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Alexander Hübner, Fredrik Eng-Larsson, Robert Rooderkerk

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Call for Papers—*Service Science* Special Issue on People-Centric Retail and Last-Mile Services

Alexander Hübner,^a Fredrik Eng-Larsson,^b Robert Rooderkerk^c

^aSupply and Value Chain Management, Technical University of Munich, 94315 Straubing, Germany; ^bStockholm Business School, Stockholm University, SE-106 91 Stockholm, Sweden; ^cRotterdam School of Management, Erasmus University, 3062 PA Rotterdam, Netherlands

Contact: alexander.huebner@tum.de,  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1358-1284> (AH); fredrik.englarsson@sbs.su.se,  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4483-8123> (FE-L); rooderkerk@rsm.nl,  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6463-7735> (RR)

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Context and Motivation

Retail plays a central role in contemporary economies: shaping consumer experiences, driving innovation, and influencing sustainability across supply chains. With the growth of e-commerce and omni-channel strategies, retail operations have become increasingly complex, particularly in warehousing, store operations, and last-mile logistics. Efficient, responsible, and resilient retail services are vital not only for economic performance but also for societal well-being, because they directly influence employment, community engagement, and access to goods.

Despite advances in technology and automation, people remain indispensable across retail and last-mile logistics—from store associates and warehouse workers to delivery personnel. Their skills, motivation, and satisfaction have a direct impact on operational efficiency, customer experience, and organizational adaptability. Yet, traditional operational models often underemphasize the human dimension, focusing primarily on cost, speed, and process optimization. Recent research highlights that people-centric operational strategies enhance both business performance and social sustainability (Ton 2014, Roels and Staats 2021, Dai and Tang 2022, Corbett 2024).

Prioritizing employee well-being, participatory decision making, and skill development not only boosts employee retention and productivity but also fosters an ethical and inclusive work environment. Beyond internal operations, responsible retail practices have direct implications for customer interaction and brand perception: Socially responsible operations—such as fair labor practices in last-mile delivery or safe working conditions in warehouses—can strengthen customer trust, enhance brand loyalty, and inform sustainable marketing narratives. Fostering employee engagement and well-being shapes how staff interact with customers, ultimately

affecting customer behavior, satisfaction, and loyalty. By integrating people-centric practices, retail operations can simultaneously enhance organizational performance, social responsibility, and positive customer experiences.

Scope

The special issue will solicit research papers that explore the various aspects of people-centric design and practices in the retail sector. We invite contributions that explore people-centric approaches in retail operations and last-mile logistics, including but not limited to the following:

- People-centered design of retail operations and delivery processes
- Workforce well-being, motivation, and retention strategies in the retail supply chains
- Links between employee satisfaction and customer satisfaction, trust, and loyalty
- Tradeoffs between efficiency, employee well-being, and customer experience
- Employee engagement in sustainability initiatives
- Socially responsible last-mile logistics and services
- Human–artificial intelligence (AI) collaboration in retail and logistics: both managers and workers
- The impact of GenAI-driven automation on job design, skills, and workforce development
- Measuring and optimizing social impact alongside operational performance

Papers can use analytical, empirical, experimental, or qualitative methods that align with the general scope of *Service Science*. This special issue highlights the cross-disciplined nature of service science. Papers that fail to demonstrate how integrating social and human considerations can foster both operational excellence and sustainable value creation will not be considered for this special issue.

Submission Process and Timing

All submissions should be submitted via the *Service Science* online submission system: <https://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/serv>. All submissions will be subject to the journal's standard peer review process. Criteria for acceptance include practical impact, originality, contribution, and scientific merit. For submission guidelines, please visit the journal's home page to learn more: <https://pubsonline.informs.org/page/serv/submission-guidelines>.

The estimated timeline of this special issue is as follows:

- Submissions open: March 1, 2026
- Deadline for submission: November 1, 2026
- First-round decisions and feedback: February 1, 2027
- Second-round submission (for invited papers): September 30, 2027

- Final decisions (subject to minor revisions): December 31, 2027

We look forward to receiving your submissions and advancing the state-of-the-art in people-centric retail operations.

References

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- Ton Z (2014) *The Good Jobs Strategy: How the Smartest Companies Invest in Employees to Lower Costs and Boost Profits* (New Harvest, New York).