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Business against Violence: Assessing How Business Impacts Peace

Abstract

Purpose: To advance theory on business in conflict zones (often termed “business for peace”) to enable the categorization of empirical work testing the field’s assertions.

Design/methodology/approach: In this conceptual paper, we present an assessment framework for categorizing research on the peace impacts of business entities, as suggested by Oetzel *et al.* (2009). Our framework allows researchers to make comparisons across methodologies and fields on whether business actions contribute to peace.

Findings: Drawing on peace and conflict research, we propose a three-stage process in response to the presence of violence and its level of intensity, identify applicable research methods to assess the impact of business actions on peace at each of the three stages, and offer suggestions for future research.

Originality: As a societal actor, business has a key role to play in peacemaking. The last decade has seen a proliferation of qualitative research work surrounding this theme. In a seminal work, Oetzel *et al.* (2009) suggested a research framework building on the theories of Fort and Schipani (2004) and suggested five actions that businesses could take to promote peace. The present paper is the first one to respond to that suggestion by proposing a means of categorizing the impacts of business actions.

Keywords: Business for peace; Peace through commerce; business and peace; B4P

The vast majority of the business and management literature tacitly presumes a peaceful operating environment (Costas and Grey 2019)—that is, one in which violence, broadly understood, does not impact business operations. However, organizations of all types find their operating environments threatened by various forms of violence (UNICEF 2019). More than a decade ago, a group of scholars, primarily in the fields of management and business ethics, began publishing on the topic of “business for peace” (“B4P”). The core issue of concern to them was whether, and under what conditions, businesses could enhance peace in the communities in which they operated. In the seminal work of that period, Oetzel *et al.* (2009) built upon the theories of Fort and Schipani (2004) to suggest five ways in which businesses could respond to violent conflict in their operating environment. One major contribution of their paper was to delineate, for the first time, business practices that could be applied to promoting peace at different levels of conflict intensity, largely using the Heidelberg Conflict Barometer (HIK, 2019).

Since then, research on B4P has blossomed into a niche field of its own. Special issues in peer-reviewed journals and edited volumes have followed, as has sustained academic and practitioner focus on the topic. The research conducted since 2009 has exposed the weak—and sometimes completely absent—empirical support for the initial assertions of Fort and Schipani (2004) and Oetzel *et al.* (2009). In particular, scholars noted a disconnect between the business activities proposed in the frameworks and the varying conditions of violence that are present in conflict zones (Miller *et al.* 2019), post-conflict and fragile contexts (Ganson *et al.* 2018), and buffer conditions (Forrer and Katsos 2015).

Research during the past decade has reinforced the broader proposition that businesses can and do engage in actions designed to enhance peace (Mellin 2021). In this article, we

develop a new assessment framework to categorize empirical research on the topic of B4P in three phases of decision making: engagement, selection of options, and measuring effectiveness. In each phase, we incorporate lessons drawn from prior literature to examine under what conditions businesses seek to reduce violence (Mellin 2021), what options are available to them if they choose to do so, and how effective those efforts are likely to be.

Our assessment framework proposes a means by which to categorize the research findings on B4P, to enable practitioners and researchers to draw broader conclusions. It also better incorporates the current state of the peace and conflict studies (PCS) field as well as other social-scientific research on indirect violence.

Our new framework makes five contributions to research and practice. First, we move forward the business and society literature as it relates to peace by building on the qualitative literature—which has thus far been based largely on the assertions of Oetzel *et al.* (2009) and Fort and Schipani (2004)—and providing a means for scholars to test them quantitatively in new areas of research. This is an important step for both the accumulation of data and the testing of theory. By organizing the new assessment framework to focus on “business fighting violence,” we clarify a lingering ambiguity about the influence business can have in promoting peace by reducing conflict. Fort and Schipani’s (2004) framework spoke of promoting peace, whereas Oetzel *et al.* (2009) used the language of reducing conflict. As both frameworks deferred to Galtung’s (1986) definition of peace as “the absence of violence,” this might appear to be a distinction without a difference. However, by embedding the linkage between reducing violence and promoting peace, Oetzel *et al.* (2009) created tension around the implicit assertion that any given act of violence reduction by business in fact promotes peace at a specific conflict locale and at a given time. As a result, some peace and conflict scholars have credited businesses with

making meaningful efforts to promote peace when their actions addressed peripheral and ephemeral aspects of violence. In contrast, our new assessment framework severs that link by focusing on the role business can play in reducing violence of different types and circumstances. This approach also reduces the ambiguity over whether businesses are reducing violence or conflict; the framework is focused on businesses reducing violence in conflict settings.

Second, by constructing a framework tied to measurements, researchers can test any new assertions that might emerge from examples of B4P. We hope that this assessment framework will facilitate the quantitative assessment of existing theories and allow the field to move beyond anecdotal evidence, which has been the predominant mode of analysis (noted below in our literature review). We do this without passing judgment on the existing assertions of Oetzel *et al.* (2009); such judgment would be premature given that our paper proposes only a means of testing the assertions.

Third, we give practitioners a means to analyze potential and ongoing projects and programs by private-sector actors through a peace lens. The assessment framework proposed here has verifiable criteria that are subject to empirical analysis. “Peace” is a notoriously difficult concept to measure (Anderson 2004). However, violence, in both its direct and indirect forms, is easier to define with associated metrics developed by scholars in PCS, economics, and political science. The framework proposed here creates opportunities to establish a body of empirical research, which is currently absent from B4P.

Fourth, our framework helps to align current management and business studies on “business fighting violence” with the PCS literature. The latter field has developed strong frameworks over the past 40 years that have guided the development of empirically tested research questions, achieving robust results. However, the research remains underdeveloped in

some areas, particularly with regard to private-sector involvement in peacekeeping and peacebuilding processes (Miklian and Schouten 2019). Furthermore, that underdevelopment pales in comparison to the lack of engagement by the management literature with the PCS literature (Miklian *et al.* 2016). Our assessment framework seeks to bridge that gap.

Fifth, our framework considers contextual factors that are relevant at each of the three decision-making decision phases of business actions against violence. In the first phase, the literature indicates a key decision point regarding whether the company should engage in the fight against violence at all. Business characteristics such as industry sector, size, presence, headquarters location, the makeup of the top management team, organizational culture, and reputation substantially influence on whether a company will try to oppose violence in each situation. Country characteristics also impact decisions in the first phase, as do the geographic and cultural proximity between the home and host countries, the uniqueness of the business's operations and opportunities, and market size. In the second phase, various options are available to fight violence, but businesses are limited by a variety of factors, including business and country characteristics and the nature of the violence being targeted. These factors affect whether certain business actions advancing peacekeeping and/or peacebuilding will be effective in specific situations. In the third phase, the effectiveness of the business's actions against violence are further affected by both the factors cited above and the relationships and coordination the business has with other actors such as civil society organizations (CSOs), international organizations, home and host governments, conflict actors, and other businesses.

In addition to proposing a new assessment framework, this paper presents several research propositions that can be tested empirically by other researchers. Findings from such empirical research will provide scholarly insights on how and when businesses can take

purposeful and consequential actions that fight violence. These research findings in turn will inform practitioners, governments, international organizations, and CSOs that seek to engage with business in fighting against violence.

Prior Research on “B4P”

Two allied frameworks have set forth the business practices most salient in promoting peace and reducing conflict and provided the leading guidance for B4P scholars. Fort and Schipani (2004) proposed four areas where business could contribute toward peace: (1) fostering economic development, (2) adopting principles of external evaluation, (3) nourishing a sense of community, and (4) utilizing “track-two” diplomacy (explained below). Building on that earlier work, Oetzel *et al.* (2009) examined the literature on business’s role in promoting peace and proposed a slightly modified framework. They expanded Fort and Schipani’s (2004) framework from four to five actions—with engaging in conflict-sensitive practices and risk assessment as the fifth area—and suggested that the choice of actions should be mediated by the level of conflict intensity—and offered the following components of their framework: (1) economic development, (2) track-two diplomacy, (3) a sense of community, (4) principles of external valuation, and (5) conflict sensitive practices/risk assessment.

Oetzel *et al.* (2009) advanced the original framework in several ways. First, they offered initial evidence from contemporary research supporting Fort and Schipani’s (2004) framework and each of the original four proposed business actions. Second, their addition of a fifth action highlighted firms’ choices about conducting firm operations and called on firms to recognize the potential implications of their own actions in inadvertently making conflict worse. Third, they presented the range of potential business actions as a function of the level of conflict intensity, placing the topic in a different light than Fort and Schipani (2004), who had framed their work

simply around business's role in fostering peace. This framing of B4P actions in terms of what a business can accomplish based on the level of conflict in a given country has been followed by subsequent researchers (Miklian *et al.* 2016). As research on B4P has expanded, more research findings have been generated that align with the five assertions (Miklian and Schouten 2019; Schouten and Miklian 2020), adding a self-reinforcing validity to its scholarly standing. Below, we review the research guided by this framework over the past decade.

We know that, by design, business generates economic development in the societies where it operates. Economic development is simply what businesses do naturally. For instance, Milliken *et al.* (2015) cited the employment of local workers as a tangible economic benefit. By providing such basic inputs in conflict-sensitive regions, business helps to strengthen the local economy and reduce the prospect of violent conflicts. Multinational companies also regularly look to developing economies as a source of greater global growth (Anderson *et al.* 2010). By entering these locations, businesses can achieve substantial growth rates while, at the same time, reducing the risk of violence.

This first contention—that businesses can promote peace simply by operating in conflict-ridden areas—has been the one most promoted outside the B4P literature (Sato and Scudder 2017; Shoji 2019) and the one that has come under the most criticism from within it (Miklian 2019; Miklian *et al.* 2016). In particular, scholars have noted that the unevenness of beneficiaries from economic development in conflict zones often exacerbates existing tensions (Canson 2019; Miller *et al.* 2019). Reduced economic activity has been shown to increase the likelihood of violence (Blomberg and Hess 2002), whereas increased economic activity can keep violence from recurring after it has stopped (Collier 2007; Forrer and Katsos 2015). But the studies thus far have largely demonstrated only correlations, not causation. A similar problem has emerged in

the literature on trade and peace (Davenport and Low 2014; Lehmann and Lehmann 2010; McDonald 2004).

Second, business can engage in track-two diplomacy, which is usually defined as informal, nonbinding negotiations intended to reduce conflict through face-to-face meetings (Westermann-Behaylo *et al.* 2015) but can also refer to any situation in which corporations act as brokers between sides in a conflict (Boulton 2011). Of the five assertions, this one entails the highest level of explicit engagement by business in the political process. Within track-two diplomacy, multiple levels of engagement are possible. Business can engage in conflict resolution through NGO partnerships that help to alleviate the causes of conflict (Lenfant 2016; Kolk and Lenfant 2015) and direct informal negotiations between the two sides engaged in active conflict (Lieberfeld 2002; Westermann-Behaylo 2009). Katsos and Alkafaji (2019) have suggested that, in active conflict zones, track-two diplomacy might sometimes actually worsen violence.

Third, business can contribute to a sense of community and enhance social cohesion. This is especially important in reducing operational risks in conflict-sensitive regions (Getz and Oetzel 2009; Oetzel *et al.* 2007; Oetzel and Getz 2012). Milliken *et al.* (2015) also note the importance of incorporating employees' voice into the management of companies in conflict-affected regions as an important way to enhance the sense of community.

Fourth, business can promote the rule of law by adopting what the literature terms "principles of external valuation" (Oetzel *et al.* 2009). Companies can advance the rule of law within a country by committing themselves to more stable international norms. These third and fourth assertions in the B4P literature differ from the first, second, and fifth in that they are both more difficult to test empirically.

Fifth, business sometimes unintentionally generates more conflict in a region through missteps, which can be avoided by better understanding the consequences of business policies and practices in local contexts. The work of such scholars as Miklian, Schouten, and Ganson is particularly convincing on this point (Ganson 2013, 2014; Miklian 2014; Miklian and Schouten 2013; Schouten and Miklian 2020). In a summary of six rigorous qualitative studies of B4P projects, Miklian and Schouten (2019) observed three ways in which businesses that intend to enhance peace can have the opposite impact. First, because the surrounding context is crucial in the development of any B4P project and because each conflict context is unique, it is difficult, if not impossible, to craft a framework that would apply in all contexts. Second, the benefits of B4P projects, when examined at the societal level, usually accrue to conflict actors themselves, not to the local people whom the projects purport to benefit. Third, access to financial and other resources in conflict contexts are often funneled through powerful players who are themselves drivers of the conflict.

The accumulated body of research has advanced the legitimacy of the framework established by Oetzel *et al.* (2009) framework, but the robust findings on the potential negative impacts of well-intended business efforts suggest that a new framework is warranted. Two main reasons justify a reconsideration of how studies of B4P construct their research questions and what conceptual lenses are employed in the search for answers.

First, Oetzel *et al.* (2009) relied on the intensity of conflict as the main mediator of which business actions will reduce conflict. Utilizing the level of conflict intensity as the sole dimension for framing the efficacy of B4P actions is very different from asking, as Fort and Schipani (2004) did, what businesses can do to promote peace. Given the absence of an agreed-upon definition in the social-science literature regarding the relationship between peace and

conflict, there may be an alternative way to recast the nexus between business and peacemaking to provide a more robust research framework that would support more empirical and data-driven research questions.

Second, research findings on conflict and peace beyond the boundaries of the conventional B4P literature challenge the reliability of the five prescriptions discussed above. Despite the unique characteristics of specific conflicts, scholars have noted similarities among them. Since the end of the Cold War, most conflicts have been civil wars (Azam and Mesnard 2001; Elbadawi and Sambanis 2002; Wani 2011). Countries experiencing violent conflict share similarities, among which the most prominent are political and economic uncertainty, disrespect for the rule of law, depleted physical and human capital, a damaged financial system, and heavy reliance on foreign (non-military) investment (Elbadawi, *et al.* 2007; Forrer and Katsos 2015; Mills and Fan 2006; Santos 2003). Conflict zones suffer from institutional deficiencies that lead to corruption, degradation of social trust, and more violence (Rothstein and Eek 2009). They are regularly trapped by their own institutional histories in a vicious cycle of violence and its associated maladies (Acemoglu and Robinson 2008, 2012).

Given these factors, we propose an alternative framework below by which to study what businesses can do to promote peace based on contextual factors. First, the literature supports the use of a three-stage business decision-making process to investigate when and how businesses can act effectively to advance peace. Second, it supports the use of the variables (*supra*) that have been shown to influence decisions made during each of the three phases. It also supports the five research propositions that we propose as a focus of future empirical research, framed by re-focused research inquiries on what businesses can do to fight violence (see below).

The Missing Link: Peace as “the Absence of Direct and Indirect Violence”

To construct the framework, we start by considering definitions of “peace” and “violence”. Initial attempts were made within PCS to categorize peace beyond definitions of direct (actor-oriented) violence and encompass indirect (structural) violence (Galtung 1969, 1974), or ways in which social structures lead to avoidable loss of life. Within PCS, however, the latter concept ran into trouble, mainly because the definition was overly broad (Boulding 1977) and too ideological (Rummel 1976). Other social sciences (Gleditsch *et al.* 2014) such as anthropology, health policy (Farmer *et al.* 2004), and criminology, however, continue to use the term “peace” to encapsulate this broader idea. One reason for this is the ease with which direct violence can be measured as compared to either indirect violence or peace (IEP 2021). As a result, “peace” defined by its negative attribute exclusively—that is, by a lack of direct violence—remains the dominant frame of reference for PCS (Gleditsch *et al.* 2014).

Direct violence is visible, and therefore easier to measure, through deaths, injuries, property damage, and imprisonments. Direct violence is regularly measured by a variety of institutions (UCDP 2013; HIIK 2019; IEP 2021). Indirect (structural) violence was once defined as “any avoidable limitation on human potential,” but now is usually described in terms of systemic exploitation, social injustice, and inequality. Though more difficult to measure, economic and political science studies have made advances in assessing them.

Each type of violence can be mitigated through different methods. In the fight against direct violence, “separation” methods are used. The idea of “peacekeeping” is derived from this concept, according to which keeping conflict actors separated physically and socially. Both types of separation can be achieved through distancing techniques such as geographically separating two conflict actors or placing some form of impediment between them. In contrast, “peacebuilding” is achieved by associative methods such as “consciousness formation,”

institution building, confronting oppressors, fighting against dominance by one party, and self-reliance (Galtung 1969, 1996).

The PCS literature has developed a strong typology of direct violence that is largely ignored within the management literature. Meanwhile, that field has moved away from referring to indirect or structural violence, as noted above, just as other social science fields have moved toward incorporating it. In sociology (Leatherman and Thomas 2009), anthropology (Benson 2008; Farmer *et al.* 2004), health policy (Miller and Rasmussen 2010), and criminology (Carrabine *et al.* 2020) in particular, the concept of structural violence has generated an abundance of research. This shift is largely due to initial work by Farmer (1996), but also to the persistent findings in clinical medicine (Quesada *et al.* 2011; Farmer *et al.* 2019) that structural violence is observable (Hahn and Inhorn 2009; Bourgois *et al.* 2004), quantifiable (Karandinos and Bourgois 2019), and changeable based on policy and cultural shifts (Rylko-Bauer and Farmer 2016; Napier *et al.* 2014).

To better capture the nature of B4P, we have created our framework's typology with a focus on negative peace—that is, the absence of violence—while incorporating both the narrower concept of direct violence used in PCS and the broader notion of structural violence prevalent in other social sciences. Our typology distinguishes between direct and indirect violence and provides measures for each one. In the next section, we show how businesses can use this typology to assess their own impacts on violence (and peace) and how researchers can categorize the findings of empirical research.

Direct violence is physical violence directed at one or more individuals. Indirect violence is any action that avoidably limits human potential—an admittedly broad definition that encompasses three subcategories: exploitation, social injustice, and inequality. Other scholars

have developed detailed metrics for measuring direct violence, in particular the direct violence associated with political conflicts. These metrics assess the means, consequences, type, and item of each conflict.

Direct violence

Means. The means of violence are relatively easy to measure and relate to how conflict actors might physically injure or kill one another. Military hardware (e.g. guns, bombs, missiles) fall within this category. The number of military personnel assigned is another means. Some businesses are directly involved in manufacturing and selling means of violence. Others are directly involved in the supply and training of military personnel. Among those companies, many refuse to sell their means of violence in conflict zones, preferring (perhaps ironically) to supply the deadliest means of violence to the most peaceful countries, thus the term “defense companies”.

For businesses not involved in the supply of the means of violence, a related question concerns whether profits from the business are used to supply the means of violence, with corruption as a key problem. For example, if a retail business pays bribes to a violent actor who uses that money to purchase weapons, is the business supplying the means of violence and thereby increasing the chances of direct violence? What if the transfer takes the form of legally required taxes instead of corrupt payments?

Our measure of the means of direct violence does not differentiate between these two types of payments. It simply asks the company to measure how much it is contributing to the means of violence. This question obviously presents challenges to companies doing business in countries such as the United States, which has among the largest military expenditures. A better test for a business might be “How much of what I am paying to this government is being spent

on violence?” To answer that question, a company can first assess how much of its contributions supply conflict actors with revenue, then how much of that conflict actor’s expenditure is related to the means of violence (e.g. using military spending as a percentage of government spending as a proxy). This approach would flash warning signs for countries as diverse as Belarus (where 31.8% of all government spending in 2019 was for military purposes), Singapore (21.4%), and Armenia (19.8%). Two of those three countries were overwhelmed by violent conflict in 2020.

Types. There are varying types of direct violence. Business is most likely to contend with crime and civil wars, as these are the most prevalent types. The relationship between the two types varies widely by geography; Central America and the Caribbean having particularly high rates of direct violence due to crime, whereas parts of the Middle East and sub-Saharan Africa suffer considerable direct violence due to political conflict (HIIK, 2019). Most political conflicts are civil wars (intrastate violence), but interstate and transnational forms of violence are also recurring phenomena.

Issues. What issues are motivating actors to engage in direct violence? Within political conflicts, eight subtypes can appear alone or in combination with one another: system/ideology, national power, secession, decolonization, subnational predominance, resources, territory, and international power. Direct violence is rarely motivated by just one issue; rather, they often occur together. This is especially true for direct violence related to resources, which usually occurs not simply because the resources are an end in themselves, but because they provide a way to fund the means of conflict. There was a longstanding dispute in academia over whether greed or grievance sustains internal political conflicts (Collier and Hoeffler 2004; Collier *et al*, 2009; Keen, 2012). Eventually, economic analyses showed that the ability to continue financing the

means of direct violence is the main (but not the only) factor sustaining direct violence over long periods of time.

If direct violence includes a dispute over resources, a business is particularly at risk of making the violence worse by its involvement. This finding connects non-defense industries much more closely to the means of direct violence. Since we know that greed generally sustains violent political conflicts, convenient financing to a conflict actor allows for the continuation of violence. Some companies learned this lesson painfully in Sierra Leone and Liberia, where companies such as Firestone helped provide tax payments to Charles Taylor. Taylor was eventually convicted of war crimes and crimes against humanity, which he admitted under oath would not have been possible without the funds supplied by large multinational companies like Firestone.

Consequences. Having the means to commit direct violence is not the same as using those means. The consequences of direct violence provide a measure of violence that has physical impact on human lives and property. This information is measured in terms of the number of fatalities, injuries, and displaced persons, among the most common data points tracked by peace scholars, governments, and intergovernmental organizations. Another important consequence of direct violence is the value of property destroyed, which can also be calculated though with more difficulty (Allianz, 2020).

For a business, the consequences of direct violence are the factor that most frequently guides actions. However, using consequences alone as a guide is severely limiting since the consequences cannot be undone once they have occurred and been observed. Nevertheless, examining consequences along with the other factors related to direct violence can be useful,

such as in determining whether the consequences have declined sufficiently to justify entry or reentry into a market.

Operationalizing responses to direct violence. Two components are involved in a business response to direct violence: assessment of the existing contribution to direct violence and minimizing that contribution. Although this process requires some introspection by the business, much of the needed information is available in public databases published by such organizations as the World Bank, the Heidelberg Institute, and the Institute for Economics and Peace. Operationalizing peace impacts is critical so that peacemaking is not relegated to a “bonus” activity in the philanthropic category. This unfortunate arrangement is particularly common in conflict contexts where a large multinational company may do great harm through its operations yet “peace-washes” its operations through philanthropy styled as corporate social responsibility (CSR) to make it appear as if the company is enhancing peace (Schouten 2013; Lenfant and van Cranenburg 2017).

As noted above, the consequences of direct violence are normally the main driver of a business’s response. This is a reactive approach that will likely cause the business substantial financial and reputational harm. A proactive approach, in contrast, would examine all four factors discussed above. In assessing its existing contribution to direct violence in each country, a business must start by considering whether it is supporting the means of direct violence. Next, the business must assess what type of direct violence is taking place, because the type of violence impacts whether the business’s activity is contributing to violence or to peace. If the violence is due to a high crime rate, that is largely the result of an ineffective state, and tax payments to bolster that state may have a net positive impact. But if it is due to political conflict resulting from for instance the state’s violations of human rights, tax payments may have the

opposite effect. Third, the business must consider what issues are causing the violence. The causes of direct violence can be difficult to disentangle from the root causes of indirect or structural violence (see below) and from each other. The key question for a business at this stage is which side of the disputed issues its operations are supporting and whether that support is facilitating or precluding peace.

This new theoretical framework addresses one of the most widely criticized aspects of the current theory, which views economic development as having a net positive impact on peace if and only if it reduces horizontal inequality and other antecedents to conflict (Hillesund *et al.* 2018; Oetzel and Miklian 2017). Only when a business examines its violence impacts through the four-part typology presented above can it clearly perceive the impacts of economic development and economic opportunity in producing either peace or violence, depending upon the context. For instance, in areas with high crime caused by drug violence, legal business activity could promote peace by providing more and better economic opportunities for the most vulnerable. Where ideology is the core driver of violence, however, providing economic opportunities for one side and not the other could motivate substantial violence against the group receiving the opportunities. This is not a new observation; it is the main criticism of current attempts to justify business activity as an agent of peace. Our new framework allows businesses (and scholars) to identify more accurately under what circumstances a business will most likely make a net positive or negative contribution to peace.

Indirect Violence

Also known as structural violence, indirect violence is more difficult to measure, but is just as important for businesses trying to reduce their overall impact on violence, for two reasons. First, indirect violence leads to many more deaths than direct violence (Lee 2016;

Kohler and Alcock 1976; Baron *et al.* 2019). Second, whereas a business will probably not have a large impact on direct violence unless it is involved in supplying the means of violence, it can play a major role in fighting against (or propping up) the components of structural violence: exploitation, social injustice, and inequality.

A standard measure to determine whether a society is structurally violent against a group (or groups) is to borrow calculations from the fields of health policy and economics that examine the deviation of health outcomes among social groups within a country from the “natural upper limit”, i.e., globally expected life expectancy, of 78 years of age¹. Simply detecting that structural violence is taking place against a given social group is the first step in determining what a business can do to alleviate the problem under its influence. This matter becomes particularly complex in large countries such as the United States (which we use as an example below) that have a wide variety of social groups. Four categories of social groupings that are widely used to identify which groups do not enjoy their full natural life expectancy are gender, place, income (typically by quartile), and race or ethnicity.

The natural upper limit can provide a basis for examining data from around the world. However, it seems equally valid (and this has been done in the health economics context) to instead use the average life expectancy in each country as that country’s baseline. In the United States, the average life expectancy is currently 78, thus obviating the need to look at the natural upper limit and the average life expectancy separately. Among the various U.S. groupings based on gender, place, income quartile, and race/ethnicity, men, African-Americans, Native Americans, and residents of twelve states fall short of average life expectancy. If Mississippi, the

¹ This limit, originally proposed by Kohler and Alcock (1976), is substituted with a country’s average life expectancy when higher than 78.

lowest-ranked state in terms of life expectancy, were a country, it would rank 122nd in the world in life expectancy.

Based on this information, one can deduce that businesses seeking to reduce structural violence in the United States should focus on the factors that leave these groups potentially vulnerable to societal pressures. We do not mean to imply that business should not pursue programs or policies that support other social groups. Instead, this process would indicate which social groups are facing such severe exploitation, social injustice, and inequality that their lives are being cut short systematically, and thus which social groups should be the focus of efforts to reduce indirect violence.

Constructing a “Business Fights Violence” Framework

In examining the existing literature, we see that the questions that emerge for businesses combating violence fall broadly into three, largely chronological phases. We believe that this method both provides a better conceptualization and better reflects the experiences of the types of choices faced by firms in conflict contexts. The identification of categories associated with the three different phases will also allow empirical researchers to develop clear ways to measure whether these propositions are true. These categorizations are not, however, meant to imply causation; rather, they are designed to assist the process of summarizing empirical research, both to allow for communication across disciplines within the field of B4P and to enable better practitioner use. A summary of all three phases appears in Figure 1.

---Insert Figure 1---

Phase One: The Decision to Engage or Withdraw

The initial decision by a business to either engage in or withdraw was mentioned in early works on B4P (Nelson 2000; Fort and Schipani 2004; Oetzel *et al.* 2009). Based on literature across multiple disciplines, we theorize that the characteristics of firms and the country where violence is occurring determine whether a firm will engage in attempting to fight violence. Some industries have a greater capacity to engage against violence than others. For instance, the extractive industry—oil, natural gas, and mining—relies on access to deposits of the resources they are extracting. Companies cannot choose where these resources are located, but only which resources to extract (Feil *et al.* 2008; McKenna 2016; Wegenast 2016). This fact makes their ability to disengage from a country in which violence is occurring relatively limited. Their situation is further exacerbated by the high costs of investment to commence extraction operations and by the relatively longer investment return period. Other industries, such as software development, can relocate much more easily (Commander *et al.* 2008; Trajtenberg and Shalem 2011).

A firm's size may also impact its decision whether to engage in efforts to fight violence. Larger companies have options available to them that small companies lack: greater economic and social impact, more employees, and often greater local influence (Blomstrom and Kokko 1998; Dunning and Narula 2004; Santangelo 2009). Small and medium-size firms may have a larger impact collectively, but are much more limited in their ability to act individually (Joseph *et al.* 2020). This limitation also makes them much more subject to external conditions and gives them less autonomy about their decision whether to engage against violence.

Another relevant factor is the importance of the country to the firm's business operations. If a country experiencing violence is a major market for a firm, the company may be more likely

to engage against violence, in an effort to keep the associated costs of doing business as low as possible, as violence increases costs for firms (Hiatt and Sine 2014).

Usually, a combination of characteristics, not any one characteristic in isolation, will determine a firm's decision whether to engage against violence. Changing any factor will affect a company's ability or willingness to engage against violence. A small, local company in a violent country might have less ability or willingness to disengage than a small foreign company with a large local presence. Future studies should thus test the impact of these various factors.

Case studies in the B4P field have noted that the characteristics of the country can severely limit a business's ability to withdraw from a conflict zone. Certain locations are critical to companies, regardless of the political situation. For any global supply chain that relies on shipping, for instance, the Suez and Panama Canals and the Strait of Malaga are the most critical transit junctions on the planet (Wilmsmeier *et al.* 2020). Their importance has often been a cause of violence, such as in the 1956 Suez crisis. The strategic location of these waterways and the immense expense of going around instead of through them make withdrawal from these shipping lanes a very costly option. Ongoing violence through the 2010s in Egypt greatly impacted tourism in the country but had little impact on trade through the Suez Canal (Matta *et al.* 2019; Wendt 2019).

Another country-related characteristic that might impact a firm's decision is market size. In spite of the direct and indirect violence taking place in China, the Chinese market is too large for global retail brands to ignore (Breinbauer 2019; Kang *et al.* 2009; Luo and Park 2001). Engagement against violence in this context could result in loss of market access, as the reaction of the Chinese government to business supporters of the 2019 Hong Kong protests indicates (Meyer 2020; Purbrick 2019; Vukovich 2020).

Finally, the institutional environment will likely impact whether a business decides to engage against violence. Public and private institutions have come under increasing scrutiny as a major element in economic and political environments and the businesses that they foster (Acs *et al.* 2008; Cantwell *et al.* 2010; Field *et al.* 2010; Henisz and Swaminathan 2008).

Again, no single characteristic will usually be determinative; rather, the full set of characteristics taken together will best explain a firm's decision. For example, many companies continue to operate in and extract resources from the DRC, but others have decided against using any cobalt from DRC. This case reminds us that the characteristics of both the country and the firm will interact in influencing a decision whether to engage.

Phase Two: Options Available to Fight Violence

Considerable research has considered the methods by which business can enhance peace, confirming that specific types of business activities can be effective in the fight against violence. Yet disputes remain over which activities are effective in which contexts and the types of effects those activities will have on peacemaking. In this section, we first detail the methods available to business generally and then discuss which ones are suitable depending on the characteristics of the direct and indirect violence taking place.

There is ample evidence that business activities that support local governance and the rule of law, engage in track-two diplomacy, encourage social cohesion, and promote economic development can each, given the right contextual factors (as described in the following subsection) counter violence effectively. These were the four business activities identified by Fort and Schipani (2004) and adopted by Oetzel *et al.* (2009). There is no evidence to suggest that engaging in conflict risk assessment, the fifth component added by Oetzel *et al.* (2009), helps business fight violence. Though conflict risk assessment has been found to help companies

make business decisions related to their operations in conflict zones, it is unclear that this process results in any reduction in violence.

Two additional business practices have been repeatedly found to reduce violence: capacity building and partnerships. Oetzel *et al.* (2009) mentioned capacity building as a subpart of their economic development component. One possible explanation for the distinction is that capacity building may not necessarily be related to the economic activity of the firm. Second, partnerships, especially with local NGOs, were largely absent from the original frameworks, but subsequent research, beginning with the work of Kolk and Lenfant (2010), has indicated the value of partnerships in enhancing peace (Baur and Palazzo 2011; Guáqueta 2009; Kolk and Lenfant 2012, 2013).

In high-intensity resource conflicts, there is at least some evidence that five of these six ways (excluding conflict risk assessment) in which businesses can impact peace are applicable. This finding is important for two reasons. First, resource conflicts are rarely the sole conflict issues (HIIK 2019), yet they are present in many conflicts globally, because natural resources typically enable continued financing of violent conflicts. Second, businesses are often present in conflict zones because of the availability of resources. Companies that extract natural resources—oil, natural gas, water, minerals—are particularly well-versed in peace and human rights issues because natural resources are a component in so many conflicts around the world and the businesses cannot choose where those resources are located. Yet extractive industries often make catastrophic mistakes in trying to enhance peace through their practices.

Regarding conflict issues other than resources, there are fewer ways to advocate for peace, and the approaches do not necessarily overlap. Conflicts over systems and ideologies

offer only three ways for businesses to enhance peace that overlap with resource conflicts: economic development, social cohesion, and capacity building.

To recap, we have identified six major ways in which businesses can enhance peace: social cohesion, partnerships, capacity building, economic development, track-two diplomacy, and governance (including due diligence, supporting the rule of law, and risk assessment). Which of these means are appropriate in each situation, based on the level of violence present and the issues driving the conflict?

To answer this question, we introduce a final consideration not mentioned in earlier B4P research: the role that indirect violence plays in determining which methods are available to firms. Recent work on intergroup conflict and the role that business can play (Joseph *et al.* 2020; Katsos and AlKafaji 2019) indicates that even in locations without direct violence, firms are choosing to engage against indirect violence.

Phase Three: Assessing the Effectiveness of the Available Options

One of the most consequential debates in the B4P space has concerned the effectiveness of various methods of producing peace. Numerous studies have called into question the efficacy of each of the five prescriptions of the framework created by Oetzel *et al.* (Ganson 2019; Ganson, *et al.* 2018; Miller *et al.* 2019). Much of this criticism has come from studies that are deeply rooted in practice (Miller *et al.* 2019) and consider the totality of private-sector activity in conflict zones, not just those activities labeled as promoting peace. At best, the totality of private-sector activity is of mixed benefit (Miklian 2019); at worst, the private sector may pose a major obstacle to peace (Miklian *et al.* 2016).

The effectiveness of options available for businesses to fight violence should be considered from two different perspectives: peacebuilding, which is associated with fighting

against indirect violence, and peacemaking, which involves eliminating direct violence by bringing hostile parties to an agreement (Reychler 2010; Boutros-Ghali 1992). Peacemaking's main goal is to ensure survival and freedom for all affected people by ending violence through diplomacy—in contrast to peacekeeping, which is generally performed by UN and international actors to prevent further violence. The main outcomes of peacebuilding are identity and welfare. Furthermore, effective efforts to combat violence can occur at different societal levels—locally, regionally, nationally, or internationally—and between different types of conflict actors, i.e., either at the interpersonal or intergroup level.

As discussed previously, business is likely to have a very limited peacemaking role in most conflicts. Our framework acknowledges this. We leave open the possibility of business playing a limited role in peacekeeping, largely due to the anecdotal evidence on business engagement with track-two diplomacy in resolving active conflicts, such as in Northern Ireland and South Africa.

CSOs, non-governmental organizations, host governments, home governments, international organizations, and businesses may each participate in fighting against violence, or in some cases they may be conflict actors themselves. We propose that a firm's relationship with and its degree of coordination with these other actors will have a direct impact on the effectiveness of the method chosen in the fight against violence.

Future Research

The existing literature on B4P has been based largely on the early work of Fort and Schipani (2004) and Oetzel *et al.* (2009) who provided initial theorizing and assertions as to how businesses might enhance peace. In the empirical work completed since then, we find more questions than answers. The questions we have identified when discussion the five propositions

of Oetzel *et al.* continue to arise. The propositions address most of the major issues that have arisen from the research to date. In addition, these propositions refocus research methods to consider these issues in terms of “fighting against violence” rather than the much more elusive goal of “promoting peace.”

From these propositions, a clear research plan emerges. Scholars must first develop robust quantitative and qualitative methods that are most appropriate to test each proposition. We should not assume that the same methods will be appropriate for each proposition. For example, surveys designed to elicit the reasoning of companies that have decided to engage against violence would be appropriate for the Phase One propositions but are less than ideal for the propositions in Phases Two and Three.

Considering all three phases, we theorize that whether a company engages to fight violence will be based on characteristics of both the firm and the country. In turn, the means chosen to fight against violence are further affected by the type and level of violence. Finally, the effectiveness of the means used to fight against violence, whether in pursuit of peacekeeping or peacebuilding, will be further influenced by the relationships a firm has with other relevant actors and the coordination of the firm’s efforts with these other actors.

We believe this paper will help researchers from other disciplines to look more closely at each proposition and refine the propositions further. Although we have captured the most salient literature in business, scholars from political science, economics, and PCS can also make important contributions in testing the five propositions and refining them based on their findings. Contributions from disciplines that have strong empirical research traditions will be especially valuable in this regard.

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