

Editorial: Essay Frontiers – a new section in the *International Journal of Logistics Management* (IJLM)

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1. Introduction

While there is a long tradition of essays in business management and related fields (Spender, 2007; Suddaby, 2019), in logistics and supply chain management (SCM) research, there remains considerable potential to expand publication opportunities for essay-style works that provide authors with greater freedom to develop innovative ideas emerging from non-traditional research processes (Maruchek et al., 2011; Sodhi and Tang, 2021).

Essays are often undervalued, even though they are proven to be powerful tools of communication in supporting critical thinking, questioning the values and stimulating meaningful conversations. “Essays should be valued because they allow us, flexibly and variously, to be analytic, autobiographical, connective, descriptive, dialogic, interpretative, meditative, reflective, and speculative according to our critical purposes” (Badley, 2010, p. 103).

We announce the creation of a new initiative in *The International Journal of Logistics Management* (IJLM) by this editorial, titled *Essay Frontiers*, dedicated to publishing intellectually bold, forward-looking essays that push the boundaries of logistics and supply chain thoughts. An initial special section will be designed to position IJLM as not only a leading outlet for empirical rigour but also as a central hub for conceptual innovation and thought leadership. Following a special section, we aim to publish one essay per published regular issue of IJLM. With this perspective, scholars can engage with the more profound philosophical, ethical and strategic questions that shape our field.

The title *Essay Frontiers* reflects both the pioneering spirit of the IJLM and its authors and readers and the need to transcend conventional academic formats. For instance, in the first volume published by IJLM in 1990, the opening paper, *Logistics: Perspectives for the 1990s*, Vol. 1 No. 1, pp. 1–6 was already showing this dedication to pushing the boundaries of the field (LaLonde and Masters, 1990). This was followed up by an editorial celebrating the 30th anniversary of the journal, which called for challenging conventional knowledge with critical thinking as one of the finest virtues of academia (Gammelgaard, 2019). As the field confronts global challenges, such as technological transformations, geopolitical shifts, climate crises and ethical dilemmas (Fritz, 2022a; Roscoe et al., 2022; Fosso Wamba et al., 2024; Cichosz et al., 2025), it urgently requires an intellectual space for critical reflection, normative theorisation and conceptual provocation (e.g. Fritz, 2022b).

2. What the special section and following essays seek to explore

Suggestion: Instead of reiterating established empirical patterns, the special section will invite critical reflections on the emerging challenges that are often overlooked in conventional conversations about logistics and SCM. By embracing paradoxes, value-laden tensions and interdisciplinary linkages with domains such as artificial intelligence (AI), behavioural science, ethics, innovation and policy, it seeks to provoke dialogue that transcends disciplinary boundaries. In this vein, we highlight examples that this section, *Essay Frontiers*, will offer:

- (1) Critical reflections on emerging logistics and SCM challenges that remain underexplored by traditional empirical approaches;
- (2) Provocative thought pieces that engage with grand challenges, paradoxes or value-laden tensions in supply chains;



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- (3) Interdisciplinary connections linking logistics with fields such as AI, behavioural science, ethics, innovation and policy;

(4) Conceptual pathways for shaping research and practice in dynamic, uncertain environments and

(5) Multiple perspectives to reflect the variety of stakeholders and how they impact or are impacted by contemporary issues.

While *IJLM* currently offers a *Viewpoint* article type, defined as “content based on the author’s opinion or interpretation, often in a journalistic or magazine style”, *Essay Frontiers* would be fundamentally different in purpose, format and scholarly ambition. [Table 1](#) highlights the primary characteristics of the *IJLM Viewpoint* and *Essay Frontiers*. The addition of essays within the editorial architecture of top-tier journals signals not only the rearrangement of a new genre but also a reorientation in scholarly ambition – one that demands a different mode of thought and writing ([Delbridge et al., 2016](#)).

As shown in [Table 1](#), this section is distinct from the well-established *Viewpoint*, not merely in style or length but in the weight it carries in shaping intellectual movements. Whereas *Viewpoints* often serve as interventions that are responsive – that is, opinion-driven, interpretive and topical – *Essay Frontiers* are guided by a philosophical disposition: they seek not to echo, but to inaugurate; not to react, but to reposition.

Here, the expectation is not just light editorial reflection but the creation of conceptual artefacts grounded in scholarly lineage, philosophical clarity and theoretical resonance. Essays in this space do not orbit around relevance; they project futures, redraw epistemic boundaries and call forth new vocabularies and conversations. They require not only erudition but also rhythm (the thoughtful pacing, flow and stylistic coherence of the argument) and not only argument but also architectural coherence. In this sense, *Essay Frontiers* opens an avenue for those scholars whose work is motivated by a different urgency, one that does not chase questions but builds the conditions under which new ones can emerge.

3. Positioning *Essay Frontiers*: a platform for theoretical provocation and intellectual reorientation

[Table 2](#) offers a refined framework for understanding the editorial ethos and intellectual aspirations behind a proposed *Essay Frontiers* section in *IJLM*. Instead of functioning as a generic submission category, *Essay Frontiers* emerges as a curated space for conceptual exploration, inviting contributions that press against the boundaries of accepted theory and disciplinary orthodoxy.

Table 1. Viewpoint compared to *Essay Frontiers*

Criteria	Viewpoint	Essay Frontiers
Nature of contribution	Opinion-driven, interpretive and reflective	Normative, philosophical, conceptual and boundary-expanding
Style	Journalistic, interpretive and possibly informal	Essayistic, scholarly, often lyrical or argumentative
Objective	Commentary reacts to issues	Theorisation, problematisation and horizon-scanning
Scholarly weight	Light editorial or topical	Deep conceptual, philosophical or paradigmatic exploration
Anchoring	Topical reflection or opinion	Situated in academic literature, logic or philosophical insight
Outcome	Raises questions and interprets practice	Sets agendas, maps uncharted territory and redefines thinking
Length	–	3,000–5,000 words

Table 2. Key core characteristics of *Essay Frontiers* (IJLM)

Dimension	Essay Frontiers
Core purpose	Push conceptual and philosophical boundaries; foster critical reflection and normative theorisation
Tone and style	Scholarly yet reflective, philosophical or provocative, a personal voice may be used
Content orientation	Conceptual, speculative or paradigm-shifting essays
Anchoring in research	It may draw on theory but is not dependent on data; it is focused on ideas, values or theoretical frontiers
Audience	Academics seeking to rethink or reshape the intellectual terrain of logistics and supply chains; practitioners seeking new perspectives to understand or explain changes in logistics and SCM
Objective	Inspire theorisation, provoke debate, spotlight overlooked questions and reframe assumptions
Empirical component	Not required; essays may be abstract, philosophical or reflective
Contribution type	Normative theorisation, conceptual provocation and agenda-setting for future theory
Submission format	Proposal (max 250 words) → Full essay (3,000–5,000 words)
Review process	Evaluated for originality, conceptual depth and reflective value by theorists or essay specialists
Strategic value	Positions <i>IJLM</i> as a hub for intellectual leadership, conceptual debate and future-oriented theory

The table refines this orientation into 11 dimensions, revealing the philosophical core of the initiative and providing clarity to prospective authors on the expectations that distinguish this format from more conventional scholarly outputs. The presence of such a structured articulation reinforces the journal's commitment to positioning itself as a catalyst for normative and speculative theorisation in logistics and SCM research.

At the heart of *Essay Frontiers* resides a commitment to conceptual ambition and philosophical range. The core purpose is not empirical generalisation but the advancement of thoughts through normative theorising, critical reflection and speculative insight. Tone and style are deliberately open to reflective or even provocative voices, allowing for a degree of personal positioning within a scholarly frame. Essays are encouraged to be paradigm-shifting in content, anchored in logic or values rather than traditional datasets.

The audience for *Essay Frontiers* comprises both academics and practitioners who are committed to rethinking entrenched assumptions within logistics and supply chains, especially those drawn to conceptual exploration and its integration with real-world phenomena. This inclusive posture reflects the journal's commitment to broadening the contours of theorisation by welcoming insights grounded in experience, reflection and critical inquiry.

In particular, the absence of a required empirical component signals a departure from methodological rigidity, privileging instead intellectual boldness and theoretical clarity. Submissions proceed through a two-step process, beginning with a proposal, after which, if it is accepted, authors are invited to develop a full essay. Both proposals and full essays are evaluated for originality, depth and reflective value. In sum, *Essay Frontiers* serves not as an outlet for incremental insight but as a crucible for future-facing theory, cross-boundary dialogue and intellectual repositioning.

4. Evaluation and crafting process: curating conceptual depth and provocative insight

To assess the fitness and intellectual potential of submissions to *Essay Frontiers*, the editorial team will apply a rigorous, yet open, evaluative framework grounded in four core criteria (i.e. purpose, originality, implications and intellectual voice/coherence). These criteria are designed to encourage bold thinking, support conceptual innovation and ensure alignment

with the section's broader aim: to cultivate essays that challenge conventional wisdom, surface previously overlooked tensions and make meaningful contributions to the theoretical, philosophical and practical development of logistics and scholarship on SCM.

Instead of measuring submissions against conventional methodological benchmarks, this evaluative approach privileges depth of reflection, clarity of argument and the courage to advance underexplored or provocative ideas. Each criterion invites contributors, whether academics or practitioners, to position their work not only as a commentary on existing discourse but also as a potential catalyst for reframing how the field thinks, teaches and engages with pressing societal and organisational questions. The four criteria for the assessment process will evaluate the following questions:

- (1) **Purpose:** Does the proposal articulate a clear and compelling argument or reflection that is relevant to logistics and SCM scholars? Does it address a conceptual tension, philosophical issue or normative concern worthy of exploration? This may include, but is not limited to, topics that remain unexplored, underexplored or that have received limited conceptual, theoretical or practical attention within the field.
- (2) **Originality:** Does the submission offer novel, bold or underexplored ideas? Does it challenge conventional thinking, propose new theoretical or empirical directions or provide fresh insights based on personal or scholarly reflection?
- (3) **Implications:** Does the essay have the potential to provoke new thinking, reframe dominant assumptions or inspire future research and theorisation? Are the insights meaningful for the academic community and possibly for practitioners or policymakers?
- (4) **Intellectual voice and coherence:** Is the essay presented in a strong and distinctive scholarly voice? Does it demonstrate clarity of thought, logical consistency and conceptual rigour, even if speculative or reflective in tone?

Authors of proposals that meet these criteria will be invited to develop a full essay (3,000–5,000 words). This two-stage process ensures alignment with the aims of *Essay Frontiers* while encouraging boundary-expanding and impactful contributions to the field. Submissions are not empirical papers. There is no expectation that they follow the standard structure of most empirical scientific papers or methodological conventions. However, clarity, rigour and argument coherence remain essential. We encourage the use of the structure that best serves the author's reflection, provocation or conceptual insight. However, the introduction and conclusion are mandatory, and sections should be numbered from the introduction to the conclusion. For example, the essay could be structured as follows: Abstract; (1) Introduction; (2) Current approaches/views/perspectives on the topic; (3) Proposed approaches/views/perspectives on the topic and (4) Conclusion; References.

4.1 Contextualisation or provocation

Authors are advised to begin the essay by grounding it in a salient issue that disrupts, unsettles or reopens foundational questions within logistics and SCM thinking. This entry point might stem from a conceptual paradox, a disciplinary blind spot, a normative tension or an unfolding societal shift with theoretical implications. Authors are encouraged to frame this starting moment not merely as background, but as a generative provocation, working as an invitation to rethink what is often taken for granted. Whether rooted in teaching, personal experience, empirical observation or philosophical questioning, this initial move should set the stage for conceptual exploration and establish why the issue demands reflective attention now.

- (1) **Conceptual exploration:** Authors are encouraged to develop their central argument by engaging with relevant theory, literature or interdisciplinary perspectives, using this space to critique dominant assumptions, expose conceptual blind spots or advance

alternative lines of reasoning. The aim is not to summarise existing work but to intervene in it.

- (2) **Main question addressed:** Authors should articulate the central question their essay seeks to explore or unsettle. This question should be clear, focused and conceptually generative, serving as a through-line that guides the reflection or provocation.
- (3) **Reflection or positioning:** Authors are encouraged to offer a distinct intellectual stance. They should reflect critically on the assumptions, highlighting their argument, and engage directly with prevailing frameworks, methods or perspectives. They should position their voice within or against existing scholarly traditions with clarity and purpose.
- (4) **Implications and pathways forward:** Authors should conclude by considering how the essay invites shifts in theory, thought or practice. They should consider what new avenues it opens for theory-building, teaching, policy or cross-sector engagement. This is the moment to signal how the contribution matters – within and beyond academia.

4.2 Optional elements (use if relevant)

- (1) **Lessons from practice:** Authors may draw on real-world experiences, institutional challenges or professional dilemmas to illustrate or ground their argument. While no empirical data are required, such reflections can enrich the essay's relevance and reveal tensions that warrant conceptual attention.
- (2) **A note on positionality:** When relevant, contributors are encouraged to reflect briefly on how their background, role or lived experience shapes their perspective. This adds transparency and depth, particularly in essays that question dominant narratives or advocate alternative worldviews.
- (3) **Alternative concepts or metaphors:** Introducing new metaphors, analogies or conceptual tools can be a powerful way to reframe established debates. Such devices are welcome when they clarify complex issues, challenge existing taxonomies or offer new interpretive angles.
- (4) **Theoretical provocations:** Authors may use the essay to press against the edges of current theory, exposing contradictions, proposing extensions or breaking with established logics. These provocations are most valuable when they are grounded in clear reasoning and invite further debate.

4.3 Summarising guidance

- (1) **Be reflective, rigorous and bold:** Essays should display depth of thought and conceptual courage, without being speculative for their own sake.
- (2) **Avoid unnecessary structure:** Use form as a means of clarity, not constraint. Let the argument shape the flow.
- (3) **Use references selectively:** Citations should support the argument, not overwhelm it. These are not literature reviews.
- (4) **Voice matters:** The tone can range from lyrical to assertive, but it should always reflect intellectual integrity and purpose. A clear, distinctive voice is part of what gives the essay its impact.

5. Submission process and format

To ensure both quality and accessibility, *Essay Frontiers* will adopt a two-stage submission process that encourages conceptual clarity, intellectual risk-taking and editorial feasibility. This approach allows contributors to refine their ideas early while enabling the editorial team to assess alignment with the section's aims without imposing undue review burden.

The process is also intended to welcome diverse forms of scholarly expression, whether grounded in normative critique, philosophical reflection or conceptual reimagination, while maintaining high standards of rigour and coherence. A small editorial team will evaluate proposals to determine alignment with the aims of *Essay Frontiers*. Accepted proposals will move to the next stage.

5.1 Stage 1: Essay proposal

- (1) Maximum 300 words outlining the central topic, the research question addressed and conceptual focus and key ideas or tensions to be explored, along with up to five key references.
- (2) A clear summary of the central argument or reflection, highlighting its novelty and relevance to logistics and SCM scholarship.
- (3) Authors are encouraged to situate their essays in personal experience, critical reflection or conceptual innovation, particularly when proposing ideas that stretch disciplinary boundaries.
- (4) Submissions may include, but are not limited to:
 - Questioning established frameworks or assumptions;
 - Expanding or reimagining existing theories;
 - Developing original conceptual arguments;
 - Critiquing methodological norms or offering alternatives;
 - Suggesting pathways for greater interdisciplinarity within the field and
 - Suggesting pedagogical approaches that are tested and include learners' feedback.

This stage is intended to assess alignment with *Essay Frontiers*' aims while encouraging bold, thoughtful and boundary-expanding contributions.

5.2 Stage 2: full essay submission

- (1) Target length: 3,000 to 5,000 words.
- (2) References may be expanded at this stage, though essays should remain conceptually focused and not reference-heavy (ideally fewer than 10).
- (3) Submissions should aim to provoke thought, challenge dominant assumptions or inspire new theoretical, reflective or practice-relevant directions in logistics and SCM scholarship.

To ensure editorial quality and manageability:

- (1) The short proposal stage helps reduce editorial workload while increasing submission clarity and intellectual alignment.
- (2) A cross-disciplinary pool of reviewers, with expertise in conceptual development, essay writing and critical SCM perspectives, will be gradually assembled.

- (3) Editorial guidance and evaluation criteria will be publicly available to support transparency, consistency and constructive engagement throughout the review process.

6. Inspiring topics and provocative questions for *Essay Frontiers*

To inspire authors in crafting bold and boundary-pushing contributions, [Table 3](#) presents some critical topics and reflective questions relevant to logistics and SCM scholarship.

Table 3. Sample topics and questions to inspire essay submissions

Topic	Inspiring questions
Critical earth and rare mineral logistics	- What ethical and geopolitical tensions are embedded in the logistics of rare earth and critical minerals? - How can supply chains for green technologies perpetuate extractive colonial logics? - Should the field develop a theory of extractive fragility in green transition logistics?
Informal and precarious logistics in marginalised communities	- What are the hidden infrastructures and survival logics of informal logistics systems? - How do unsafe or invisible logistics practices reshape our understanding of supply chain legitimacy? - Can logistics be theorised through lenses of precarity, resistance or informal knowledge?
Temporality in supply chains	- How does the acceleration imperative distort sustainability, worker well-being or long-term resilience? - Can alternative temporalities (e.g. slow logistics and cyclical time) offer viable models?
The afterlife of supply chains	- What are the consequences of framing logistics performance solely around speed? - What happens to supply networks after obsolescence, disassembly or abandonment? - How do logistics systems handle decay, waste or post-use transitions? - Can we develop a theory of logistical residues and their sociomaterial impact?
Methodological refusals and conceptual reorientations	- Should SCM scholars reject certain dominant methods as limiting? - What would a post-positivist or decolonial research agenda in SCM look like? - How do our methods shape (not just study) the field we claim to understand?
Algorithmic control and invisible labour	- How do algorithmic platforms conceal or amplify labour exploitation in logistics/supply chains? - Can we theorise algorithmic control as a new form of supply chain power? - What forms of resistance or adaptation emerge in digitally mediated logistics work?
Supply chains and epistemic injustice	- Whose knowledge counts in the theorisation of supply chain practices? - How can the field better recognise or integrate indigenous, community-based or practitioner epistemologies? - What does an epistemologically plural logistics scholarship look like?
Designing for disruption: beyond resilience	- Should we move from resilience to anti-fragility or adaptive improvisation? - What are the conceptual limits of “bouncing back”? - How might we theorise disruption not as failure, but as formative to organising?
Supply chains and moral ambiguity	- Can logistics ever be morally neutral, or are supply chains inherently political? - How do supply chains entangle organisations in moral complicity? - What frameworks can help theorise ethical grey zones, such as surveillance or greenwashing?
The architecture of absence: what supply chains ignore	- What topics, actors or materialities are systematically excluded from logistics discourse? - How does absence function as a structuring logic in supply chain governance? - Can theorising structural omission reveal new pathways for critique and change?
Post-colonial approaches	- Are concepts emerging from developed economies (e.g. circular supply chains) applicable in developing economies? - What can developed economies’ supply chain practices learn from those in developing economies? - How to enhance win–win cooperation between supply chain partners from developed and developing economies?

These themes are not prescriptive but generative, meant to inspire essays that provoke disciplinary orthodoxies, expose conceptual blind spots, invite theoretical reimagination and trigger new conversations. Whether grounded in ethical dilemmas, political tensions or overlooked materialities, each topic offers a fertile starting point for reflection, critique and conceptual innovation.

7. Final remarks

Essay Frontiers represents more than a new type of research contribution. It marks a deliberate editorial stance towards openness, provocation and conceptual ambition in logistics and SCM scholarship. It offers a space for ideas not yet fully formed but urgently needed, for voices that challenge, reframe or illuminate and for essays that invite the field to pause, reconsider and rethink. This is not a place for safe answers or procedural writing. It is a space for intellectual risk, philosophical depth and theoretical experimentation. We invite scholars and reflective practitioners alike to see *Essay Frontiers* not simply as a submission category, but as a shared endeavour to expand what and who counts in the future of logistics and *supply chain* thinking.

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