to governments over time, such as through public-private partnerships, capacity building, good governance, and support of positive norms. Companies cannot substitute for the state indefinitely, even if they can support it in the short run. Management scholars may argue that companies can and should improve governance gaps (Westermann-Behaylo et al., 2015), but such arguments need to account for the sizable variation in conflict settings, as well as the deep historical and political complexities involved in such work (Ford, 2015).

In other cases, businesses do not seek to generate either positive or negative effects but instead try to take a neutral position. Examples include generating economic value in a do-no-harm manner (Jamali and Mirshak, 2010) or maintaining norms that neither add to nor detract from peace (Miller et al., 2019). Similarly, companies assume that adopting Western-based 'ethical' norms enables them to occupy a neutral position and, potentially, bring about positive effects (Fort, 2007, 2016). Many businesses approach conflict settings in this manner, but this approach typically maintains the status quo, which by default, means upholding either a virtuous or vicious cycle which more frequently is vicious in conflict settings (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2012; Ganson, 2023; Iff and Alluri, 2016). Maintaining a neutral stance can also be the most difficult path for a company to take. For example, pursuing free trade and government regulation (McDonald, 2004) can easily transform into the monopolization of state functions (Ganson and M'cleod, 2019). Similarly, companies might take an anti-corruption stance when working with conflict actors, but it is a difficult position to hold, and eventually, companies likely find themselves engaged in corrupt or negative activities (Andreas, 2009; Federman, 2021).

Table III. Examples of positive and negative effects

<i>Domain</i>	<i>Categories</i>	<i>Examples of positive and negative effects</i>
Institutions	Upholding legal norms	+ Internal policies that promote legal compliance – SMEs avoiding formalization and undermining the law
	Anti-corruption measures	+ Anti-bribery policies that undermine corruption – The payment of tariffs to belligerents which fuels violence
	Lobbying/political CSR	+ Lobbying for inclusive economic policies that reduce poverty – Lobbying against labour protections which promotes inequality
	Engaging in peace negotiations	+ Acting as mediators to resolve conflict – Not supporting peace processes by refusing peace-dialogue
	Shaping societal norms	+ Legitimizing peace processes through marketing campaigns – MNEs engaging local partners that perpetuate discrimination
Markets	Opportunities via trade policies	+ Advancing trade policies that include all social groups – Excluding others by advancing protective trade policies
	Market and infrastructure	+ Creating infrastructure that enables development – Providing services for staff, excluding the community
	Enabling investments	+ FDI generating trickledown revenue for the community – Monopolization of a resource creating local dependence
	Advancing ecological infrastructure	+ Adopting policies that relieve resource tensions – Environmental degradation undermining livelihoods
Communities	Providing goods and services	+ Open-access services that enable livelihoods – Selling goods that some cannot access, promoting inequality
	Philanthropy/CSR	+ Funding social services to promote development – CSR unintentionally inflaming local resource disputes
	Promoting communal interactions	+ Promoting inter-communal dialogue and cohesion – Collaborating with one identity group, excluding others
	Technological solutions	+ Providing tech-solutions that solve humanitarian issues – Creating technologies that are exploited by conflict actors
	Social enterprise initiatives	+ Business models that finance the poor, reducing poverty – Social ventures being manipulated by exclusionary actors
Operations	Conflict-sensitive governance	+ Adopting industry standards that protect local communities – Ignoring conflict risks and unintentionally exacerbating conflict
	Collaborative industry networks	+ Networks advancing codes that eliminate exploitation – Rejecting industry forums that undermine conflict drivers
	Inclusive economic relationships	+ Distributing profits along the supply chain to reduce poverty – Working with elites who strengthen economic inequality
	Defunding conflict actors	+ Defunding belligerents through commercial exit – Operational continuance that implicitly supports conflict actors

(Continues)

Table III. (Continued)

<i>Domain</i>	<i>Categories</i>	<i>Examples of positive and negative effects</i>
Employees	Sustainable livelihoods	+ Creating jobs with employment rights to promote livelihoods – Indirectly promoting forced labour through subsidiaries
	Capacity building	+ Training local staff to promote livelihoods – MNEs undermining local capacity by relying on foreign experts
	Employee socialization	+ Intergroup team building which promotes cohesion – Not mediating conflicts when they arise, cementing tensions
	Personal transformation	+ Employment that reduces the motivation to return to violence – Conflict-zone entrepreneurs adopting harmful norms

Managerial decision-making focused only on normal operations can increase conflict risk (Ganson et al., 2022a), and business-as-usual typically falls short of achieving peacebuilding (Oetzel and Miklian, 2017). Even if it is more difficult, advancing peace-positive approaches can help companies avoid slipping into an unintentional state in which they exert negative effects.

DISCUSSION

Through this review, we draw on interdisciplinary research in business and peace to posit an organizational-level perspective of how businesses exert their agency to engage in peacebuilding. This process is important for conceptualizing the role of business in peace and conflict, which also provides a conceptual grounding for continued scholarly and practice-based efforts (Wickert et al., 2021). The effects that businesses can have on peacebuilding can be grouped under five domains (institutions, markets, communities, operations, and employees). These domains illustrate the intersections between the business and its environment, to which businesses can exert both positive and negative effects. Businesses, therefore, can have heterogeneous effects on peace, such that businesses can facilitate peace in one area while creating conflict in other areas. These heterogeneous, concurrent effects mean that organizations must undertake comprehensive examinations of their peace or conflict impacts, which include reviewing operational processes, voluntary efforts, political processes, and the activities undertaken by industry partners. By mapping these organizational-level effects with supporting examples, we offer a basis for real-world business assessments beyond the aspirational business and peace assertions, providing opportunities for business and management scholars to engage more deeply with the organizing dynamics surrounding business and peace.

Theoretical Implications

More than 10 years have passed since the foundational scholars of business and peace established the influential arguments and assertions that underpin the field today (Fort and

Schipani, 2004, 2007; Gerson, 2001; Nelson, 2000; Oetzel et al., 2010; Williams, 2008). In line with scholarship at the time, scholars claimed that responsible economic activity could foster peace, while providing a set of strategically orientated assertions that could promote peacebuilding (Fort and Schipani, 2004; Nelson, 2000; Strong, 2009). Since then, the economic link to peace has been questioned, the assertions remain largely aspirational, and business and peace research continues to focus predominantly on MNE activity, prompting criticisms of both the assertions and the field's foundational claims (Ganson et al., 2022a; Joseph et al., 2021). At the same time, business and peace research has attracted contributions from diverse academic fields, each hosting distinct methodological and analytical approaches. The inevitable result – definitional variations, unit and level of analysis inconsistencies, conflicting claims, and ideological camps, all of which have limited theoretical advancement in the field. Noting how business and peace has expanded and integrated studies that address a range of geographic, organizational, and conflict dynamics, we draw on a diverse set of interdisciplinary contributions that illustrate a shift toward representing the heterogeneous effects of business in conflict, rather than just positive ones.

To clarify the association between business, conflict, and peace, we determine that businesses are, largely by default, heterogeneous actors that impress upon both peace and conflict. In contrast with established views in the political sciences and international relations literature that dismiss the influence of business on peacebuilding (Berdal and Mousavizadeh, 2010), we leverage extant research to illustrate the important role that companies play; which can be positive, negative, or both. Because organizations are embedded in existing conflict dynamics, intentionally or not, they exert effects, which are neither intrinsically positive nor negative (Miller et al., 2019). Through their normal operations, businesses affect both peace and conflict (Ganson et al., 2022a), but maintaining the status quo cannot alleviate violence (Oetzel and Miklian, 2017) – despite continued efforts by scholars in the business and human rights arena to advocate for such an approach (Lundsgaard, 2014). Rather, pushing for peace-promoting practices is likely more challenging for organizations but also necessary to create positive effects, meaning that the focus of business and peace scholars should be on identifying the factors that advance the peace-positive elements of business while eliminating those factors that cause conflict.

Furthermore, our analysis decouples an organizational-level view of business and peace from broader private sector debates, which can help to address ideological differences that have emerged in the field. We argue that an organizational-level view of business peacebuilding should not be confused with a broader private sector analysis in conflict settings, because drawing organizational-level implications from macro-level observations is methodologically problematic and leads to misdirected conclusions for organizations and actors – such as by miscasting businesses as fundamentally good or bad. Arguments surrounding the greed versus grievance debate, resource curse (Haufler, 2015), and neo-liberal peacebuilding agenda (Gündüz et al., 2006) have arguably influenced scholars and country-level private sector initiatives (Barbara, 2006) in ways that could be unhelpful to advancing organizational-level peacebuilding. Decoupling such examinations from a tailored, organizational-level view is vital to progressing peace research in management studies, whose focus should be on applying management theory to understand the

peace-positive interactions of organizations in their relevant contexts. Some progress has been made in this area, including applications to CSR (Jamali and Mirshak, 2010), international business (Williams and Steriu, 2022), human resource management (Bishara and Schipani, 2009; Reade, 2015), entrepreneurship (Joseph et al., 2021, 2023), and international business (Oetzel and Getz, 2012). However, this development remains limited, and our review aims to provide a balanced perspective of the organization in peacebuilding, while also offering an appropriate framework for action that can be used by decision-makers operating in conflict zones.

Finally, an organizational-level view advances our understanding of what constitutes a peace-positive organization. Unlike the business and peace assertions, which identify four strategically orientated themes that link business to peacebuilding (e.g., Fort and Schipani, 2007; Oetzel et al., 2010), we drew on interdisciplinary contributions to cite 22 categories under 5 domains that account for a broad range of stakeholder interactions. Furthermore, while business and peace has remained aspirational – reflecting only positive activities, our framework illustrates that across our categories and domains businesses generate heterogeneous effects; this, in turn, moves the focus away from celebrating instances of peace-positive behaviour, toward looking for ways to amend the inherent negative aspects of business. This is because a peace-positive organization must concurrently advance positive effects across the full range of its stakeholder engagements (institutions, markets, communities, operations, and employees) to avoid the pitfalls of encouraging peacebuilding in one area while creating conflict in another. Our framework contradicts the idea that economic development alone advances peace (Fort and Schipani, 2007; Oetzel et al., 2010) and instead recognizes that these interactions occur within an embedded system of actors that also includes non-commercial dynamics that require engagement. Therefore, for organizations to be peace-positive, they must participate across their sphere of influence, and not only deploy positive practices but also reform the areas of their business that cause conflict. With this framework, we go beyond polarized views of business as inherently good or bad for peace; business can be both, depending on the effects that each business creates.

Limitations and Future Research

Our review consolidates the interdisciplinary contributions made to business and peace, which have been strategically oriented toward understanding how business activities link to peacebuilding. Through our review, the thrust of the field has been pivoted toward an organizational-level perspective that depicts businesses as heterogeneous actors, while providing rigour and definitional nuance to sustain peace research through various applications and settings. However, the boundaries of our review are confined to the narrow field of business and peace, which hosts several limitations that overlook important areas of research.

Concerning the limitations of our review, although we offer a platform for management scholars to engage business and peace research, we do so without driving theoretical advances in a mainstream management discipline. This omission presents a range of opportunities to advance peace research in management fields that have seen ad-hoc contributions that run in parallel to business and peace. Second, while our review

outlines the activities and heterogeneous effects of business-based peacebuilding, it does not consider the formalization of peace-positive orientations into governance practices, highlighting the need to examine how peace is measured, monitored, and reported within organizations. Finally, our conceptual positioning at the organizational-level establishes central claims concerning the business and its connection to peace and conflict, yet, we overlook how varying conflict systems affect business-based peacebuilding, with research in this area representing an important extension of our organizational-level work. These limitations, in addition to several broader omissions in prior scholarship, illustrate several pressing needs for future research in business and peace.

Future Research Agenda

The limitations of the current review, combined with the pressing need to advance peace research in management studies, generate a future research agenda based on three broad areas; management theory, governance practices, and systems analysis (Table IV).

The development of management theory in peace research has stalled since the initial conception of business and peace was formed (e.g., Oetzel et al., 2010). While business and peace scholars have largely reproduced the original assertions alongside descriptive case studies, management scholars have made piecemeal contributions to specific topic areas, which, without a critical mass of scholarship in any one area, fails to drive theory forward. As interest in peace and conflict grows, management scholars have the opportunity to make important contributions; either to business and peace, or across a range of management fields, to advance the phenomenological basis of peace research (Hanell et al., 2022). To this end, we cite several fields in management studies that require the urgent attention of scholars, while identifying interesting lines of theoretical development that this review does not address.

First, there is an immediate need to integrate peace concerns into CSR and the broader business and society discussion. Prior studies acknowledge that conflict-sensitive practices should be aligned with CSR approaches (e.g., Miklian and Medina Bickel, 2020; Oetzel et al., 2010; Rettberg, 2016), and although our review discusses conflict-sensitive CSR initiatives, it falls short in building a comprehensive framework in this area. The topic is particularly important because of the counterintuitive evidence that has emerged from conflict zones. There is a notable body of research indicating that CSR programs deployed by MNEs and large businesses in conflict zones can unintentionally drive conflict (e.g., Aaron and Patrick, 2013; Abuya, 2016), while alternatively, small businesses appear to forgo typical CSR approaches, instead adopting relationally-centred activities (Gallo et al., 2023; Joseph et al., 2023). In this area of work, several promising research avenues focus on the role of partnerships in developing CSR programs (Kolk and Lenfant, 2016), applications of stakeholder theory (Ganson et al., 2022a), developing anti-exploitation frameworks (Nilsson, 2023), and blended models that include conflict-considerations and broader social factors (e.g., Jamali and Mirshak, 2010). However, these contributions have run in parallel to one another, with work needed to consolidate these studies which can guide businesses' CSR activities.

Similar work is needed concerning international businesses entering and operating in conflict zones. This line of inquiry has been led by research in the broader conflict

Table IV. Potential avenues for future research

<i>Research areas</i>	<i>Avenues of inquiry</i>	<i>Exploratory research questions</i>
Management theory	Expand the phenomenology of business and peace by using established management theory to broaden the frames of peacebuilding, while deepening the rigour of established constructs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What factors define conflict-sensitive CSR? • What are the ethical, governance, and diplomatic responsibilities of international businesses that enter conflict zones? • What are the organizing processes that support peace?
Governance practices	Conceptual and applied research across interdisciplinary boundaries to establish governance practices surrounding the management of peace and conflict in direct operations and extended supply chains	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can governance and management frameworks integrate peacebuilding? • How and why does conflict-complicity extend through supply chains? • What is the role of organizational, industry, and national-level frameworks in the governance processes surrounding peace?
Systems analysis	Systems research that explores how macro-level dynamics impact the conditions, boundaries, or limits of business-based peacebuilding in conflict zones	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the factors that condition business-based peacebuilding? • What is the interplay and/or hierarchy of conditional factors? • Is business-based peacebuilding incompatible with certain conflict systems?

studies field, which frequently reports the negative effects of MNEs operating in conflict zones (e.g., Gamu and Dauvergne, 2018; Hoelscher and Rustad, 2019). In management studies, there have been efforts to apply business and peace to international business (Getz and Oetzel, 2009; Oetzel and Getz, 2012), with research also linking international business and peace with factors such as inequality (Hermes and Lehto, 2021) and social investments (Williams and Steriu, 2022). Our review adds to this work by compiling a series of prescriptive strategies that apply to international businesses, however, theoretical development that informs the scope and responsibilities surrounding these applications remains unaddressed. In conflict zones, frameworks that delineate the responsibilities of MNEs versus the state are of particular interest (e.g., Hanekom and Luiz, 2017), alongside research that calls for international businesses to take on greater governance roles (e.g., Forrer, 2009), or engage corporate diplomacy responsibilities that they might not do in other settings (Westermann-Behaylo et al., 2015). How international businesses respond to repressive and violent actors is also important, with institutional theory detailing how organizations navigate violent oppression (Martí and Fernández, 2013), authoritarian regimes (Xiao and Klarin, 2021), and corrupted authorities (Stevens and Newenham-Kahindi, 2021), which is a common challenge for organizations operating in conflict zones. Each of these areas of research has received intermittent attention, with work needed to consolidate and advance this important area of inquiry.

Finally, there is also a need to understand the organizational behaviours that support peace, which broadly address the psychological and sociological dynamics that underpin peace-positive business interactions. Research from a range of management fields; including entrepreneurship (e.g., Tobias et al., 2013), human resource management (e.g.,

Reade, 2015), and organizational behaviour (e.g., Kolk and Lenfant, 2016), point to the centrality of creating organizing conditions that promote intergroup cohesion. The target of this activity is the psychological transformation of individuals who belong to socially divided groups, and the sociological dynamics of organizing that support this outcome. To understand the organizing processes that support peace, different frames have been used; including hybrid organizing (Kolk and Lenfant, 2016) and intergroup (or contact) theory applications (Halevy et al., 2020; Joseph and Van Buren III, 2022; Tobias et al., 2013). Theoretical development in this area is of particular importance, and well suited to the organizational-level thrust of management studies.

In addition to making advances in management theory, research on the governance practices of conflict zone businesses forms an important area of future research. Peace rarely features in governance agendas, with the formalization of conflict-sensitive practices into organizational processes being of critical importance. Our review frequently cited how conflict-sensitive practices impress upon communities and operations (Figure 2), yet, a lack of consensus on the content of such practices was noted. This research avenue is of the utmost concern for practitioners operating in conflict zones, as governance practices are central to addressing the heterogeneous nature of business effects cited in our review. Business and human rights literature shows promise in this area (e.g., Katsos, 2020), though the field remains focused on eliminating illegal practices rather than addressing the essential developmental needs that support peace. Research on industry-specific governance processes (Haufler, 2009) and supply chain assessments (Ralph and Hancock, 2018) offer much promise, with sustained interdisciplinary scholarship between governance and peace experts needed in this area.

Finally, systems analysis research presents a unique line of inquiry that can extend the organizational-level conclusions drawn from our review. Research on conflict systems uses macro-level processes as the unit of analysis, theorizing an organization's peace and conflict effects based on a network of interconnected processes that underpin conflict (Cechvala and Ganson, 2024; Luiz et al., 2019). Existing business and peace research, and our review, are oriented toward studying the organization in conflict systems that are characterized by moderate to high-intensity violence. Less attention is given to conflict systems that waiver between interstate war and sustainable peace (Forrer and Katsos, 2015), and research rarely compares how different conflict systems impact business-based peacebuilding. The lack of representation and comparison between conflict systems, alongside the detachment of organizational research from broader macro-level processes, can inadvertently foster polarized views that undermine consensus. Such topics are typically reserved for political science scholars who specialize in conflict; however, conflict systems are directly connected to organizational processes, and will remain an important factor for management studies in peace.

Concluding Remarks

Advancing business and peace research has never been more important. In 2024, we experienced the 12th deterioration in global peace in the past 16 years (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2024), which increases pressure on companies to respond. The objectives underlying this research may become a cornerstone of business research in the

21st century, but comprehensive and conscious effort still is required to move conflict-sensitive practices into the mainstream business and society debate, to examine the increasingly important role of companies in peacebuilding. Companies might never hold a place in society that enables them to bring about peace on their own, but peace is also unlikely without their support. Businesses, therefore, are key allies in the pursuit of a peaceful world.

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