



COMMENTARY

International business policymaking for a “wicked” world

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Abstract

Many international business (IB) issues are “wicked”, requiring specific policymaking approaches and capabilities. COVID-19 has accentuated their wickedness, contributing also to global structural shifts, which pose significant challenges and opportunities for transformation policymaking. This commentary extends the second-generation wicked problem (WP) literature and proposes a third-generation WP approach focusing on morality and time, which have been often overlooked. Drawing on the WP literature, I propose three policymaking principles (i.e., time-sensitive logics, actioning a moral imperative, empathy, and reflexivity) and two types of meta-capabilities (i.e., resilience and entrepreneurial meta-capabilities). Time-sensitive logics sensitize decision-makers to cause-effect lags and help synch their approaches with governance, system and strategic policymaking logics. Actioning a moral imperative helps curb perverse managerial incentives to address only feasible WP parts. Empathy and reflexivity outline the importance of humanizing WPs and prompt decision-makers to reflect on their own mental models and biases when addressing WPs. Resilience meta-capabilities underscore anticipatory, coping, adaptive and transformative capabilities needed to address WPs in order to “bounce beyond adversity”. Entrepreneurial meta-capabilities outline five entrepreneurial policymaking elements suited for addressing WPs. These principles and meta-capabilities can guide policymakers and managers to better navigate the wickedness of COVID-19 and address WPs beyond it.

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INTRODUCTION

According to the *wicked problems* (WPs) literature, most policy problems, like COVID-19, are wicked in nature (van Zanten & van Tulder, 2020). To address them effectively, policymakers and managers must go beyond “rational-scientific methods” (Eden & Wagstaff, 2021, p. 3). They need collective “soft skills” to foster trust (Carney & Wellstead, 2021), leverage the power of communities (Glynn, 2021) and involve the *whole* of society (van Zanten & van Tulder, 2020). WPs are “that class of social system problems which are ill-formulated, where the information is confusing, where there are many clients and decision-makers with conflicting values, and where the ramifications in the whole system are thoroughly confusing” (Churchman, 1967, p. B-141).

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The popularity of the WP literature “has produced significant conceptual stretching” (Peters & Tarpey, 2019, p. 218), as we draw on WP thinking to navigate large-scale change (Waddock et al., 2015) in a post-pandemic landscape fraught with radical uncertainty and discontinuous change (Hitt et al., 2021). While drawing on WP thinking in IB policymaking can yield significant benefits (i.e., synchronizing time horizons between problems and strategies/policies, addressing stakeholder-system interfaces and fostering collective problem solving), overreliance on managerial thinking in turbulent times risks losing sight of decision-makers’ moral responsibilities when addressing WPs. One example is cherry-picking partial, short-term solutions devoid of context or all relevant stakeholders (Churchman, 1967; Peters, 2017). Another is “wasting” the transformational potential of COVID-19 to address other perennial WPs, like sustainability (van Zanten & van Tulder, 2020).

This commentary focuses on two hidden WP aspects, *morality* and *time*, which are often overlooked, as they are not explicitly acknowledged among the ten general WP characteristics (Peters, 2017). Its main contribution is a third-generation WP thinking approach underscoring the moral imperatives of decision-makers and greater sensitivity to time. This can help IB policymakers better tame WPs, like COVID-19, and contribute to a more profound transformation beyond it (van Zanten & van Tulder, 2020). *Morality* and *time* are interconnected and stem from the managerial tendency to focus on “feasible” problems to offer partial short-term solutions (Churchman, 1967, p. B-142) in the name of shareholder supremacy (Rašković & Takacs Haynes, 2020; Banarjee, 2008). They also arise from a disconnect between the short-term nature of managerial thinking and the long-term nature of most WPs (van Zanten & van Tulder, 2020). I aim to show they also call for more capability-driven policymaking to scale up resilience, as a collective meta-capability of bouncing beyond adversity (Menzies & Raskovic, 2020). This paper has relevance for IB policymaking in the current COVID-19 context (Carney & Wellstead, 2021), but also for transformational policymaking beyond it (van Zanten & van Tulder, 2020).

THE HIDDEN ASPECTS OF WICKED PROBLEMS

WPs have been researched from various angles, with the bulk of the work being conceptual, focusing on complexity and related features.

Drawing on this literature, I argue that employing WP thinking should not just distinguish between technical characteristics and social nuances of WPs; decision-makers must also consider their moral imperatives and pay greater attention to time.

Wicked Problems

Originating from the 1970s planning literature (Peters, 2017), WP literature emerged as a critique of the systems approach to policymaking (Eden & Wagstaff, 2021). It was motivated by unprecedented social changes and technological transformation in the 1960s (Rittel & Webber, 1973), similar to recent developments. The IB policy literature has led the way in addressing WPs, particularly related to sustainable transformation (van Zanten & van Tulder, 2018), (in)equality (Eden & Wagstaff, 2021) and resilience (van Zanten & van Tulder, 2020).

COVID-19 has contributed to the structural reshaping of the world (Buckley, 2020). It has spurred a deeper “rethinking of concepts [which] will avoid ill-advised prescriptions, misaligned with the coming post-pandemic state of the world economy” (Verbeke & Yuan, 2021, p. 597). It has highlighted that IB policymaking plays a key role in navigating large-scale systemic crises in which “[global] health, social inclusion, economic development, and ecological sustainability are not only deeply entwined” (van Zanten & van Tulder, 2020, p. 451), but also require new-generation governance models and “more precise tools to define dimensions of wicked problems, such as conflict, complexity, and uncertainty” (p. 452).

However, a WP consists of more than complexity. WPs are highly socially nuanced (Peters, 2017), which is where the issue of morality arises (Churchman, 1967). Peters (2017) outlined ten characteristics of WPs, originally defined by Rittel and Webber (1973):

1. No definite formulation of the problem (i.e., lack of structure, messiness).
2. No stopping rules (i.e., the process of problem solving is identical to the process of understanding the problem’s nature, lack of clear judgement criteria, endless causal links).
3. No true/false, just good/bad solutions (i.e., conflicting needs of stakeholders, multiple actors involved in solutions).
4. No immediate and ultimate solution test (i.e., implications for planning, problem solving, and time horizons).



5. One-shot solutions with irreversible and unforgettable consequences.
6. Lack of enumerable and exhaustively describable solutions.
7. Uniqueness (i.e., context embeddedness).
8. Symptoms of other problems.
9. Multiple interpretations/explanations (i.e., of problems and solutions).
10. No right to be wrong (i.e., implications of “truth testing”).

Both *complexity* and *complicatedness* drive WPs. The former corresponds to a dynamic system perspective, whereas the latter corresponds to a structural one (Andersson & Törnberg, 2018). In terms of problem solving, Peters and Tarpey (2019) highlighted three particular features of complex problems: (1) *intransparency* (i.e., lack of structure, openness to interpretation), (2) *polytely* (i.e., conflicting stakeholder goals and views), and (3) *time-delayed effects* (i.e., cause and effect lags). Second-generation WP literature has moved beyond these features to focus on governance and implementation (van Zanten & van Tulder, 2020). It emphasizes: (a) WP framing (i.e., vantage points and time perspectives); (b) the development of analytical tools for resolving stakeholder conflicts (i.e., managing stakeholder interfaces) and dealing with uncertainty; and (c) specific models that can help us navigate WPs along *governance lines* (i.e., macro-level policy goal setting, policy implementation and progress tracking), *system lines* (i.e., managing interactions and cross-level effects) and *strategic lines* (i.e., firm-level strategic responses; van Zanten & van Tulder, 2020).

As many WPs evolve into *super WPs* – with narrowing time windows for action, weakened/absent central authorities, policy responses irrationally discounting the future, and perpetrators/exacerbators also seeking to provide solutions (Levin et al., 2012) – a need has arisen for a third-generation WP approach in which decision-makers become also more sensitive to their *moral obligations* (Wexler, 2009) and the role of *time* (van Zanten & van Tulder, 2020).

Morality and Time

I first focus on *morality* (in a descriptive sense of societal codes of conduct). This was a central aspect of Churchman’s (1967) editorial but faded into the background in Rittel and Webber’s (1973) framework. Churchmann (1967) saw morality as a key principle within the specific context of the

managerial tendency to cherry-pick feasible pieces of WPs and offer partial solutions. Yet, his critique of the managerial profession doesn’t just apply to decision-makers not having the right to be wrong; it relates to other points in Rittel and Webber’s (1973) framework, such as singling out economic aspects of WPs and separating them from their social context, not recognizing stakeholders with opposing views and excluding them from problem-solving approaches, or disregarding WPs as symptoms of other WPs. COVID-19 has obfuscated many of these concerns, due to high stakes and increased urgency, short time windows for action, significant resource constraints, and zero-sum thinking, as well as a plethora of political issues.

Focusing on the moral imperatives of the decision-maker, Wexler (2009) identified four specific types of moral concerns when dealing with WPs:

1. *The responsibility nexus* Absence of precedence, norms, and criteria provide a license for innovation and perverse incentives for novelty claims on the “knowledge frontier.”
2. *The risk of false assurance* The dangers of false assurances are greater for WP solutions, due to (a) good solutions being unknown, (b) lack of stakeholder knowledge, and the (c) politics of finding solutions, which incentivizes overemphasizing benefits/downplaying risks.
3. *The politics of urgency* The importance of capturing attention in complicated contexts. Emphasizing urgency curbs skepticism and downplays use of rational judgement criteria.
4. *Confusion over solutions* While WPs can only be tamed, the ability of offered solutions rests on the *proliferation of methods, skills and techniques by those mobilizing the distinction to manage, make sense of and improve wicked problem-solving capacity* (p. 538).

Morality has become a central concern in recognizing the adverse effects of globalization on society (i.e., inequality) and the environment (i.e., climate change), as the impending consequences of super WPs show the boundary conditions of drawing on Social Darwinism (i.e., how unrestricted competition allows the most fit to rise to the top, allegedly driving material and social progress through natural selection) to address WPs and super WPs. Unfettered competition advocated by neoliberal capitalism has been shown to facilitate “inequitable distribution of human goods, and both amorality and immorality”, disrupting the

natural balance (Klein, 2003, p. 393). Neo-Darwinists have been able to show that material and social progress of collective groups in nature (i.e., monkeys and apes) requires a balance between competition and cooperation (Klein, 2003). Transcending shareholder supremacy with an expanded logic of stakeholder capitalism relates to the *polytely* within WPs. It can help re-draw the boundaries between relevant social outcomes and unintended externalities that we can neither discount nor dismiss. They become “internal variables” in IB’s thinking about globalization, not external environmental factors (Witt, 2019).

When it comes to the environment, managers and policymakers have a moral responsibility to internalize and advance sustainable development (van Zanten & van Tulder, 2020) as the global landscape undergoes profound transformations (Hitt et al., 2021) and becomes more fraught with WPs requiring multi-stakeholder process problem-solving approaches (van Tulder et al., 2021). Managers must in particular go beyond “moral self-licensing,” as an antithesis to the moral responsibility toward the collective *whole* (van Tulder et al., 2021). Yet, in a poignant critical review of corporate social responsibility (CSR), Banerjee (2008) points out that even if managers are “moral actors” inclined to make socially responsible decisions to accommodate stakeholder interests over shareholder supremacy, they lack genuine freedom to do so. This is because their “role in accommodating stakeholder interests is predefined at higher levels and practices at this level are governed and organized by organizational and institutional discourses” (p. 58), which highlights the role of policymaking informed by WP thinking.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) “constitute the most influential framework for the global development agenda at the present time” (van Tulder et al., 2021, p. 1), which is why the role of multinational enterprises (MNEs) as “strategic agents in achieving the SDGs across the world” is so vital (van Tulder et al., 2021, p. 2). MNEs can help legitimize the SDG agenda and possess the global outreach capacity, required resources, as well as leadership and other capabilities for the implementation of the SDG agenda in its entirety (van Tulder et al., 2021). Additionally, recent research by Sinkovics et al. (2021a) has also shown that the role of small and medium size enterprises (SMEs) also warrants careful consideration, as they are an important stakeholder in national economies and a key part of global value chains.

Unfortunately, evidence suggests SDG implementation is below expectations and “that SDG contributions are rather slow and often marginally integrated into business practices” despite their trillion-dollar business potential (van Tulder et al., 2021, p. 2). Greater clarity is available about macro-level advancement and implementation of SDGs but less is known about micro-level business strategies “that improve corporate impacts on sustainable development” (van Zanten & van Tulder, 2021, p. 2). While many firms, especially larger ones, are aware of SDGs and report on them, only a small percentage incorporate SDGs in their strategies and monitor their progress in terms of specific SDG targets; let alone wholistically (van Zanten & van Tulder, 2021). Sinkovics et al. (2021b) highlight how firms don’t merely prioritize internally actionable and passive goals when pursuing SDGs due to economic constraints and financial resources. They believe firms also lack capabilities to identify and alleviate various types of constraints, which is directly related to WPs and the role of transformational policymaking. Going beyond CSR activities, which usually facilitate cherry-picking SDGs to pursue internally actionable goals aligned with existing business models (van Tulder et al., 2021), Sinkovics et al. (2021b) have proposed a depth-to-width type of business responsibility matrix to more appropriately assess the actual support of the SDG agenda. Providing the most comprehensive analysis of micro-level business strategies supporting or hindering sustainable development and specific SDG targets, van Zanten and van Tulder (2021) have created a typology of 67 different business activities of firms and identified four types of business activities with varying strategic imperatives:

1. *Core activities* (i.e., high positive and few negative impacts on SDGs): need to be scaled up, as they provide essential public goods, like research, education, and social work.
2. *Mixed activities* (i.e., moderate or high degrees of both positive and negative SDG impacts): call for decoupling of negative externalities from their positive effects; often related to health, sanitation, infrastructure, and industrialization.
3. *Opposed activities* (i.e., few positive and many negative SDG impacts): calling from transformative capabilities and bounce-beyond-adversity type resilience; often related to resource extraction.



4. *Peripheral activities* (i.e., low degrees of positive and negative SDG impacts): calling for targeted exploration to support innovation which could yield positive impacts in the future, like travel, employment placement, and repair of goods.

In terms of *time*, aligning the temporal horizons of policies and strategies with the long-term consequences of (super) WPs also requires collectively agreeing on and locking-in “long-term preferences so that, as the future nears, they cannot revert to their short-term calculus” (Levin et al., 2012, p. 128). Hence, *morality* and *time* go hand in hand when it comes to WPs.

Rittel and Webber (1973) only implicitly referred to *time* when describing (a) the indefinite nature of WPs, (b) the absence of ultimate solutions and waves of WP consequences, (c) a lack of stopping rules (i.e., leading to good enough solutions), and (d) WPs’ openness to various interpretations (i.e., role of temporal vantage points). The issue of time is more explicitly recognized in the literature on complex problems but has been reduced to the existence of time-delayed effects between causes and effects (Peters & Tarpey, 2019). It is also important to recognize the relevance of time for both the problem and solution sides of super WPs (Levin et al., 2012). On the problem side, time relates to windows of opportunity, in which policy makers seem to be “running out of time” to address certain WPs (Peters, 2017, p. 388). An example of this is the available time left to address climate change. On the solution side, time relates to a “radical discounting of the future” (Peters, 2017, p. 388), which relates to time consistency of preferences in economics and the use of long-term social discounting in an increasingly uncertain future (Levin et al., 2012). An example of this is continued support for coal, oil, and fracking, despite the recognized long-term effects of rising CO₂ emissions on climate change.

A NON-ERGODIC ENVIRONMENT

Ergodicity is a relatively new concept for IB (Buckley, 2020) and strategic management (Hitt et al., 2021), borrowed from economics. Originating in statistical mechanics, the ergodicity hypothesis is a cornerstone of neoclassical economics and its belief in long-term (stable) equilibria of markets, regardless of shocks, and initial conditions (Carrión Álvarez & Ehnts, 2016). An important implication of the ergodicity hypothesis is that, over time, a system

will return to a default equilibrium, allowing it to backtrack to a previous state (Buckley, 2020). The structural reshaping of globalization (Buckley, 2020) and COVID-19 (Hitt et al., 2021) challenge ergodic assumptions. This is why the absence of ergodicity, called *non-ergodicity*, is of greater relevance. I outline three key non-ergodicity features of particular relevance to wicked IB policy problems.

The first feature is *radical uncertainty*, which relates to the so-called unknown unknowns where “decision-makers don’t even know what they are uncertain about” with regard to the state of the environment (Buckley & Casson, 2019, p. 1431). It has direct relevance for WPs, as changes in the environment interact with other WP features and transform the dynamics of the whole system. The second feature relates to *change*. Changes occur erratically and at inconsistent speeds in non-ergodic conditions (Buckley, 2020). Hitt et al. (2021, p. 259) see non-ergodic processes as being subject to “quantum” (i.e., large and sudden) and “discontinuous” changes (i.e., caused by abrupt external events). This again has implications for WPs, both in terms of WPs being symptoms of other WPs and time-delayed cause-effect relationships. The third feature relates to the ergodicity hypothesis and types of effective *equilibria* within systems. According to Hitt et al. (2021), non-ergodic conditions call for the logic of *dynamic equilibria*, in which the system changes continuously, not just in response to external shocks. The transformational effect of globalization on social identity is something that materializes continuously, as an inherent part of globalization. It is not caused by an economic crisis, a trade war, or a pandemic (Rašković & Takacs Haynes, 2020).

There are no optimal solutions to WPs, which is why they can only be tamed. This requires a shift from solutions to the problem-solving process, which is ongoing in non-ergodic conditions. It is important, however, to stress that Hitt et al. (2021) did not employ the term “dynamic equilibria” mathematically. They used the term descriptively, drawing on the logic of firm dynamic capabilities and the value of entrepreneurial responses in non-ergodic conditions (Buckley, 2020).

Table 1 provides a synthesis of a fragmented literature on ergodicity that is of relevance for IB. I have further contextualized ergodic/non-ergodic conditions in terms of the VUCA framework relating to volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity.

Non-ergodicity also carries important implications for understanding *resilience*, which can be

Table 1 Ergodic vs. non-ergodic conditions

Environment conditions	Ergodic conditions	Non-ergodic conditions
Uncertainty types	Regular uncertainty (i.e., decision-maker knows the state of the environment)	Radical uncertainty (i.e., decision-maker doesn't know the state of the environment/what they are uncertain about)
Nature of changes	Linear and incremental change, moderate and consistent speeds	Quantum discontinuous change, varying speeds
Equilibria	Static equilibria logic (i.e., long-term tendency toward a stable status quo)	Dynamic equilibria logic (i.e., constant re-adjustment due to continuous change)
Path dependency, role of time	Not strong, no/little time lags between causes and effects	Very strong, time lags between causes and effects. Importance of critical junctures
IB policymaking and managerial implications		
Business environment conditions	Stable industry structure, clear boundaries, identifiable players, linear trends	Ambiguous industry structure, blurred boundaries, ambiguous and changing players, non-linear and unpredictable trends
Relevance of VUCA conditions	Moderate volatility, regular uncertainty, varying complexity/limited complicatedness, moderate ambiguity	High volatility, radical uncertainty, complexity and complicatedness, high structural and stakeholder ambiguity
Firm strategies	Advantage-based strategies	Entrepreneurial-type strategies
Required knowledge	Importance of analytical routines, existing/upgraded knowledge	Experiential routines, newly created knowledge on the knowledge frontier

Source Adapted from Hitt et al. (2021), Buckley (2020), Carrión Álvarez and Ehnts (2016), van Tulder et al. (2020).

approached as either the capability to bounce back (return to a *status quo*) or bounce beyond (transform, advance; Hoegel & Hartmann, 2020). Non-ergodic conditions don't allow backtracking and imply constant change, making any return to a *status quo* irrelevant.

IMPLICATIONS FOR IB POLICYMAKING AND PRACTICE

I propose three IB policymaking principles, which take into consideration the role of *morality* and *time* in terms of WPs. I then propose two types of meta-capabilities that can help address the non-ergodic nature of the global environment. While not primarily focused on the current pandemic situation, I provide some specific recommendations for IB policymakers and managers related to COVID-19.

Policymaking Principles

Principle #1: Time-sensitive logics

The first principle builds on van Zanten and van Tulder's (2020) typology of policymaking *logics*¹ and discusses their temporal aspects in a WP context. Table 2 illustrates this through some examples. With regards to the governance logic, the framing of policy goals and the alignment of

policies and progress tracking should be synchronized and made more sensitive to WP cause-and-effect lags. When it comes to the system logic, the use of *personas* can help humanize WPs and enforce a stronger “whole of society” approach. *Personas* refer to narrative descriptions of archetypal users representing specific stakeholder groups and are often used in user-centered design (Pruitt & Aldin, 2006) and healthcare policymaking. For example, the New Zealand government uses *personas* as a policymaking tool “to understand the real experiences of people who will use your service or be affected by a policy” (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2017). The use of *personas* can further shift attention to stakeholder interfaces and relationships, as it humanizes WPs and their stakeholders. In terms of the strategic logic, firm dynamic capabilities become even more crucial in non-ergodic conditions. In particular, greater emphasis needs to be paid to sensing and reconfiguring capabilities, which underscore proactive aspects of resilience and greater entrepreneurial thinking.

As we grow increasingly sensitive to a distinction between WPs and super WPs, the choice of solutions informed by the system and strategic logics must prioritize quick wins (Termeer & Dewulf,

Table 2 Temporal horizons and policymaking logics

	Governance logic	System logic	Strategic logic
Logic scope	Macro policy goals, policy adoption and implementation, impact-progress tracking	Identifying and managing interactions (i.e., between actors, structures, and context)	Firm capability development and strategy implementation with impact on macro-level goals
Temporal horizon issues	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Aligning macro policy goals with the temporal nature of WPs and their consequences 2. Aligning the temporal horizons of effects/consequences and progress tracking 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Introducing dynamic and structural understandings of interactions, supported by scenario planning 2. Distinguishing between existing (near-/far-future) and possible interactions 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Aligning firm dynamic capabilities with proactive resilience 2. Supporting a strategic vision/plan through empowered purposeful agency (part of social structuration)
Examples of actions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Using future stakeholders for current strategy formulation. <i>Example</i> Middlesex University using primary school pupils for its 2031 strategy 2. Using SDGs to navigate COVID-19 responses. <i>Example</i> New Zealand's COVID-19 government response informed by SDG logic with the goal of “bouncing back better” and supporting carbon neutrality 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Dealing with globalization not as interdependence among nation-state actors and measuring flows, but as a dynamic transformation process in the extent, level, and nature of social relations. <i>Example</i> UK introducing a minister of loneliness to address growing social isolation and mental health issues caused by globalization 2. Proactive social resilience of a system. <i>Example</i> New Zealand's effective COVID-19 response as an outcome of meta-capability-based social resilience 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Redesigning MNE CSR initiatives into resilience-building dynamic ecosystems. <i>Example</i> Tech companies offering flexible work arrangements and additional benefits to support their employees (i.e., subsidized childcare, Internet at home) 2. Combining purpose and agency <i>Example</i> Micro loans in emerging markets for women to pursue social business ventures

Source Adapted from van Zanten and van Tulder (2020), Menzies and Raskovic (2020).

2019), rather than complicated far-future solutions significantly discounted under non-ergodic conditions (Hitt et al., 2021; Peters, 2017).

Principle #2: Actioning a moral imperative

This principle recognizes the overlooked moral imperative of decision-makers when addressing WPs. Building on Wexler's (2009) typology, IB policymaking should:

- Not allow decision-makers to avoid their moral responsibilities in dealing with WPs. Addressing WPs should come with a two-pronged moral license and a license to innovate (on the knowledge frontier).
- Inseparability of WPs from their context. Assessment of the WP context must be a required part of the problem-solving process.
- In the absence of precedence and clear judgment criteria, policymaking should provide clear norms for *how* WPs should be addressed, and stakeholders engaged.
- Curb perverse managerial incentives for partial solutions. Proposed solutions should be stress-

tested against different scenarios and double-checked by expert “opponents.”

- Demonstration of “skin in the game” when addressing a WP.
- Monitor attempts to manipulate sense of urgency via (social media) and otherwise.
- Demand transparency and require solutions that demonstrate patterns of relatively simple, experiential routines.

Principle #3: Empathy and reflexivity

WPs involve a plethora of stakeholders with conflicting needs and demands, as well as various solution providers espousing competing approaches. To follow the underlying moral imperatives, policymaking should move away from abstractions and *humanize* WPs. Identity-based stakeholder narratives can provide a human face to WPs and shift our attention to interactions/interfaces among stakeholders through the use of *personas*. This requires an awareness of our own mental models (i.e., relevant for problem framing) and biases (i.e., impacting attitudes toward objects/

actors and behaviors). Policymakers should also consider themselves as types of epistemic communities, calling on themselves to be more self-reflective and self-critical, because formulating a WP is part of the problem.

COVID-19 and Principle-Based Recommendations

In taming COVID-19, IB policymakers must be able to identify and monitor the different time horizons on both the problem and solution sides of WPs. They must be able to align planning and problem-solving approaches, calling for more synchronicity. For example, while implementing strict social distancing rules and public curfews may yield positive short-term outcomes, the long-term social externalities merit consideration, as the pandemic drags on (i.e., mental health, domestic violence).

In terms of causal links and cause-effect lags, policymakers must also attend to so-called critical junctures, which relate to the interplay of specific factors and/or conditions in a particular time sequence. The importance of COVID-19 as a critical juncture is particularly relevant to understanding the interactions among anti-globalization sentiment, threats to democracy, and the rise of populist politics, which harnesses the uncertainty-reducing power of identification with entitative groups and prototypical leaders (Rašković & Takacs Haynes, 2020).

Managers must also become more sensitive to both cross-level (Hoegel & Hartmann, 2020) and cross-time effects (Levin et al., 2012) when addressing WPs in non-ergodic conditions. As managerial attention shifts more to resilience thinking, managers will need to determine which types of dynamic firm capabilities can help scale up resilience. Resilience should not be seen as an outcome, but as a dynamic process of utilizing specific types of capabilities with the goal of bouncing beyond adversity, in-line with a dynamic equilibria logic (Hitt et al., 2021).

In terms of COVID-19, policymakers and managers must internalize and advance the moral responsibilities of dealing with the wickedness of the pandemic, resisting the trappings of cherry-picking issues and solutions. Leading by example, through compassion and role modeling heroes, are two strategies that can help internalize the moral imperatives discussed by Wexler (2009), as well as help build social resilience through communities and institutional trust (Glynn, 2021). Dealing with WPs requires a collective approach, which is where the role of sensemaking becomes critical, in terms

of problem framing and solving (Christianson & Barton, 2021).

Managers and IB policymakers also must keep in mind their moral responsibility to regard COVID-19 not just as a WP but also an opportunity for more lasting transformation (Hoegel & Hartmann, 2020), particularly toward a more sustainable future (van Zanten & van Tulder, 2020; van Tulder et al., 2021).

Policymaking Meta-capabilities

I propose two types of higher-order policymaking meta-capabilities of particular importance for non-ergodic conditions, inspired by a capability approach to policymaking.

Resilience meta-capabilities

From a capability-based perspective, resilience can be defined as a set of *ex ante* meta-capabilities, which allow actors and/or systems to *anticipate, cope, adapt, and transform* adversity in order to bounce beyond it (Menziez & Raskovic, 2020). Effective WP-sensitive IB policymaking must be mindful of these meta-capabilities, incorporating practices and approaches that can help scale up:

- Anticipatory capabilities of actors and systems (i.e., through environment scanning, periodic and unscheduled reviews, stress tests).
- Skills and support systems for sensemaking and coping with various types of changes/adversities (i.e., social support systems, cultural capital, community networks).
- Levels of adaptability (i.e., promoting anti-fragility of structures, versatility of actors, mandating required slack, etc.).
- Achievement of transformation through experiential and vicarious learning *and* entrepreneurial thinking.

Entrepreneurial meta-capabilities

The second set of meta-capabilities relates to the role of entrepreneurship, which becomes more important when dealing with WPs (i.e., license to innovate on the knowledge frontier) and much more valuable under non-ergodic conditions (Hitt et al., 2021). In a WP context, the use of *policy entrepreneurship* is becoming particularly valuable. Policy entrepreneurship focuses on: (1) the process of problem framing (i.e., essential for WPs); (2) network-oriented behavior (i.e., promotes system logic); (3) working with advocacy coalitions (i.e.,



seeking consensus, facilitating empathy); (4) leading by example (i.e., moral leadership); and (5) scaling up change processes (i.e., capability-based resilience; Mintrom, 2019).

COVID-19 and Meta-capability Recommendations
Tackling the wickedness of COVID-19 requires a collective approach that builds and leverages social resilience (Menzies & Raskovic, 2020), rendering institutional trust essential and mobilizing a strong sense of community (Glynn, 2021) through appropriate sensemaking (Christianson & Barton, 2021) and policymaking (Carney & Wellstead, 2021). However, to meet the challenges of a non-ergodic environment (Buckley, 2020), we need a scalable meta-capabilities to bounce beyond existing challenges and harness the transformative potential of adversity through continuous learning and entrepreneurial thinking. For managers, this requires integrating resilience thinking with a firm’s dynamic capabilities (e.g., sensing, seizing, reconfiguring). For IB policymakers, this requires finding ways of incorporating a stronger entrepreneurial logic into policymaking, through the philosophy of policy entrepreneurship.

CONCLUSION

Unprecedented technological innovation and increasing socio-environmental challenges caused by globalization and deepened by COVID-19 have

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sparked renewed interest in WPs and ways to tame them within IB. However, to avoid the risk of reducing WPs to *hembigs* (i.e., hegemonic, ambiguous big concepts), we must go beyond second-generation WP thinking, which emphasizes governance and implementation (van Zanten & van Tulder, 2020). This commentary has proposed a third-generation approach to WPs that underscores the importance of *morality* and *time* for the decision-maker, as we exploit the transformative opportunities of a post-pandemic non-ergodic tomorrow (Hitt et al., 2021) by bouncing beyond the challenges of COVID-19 today (Menzies & Raskovic, 2020).

NOTES

¹According to van Zanten and van Tulder (2020, p. 461), logics “mobilize the metrics, create collective intelligence, and present intervention repertoires.”

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