



Technische
Universität
Braunschweig

AΨS
Arbeits-,
Organisations- und
Sozialpsychologie



Arbeitswelt in der Circular Economy

REWIMET-Symposium Ressourcenmanagement 2025

Univ.-Prof. Dr. Simone Kauffeld | TU Braunschweig | 14.08.2025

Gefördert durch:



Bundesministerium
für Forschung, Technologie
und Raumfahrt

BETREUT VOM



PTKA
Projekträger Karlsruhe
Karlsruher Institut für Technologie



NFF
NIEDERSÄCHSISCHES
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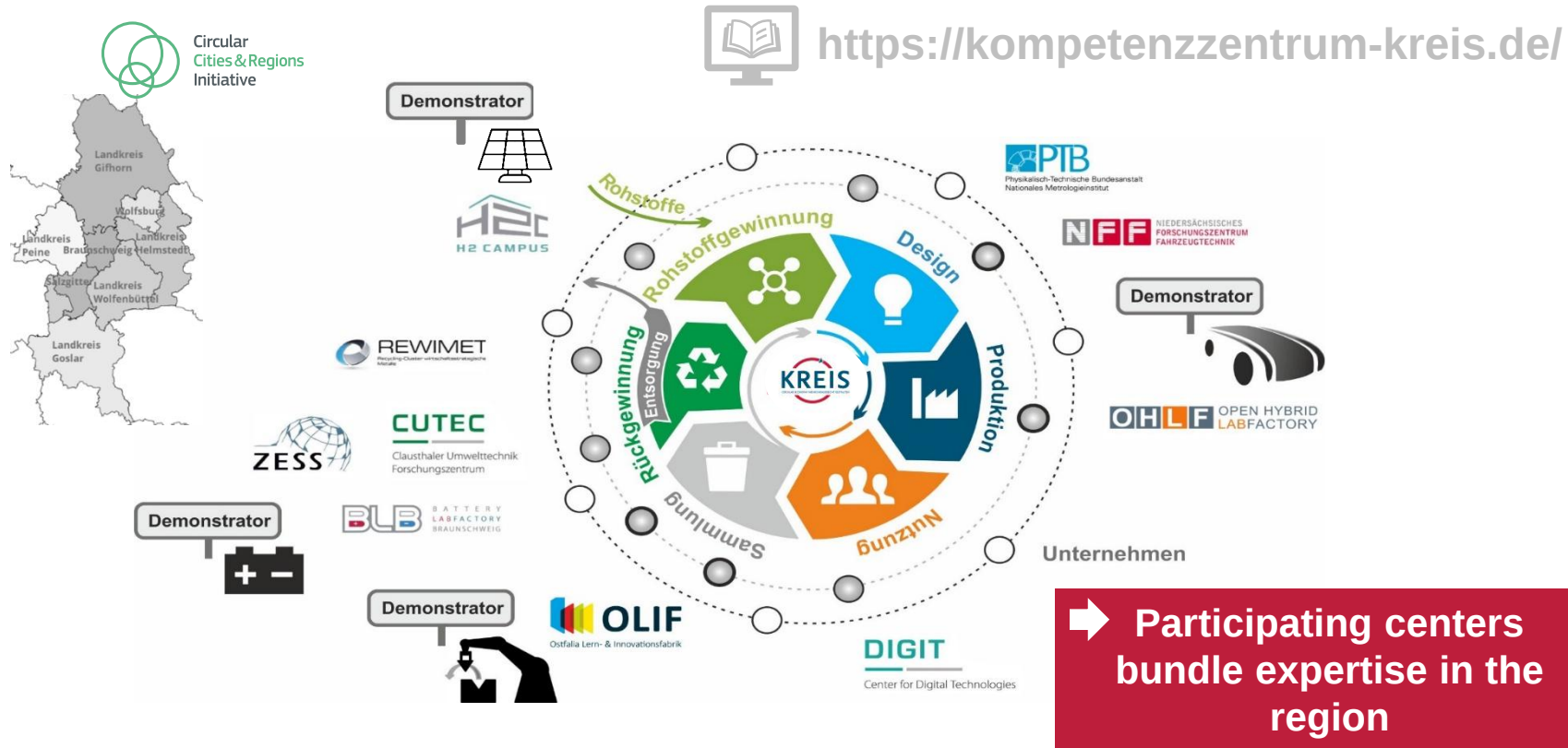
Agenda

1. What is KREIS?
2. Current Research Topics
 - i. Networks
 - ii. Employer Attractiveness
 - iii. Sustainability
3. Selected Tools & Interventions
 - i. Veränderungs-Macher*in
 - ii. GesA: The App for Healthy Work
4. Future Research & Events

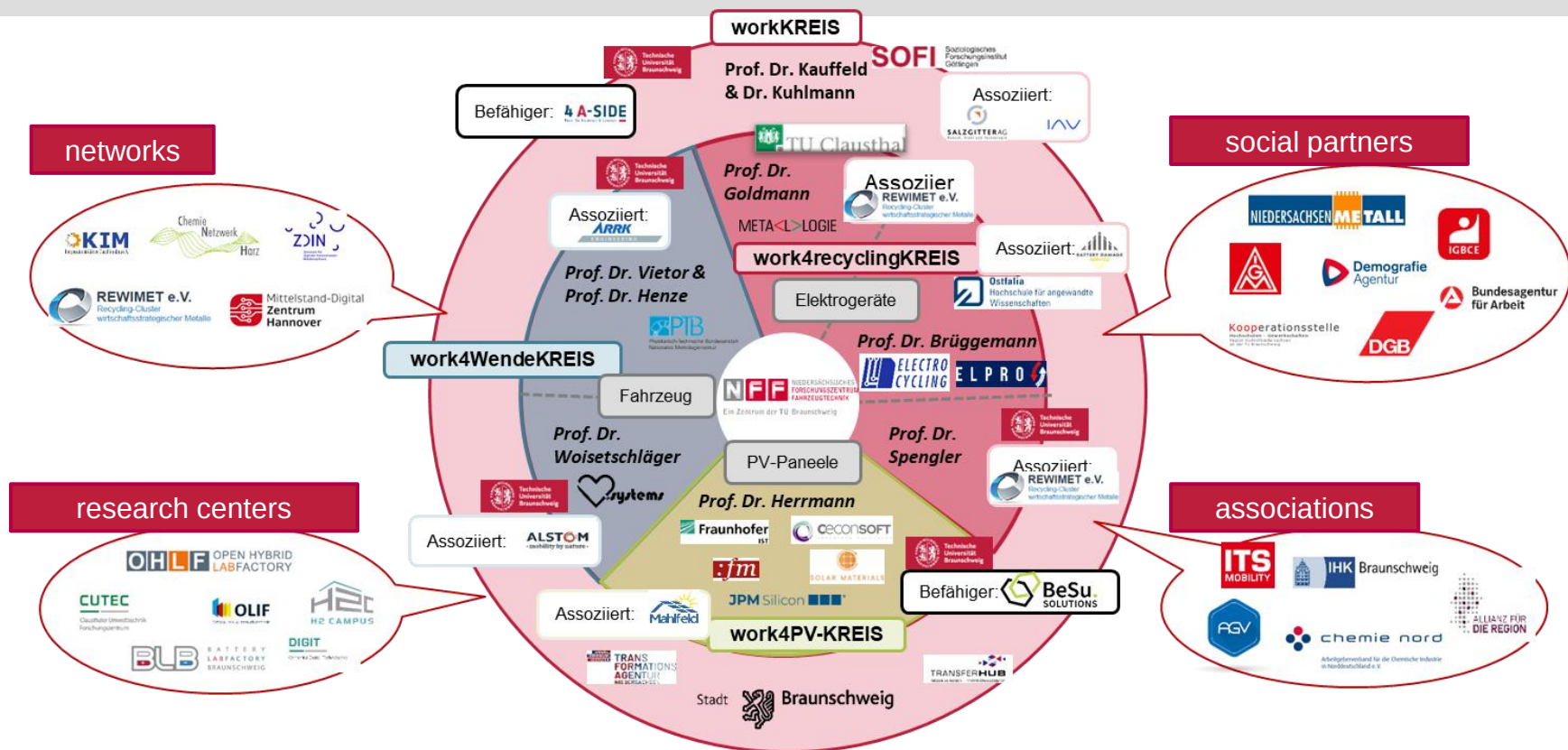
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Expertise in the Region of Lower-Saxony “SüdOstNiedersachsen“ (SON)



KREIS Consortium



KREIS (€10M, 42 partners, 5-yr duration: July 2023 – June 2028)

Network manager

Univ.-Prof. Simone Kauffeld



Professorship for the
Institute of Industrial/
Organisational and
Social Psychology (AOS)
TU Braunschweig
s.kauffeld@tu-braunschweig.de

ResearchGate:



LinkedIn:



Research focus of the working groups (ArbeitsKREISe)

work4recycling

- Development and testing of a digital occupational safety assistant; workshops on usability, safety, and automation in recycling processes
- Setup of a robotics demonstrator (delta robot, camera system, gripper) and training of recognition systems; material flow analysis and technology/capacity planning carried out

2025: Testing of automation solutions in partner companies and analysis of the impact on employees and processes

work4PV-KREIS

- Central analyses of the PV circular economy (interfaces, strategic-operational planning); development of learning and simulation game concepts as well as a microwave pyrolysis plant- Prototypen für Plattform,
- Automation solutions for manual workstations and forecast models for the PV market validated

2025: Virtual testing of concepts (simulation, business games), commissioning and optimization of the pyrolysis plant, expansion of training and awareness formats

work4WendeKREIS

- Expert interviews on battery management and job attractiveness; development of a potential model for recyclable product development
- Progress in predictive diagnostics, LiDAR aging tests, digital twins, and EMS business models; competence requirements in repair/disassembly derived

2025: Validating predictive diagnostics in real vehicles, developing high-voltage training modules, launching self-assessment tools and training courses for companies

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Why Networks?



Cooperation & Networks

- Need: Cooperation and knowledge transfer are particularly important in the circular economy, as the complex issues involved require the expertise of stakeholders along the value chain.
- Challenge: Cooperation and knowledge transfer offer many opportunities, but legal hurdles and (economic) conflicts of interest in particular make it difficult to establish.



Question:

- How is the KREIS network structured and where do collaborations exist within the network?



Why Networks within the CE?

- Knowledge transfer & cooperation are important determinants of a successful CE (Ritter et al., 2024)
 - Knowledge must be shared between product cycle phases
 - Closing the loop requires cooperation of actors in different cycle phases
 - Current CE research focuses mainly on economic models or legal frameworks but too little on people in the organization who build and maintain relationships



Ritter, M., Schilling, H., Brüggemann, H., Fröhlich, T., Goldmann, D., Henze, R., Kuhlmann, M., Mennenga, M., Mrotzek-Blöß, A., Niemeyer, J. F., Schmidt, K., Spengler, T., Sturm, A., Vietor, T., Woisetschläger, D. M., & Kauffeld, S. (2024). Towards achieving the sustainable development goals: a collaborative action plan leveraging the circular economy potentials. *Gr Interakt Org* 55, 175–187 (2024).
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11612-024-00733-9>



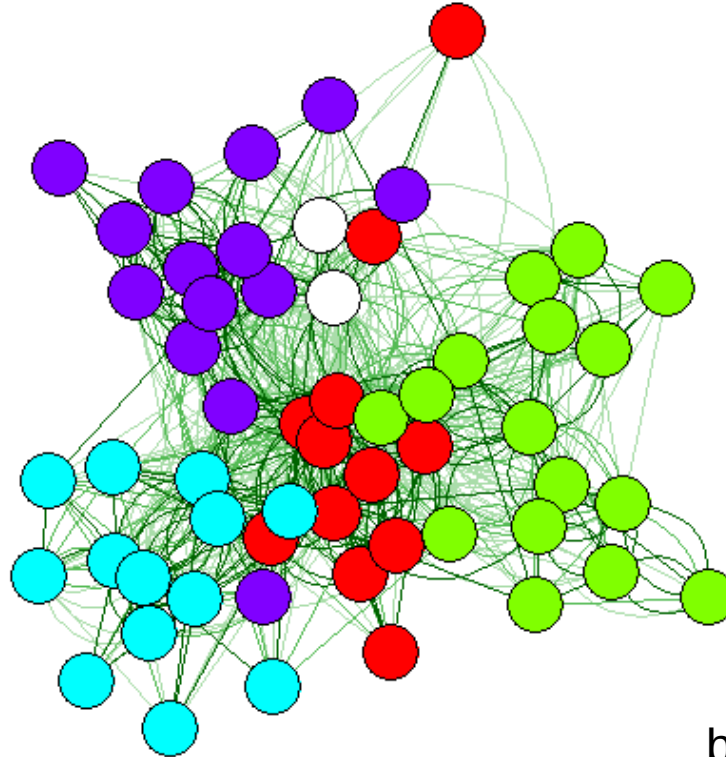
Barriers within Networks within the CE?

- Sharing knowledge beyond one's own context involves risks and incurs costs
 - Examples from KREIS:
 - Power imbalances between larger corporations in the design and production and SMEs in recovery phases
 - NDAs are highly complex and take too long to set up
 - Sharing ideas incurs risks of idea theft
- May require “knowledge activists” (Szulanski, 1996, 2000; von Krogh, 2012) who can create a context in which knowledge sharing is possible and risks are decreased
 - Associations (e.g., REWIMET)
 - Public Private Partnerships (e.g., OHLF)
 - Research projects and joint collaborations with central coordination and enablers



Network of the KREIS Consortium in January 2024 – Beginning of the Project

Individual work groups (ArbeitsKREISe) are connected by a few central actors, but there is a good flow of information.



Network of individual work groups (ArbeitsKREISe) in January 2024

- workKREIS
- PVKREIS
- wendeKREIS
- work4recycling



workKREIS = „knowledge activists“ in the center

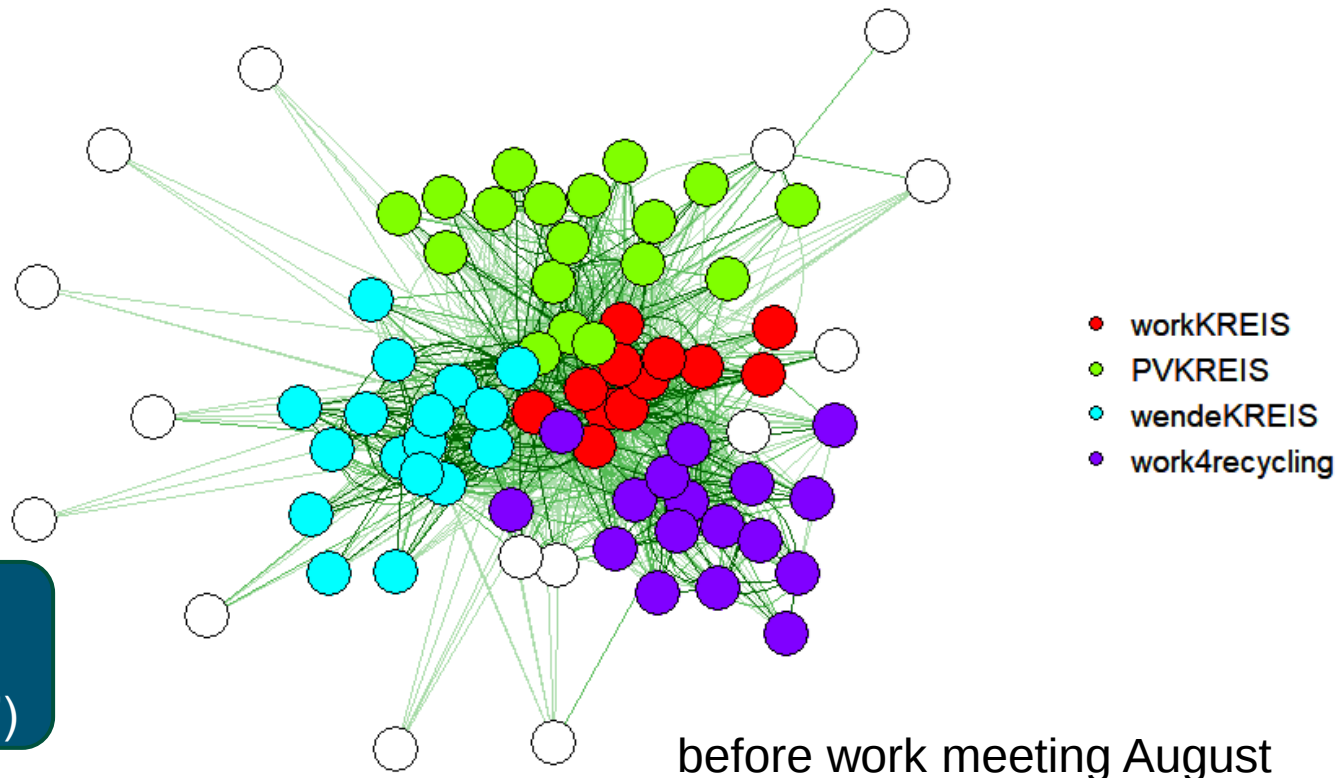
before work meeting January

Network of the KREIS Consortium in August 2024

Work groups
(ArbeitsKREISe)
have grown
closer

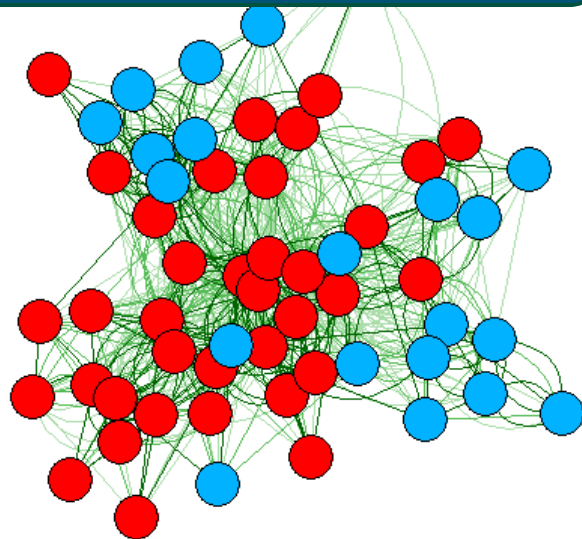


Stronger connection
to the center (i.e.,
“knowledge activists”)



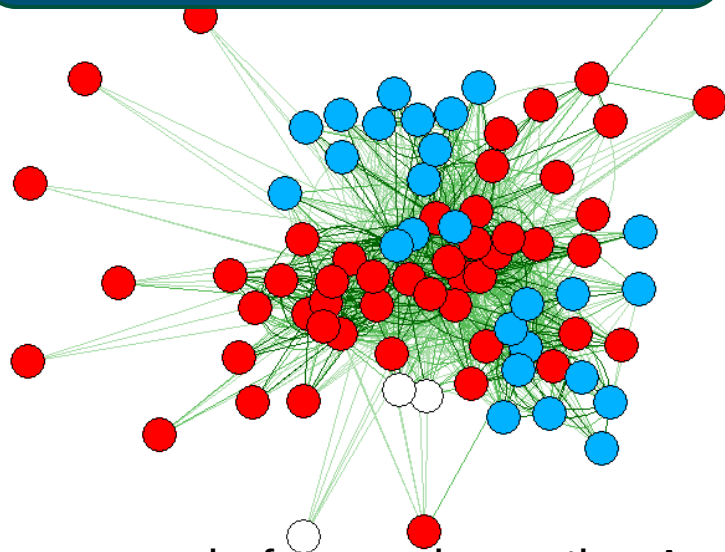
Network of the KREIS Consortium January 2024 vs. August 2024

Good networking between partners from different areas



before work meeting January

Increased mixing of application and research partners



before work meeting August

Development of Networks – KREIS+ Network Morning vs. Evening

Successful integration of external guests,
promote the mix/networking of KREIS-
groups even more

- workKREIS
- PVKREIS
- wendeKREIS
- work4recycling
- Extern

KREIS+ meeting: morning

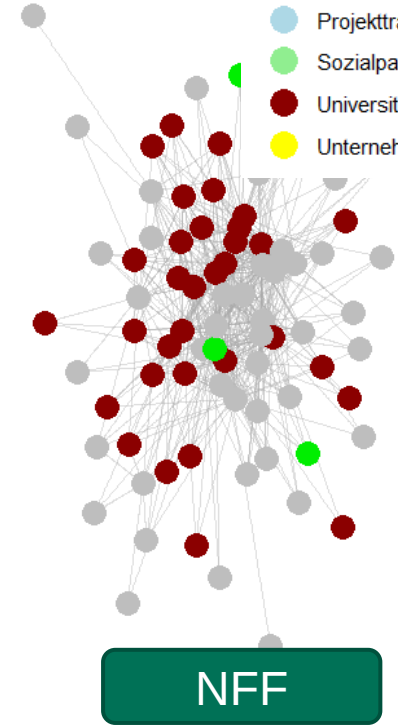
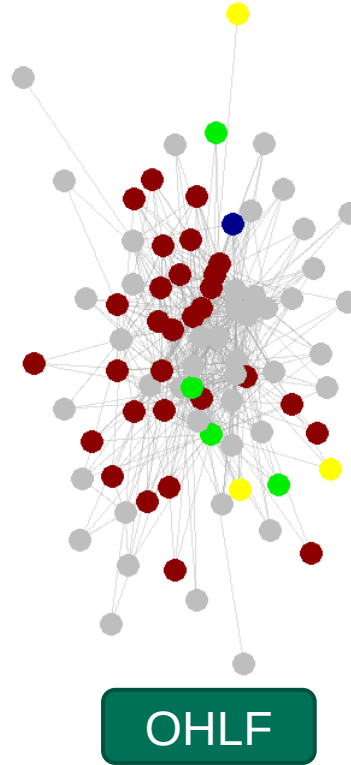
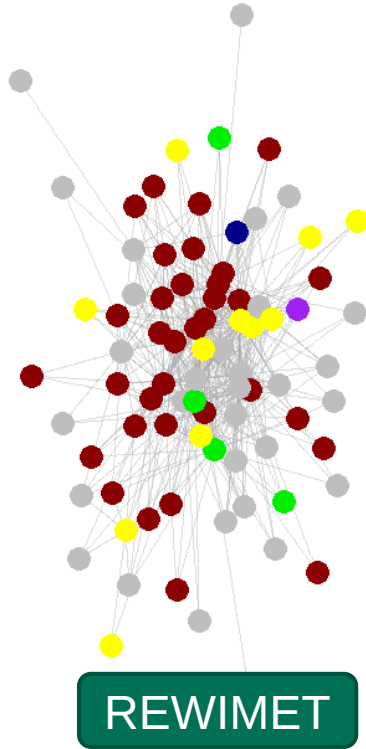
KREIS+ meeting: evening

NFF, REWIMET, OHLF?

Which KREIS members are also members of other networks?

ORG

- Fachhochschule
- Forschungsinstitut
- N/A
- Netzwerk
- Projektträger
- Sozialpartner
- Universität
- Unternehmen



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Employer Attractiveness in the Circular Economy



Employer Attractiveness

- There is a generally positive trend in the assessment of companies by employees.



Goal:

- How can this positive trend be further expanded?
- How exactly can potential new employees be recruited for the circular economy?
- What obstacles exist?

Companies in the Circular Economy & Their Image

Companies in the circular economy (CE) as drivers of change

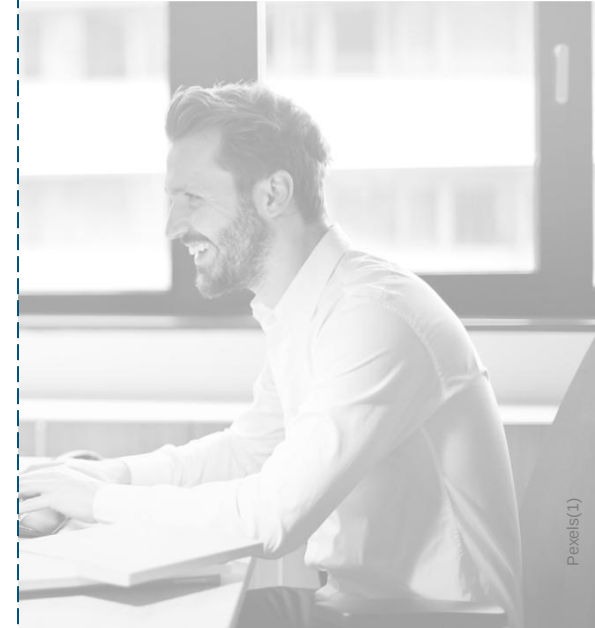
¹ARA Circular Economy Bericht, 2023)

- Companies in the CE actively contribute to reducing environmental pollution
- CE promotes the development of innovative business models based on circular principles
- Sustainability is increasingly becoming a purchasing criterion and creating market advantages

For every two job vacancies, there is one job seeker

²(EU-recycling, 2017)

- After digitalization, the shortage of skilled workers is the second biggest perceived challenge for companies in the CE sector (³Prognos, 2024)
- CE jobs and organizations are perceived negatively
 - „dirty business“ (ENTSORGA, 2022)
 - “Allegedly” below-average pay (Prognos, 2024)
- **Opportunity:** “Today's candidates are looking for meaning and purpose in the company and in their own work (ENTSORAG, 2022)



¹ARA Circular Economy Bericht (2023); ²EU-recycling (2017); ³Prognos (2024); ENTSORGA (2022)

Qualitative Exploration of the Perception of CE – Initial Findings (n = 48 Interview partners outside CE companies)

Prior knowledge of CE

„ By that, I would spontaneously understand that it really is more or less the entire production or product life cycle, from production to disposal, including all materials and intermediate steps involved.“ (Interview 8 – Blue Collar)



„Actually, I have to say, I've never heard that term before...“ (Interview 5 – White Collar)



How familiar are respondents with the concept or definition of the circular economy :

- Both blue-collar and white-collar workers struggle with the definition of the term
- Little knowledge about the circular economy
- The term was often only heard in passing somewhere

Prejudices CE: Dirty work

„ Clichés, when I hear the word “waste,” I naturally think of garbage collectors. I don't know if that's still a term people use or if it's now considered somewhat derogatory.“ (Interview 2 – White Collar)



„ Yes, one always thinks of a recycling center as being dirty, smelly, and similar to garbage collection.“ (Interview 2 – White Collar)



A particular prejudice against the circular economy is that it is equated with waste management

- garbage man image
- Circular economy = waste management/waste management companies
- Dirty and smelly

Qualitative Exploration of the Perception of CE – Initial Findings (n = 48 Interview partners outside CE companies)

Meaning of Work: Significance



„ The work is also very meaningful because you are doing something for the environment, and yes, I believe that if many people were to get involved in this, the world would look very different.“ (Interview 2 –White Collar)

„ Yes, and of course, it's a meaningful activity if I'm also doing something for the environment.“ (Interview 12 – White Collar)



While there are prejudices against the circular economy, working in this field is also considered very meaningful in some cases

- The aspect of sustainability is particularly important in this context

Meaning of Work: Self-impact



„ Basically, I think work is also part of my identity, which is why I want to do something that I find meaningful, but at the same time contributes to the world and society.“ (Interview 34 – White Collar)



The importance of their own contribution is also cited by respondents as an incentive for a job in the circular economy

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CE & Sustainability



CE & Sustainability

- A basic understanding of sustainability and the circular economy exists, but it is rarely comprehensive.
- Acquiring knowledge and inter-company cooperation are key challenges for the circular economy.



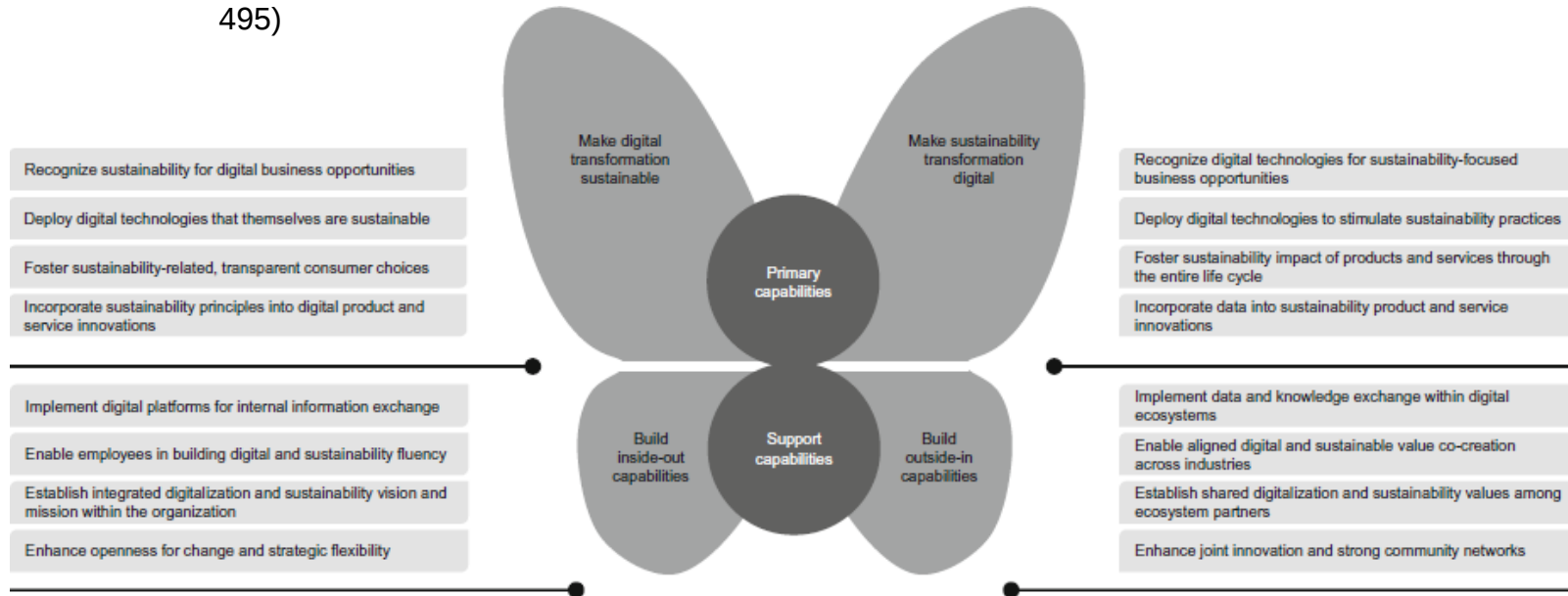
Goal:

- Which factors promote or inhibit sustainable transformation in the circular economy, and how do employees' narratives differ depending on their company's position within the circular economy?



Twin Transformation in the CE

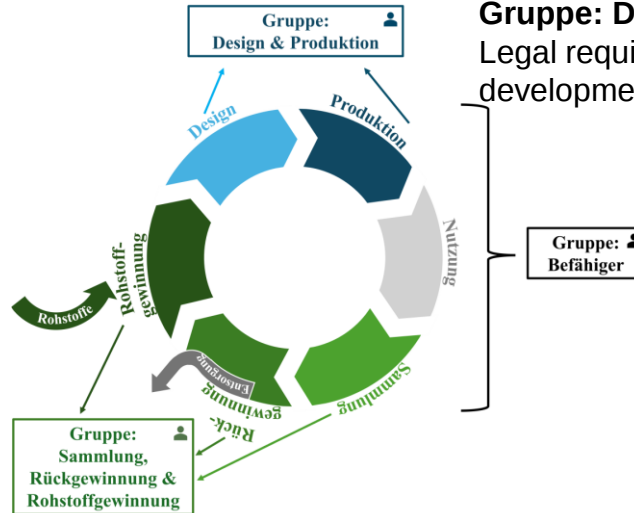
- European Green Deal puts twin transformation on the agenda for sustainable economic growth (Askar et al., 2024)
 - Twin Transformation:** „A twin transformation refers to a value-adding interplay between digital and sustainability transformation efforts that improve an organization by leveraging digital technologies for enabling sustainability and leveraging sustainability for guiding digital progress.” (Christmann et al., 2024, S. 495)



Twin
Transformation
Capability
Framework of
Christmann et al.
(2024)

Study: Twin Transformation in the Circular Economy - Preliminary Results (n = 39 Interview partners from CE companies)

Laws, regulations, and bureaucracy



Gruppe: Design & Production

Legal requirements for promoting sustainability are forcing the development of new technologies.

Group: Collection, recovery, & raw material extraction

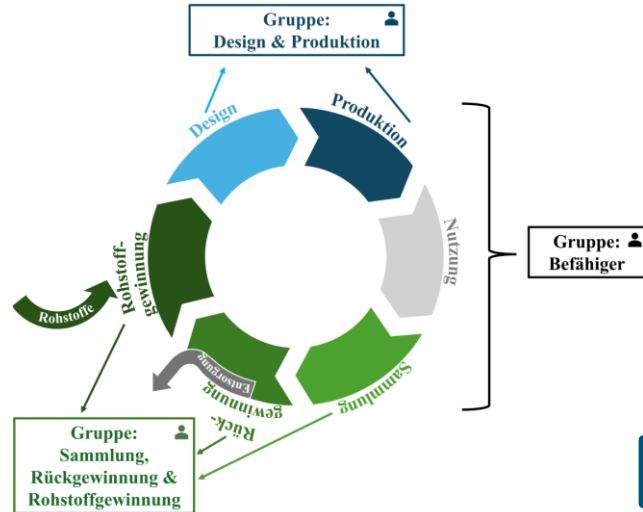
The bureaucracy associated with innovation in technologies for improving sustainability in circular economy companies is perceived as a barrier to new development.

The twin transformation in the circular economy is perceived as being heavily dependent on legal requirements, regulations, and the associated bureaucracy.



Study: Twin Transformation in the Circular Economy - Preliminary Results (n = 39 Interview partners from CE companies)

Software provision (by Enabler)



Group: Enabler

- Enablers who do not operate directly in the circular economy but supply these companies with software, for example, are considered by respondents to be promoters of the twin transformation.
- Enablers can contribute to active networking between corporate actors in circular economy companies.



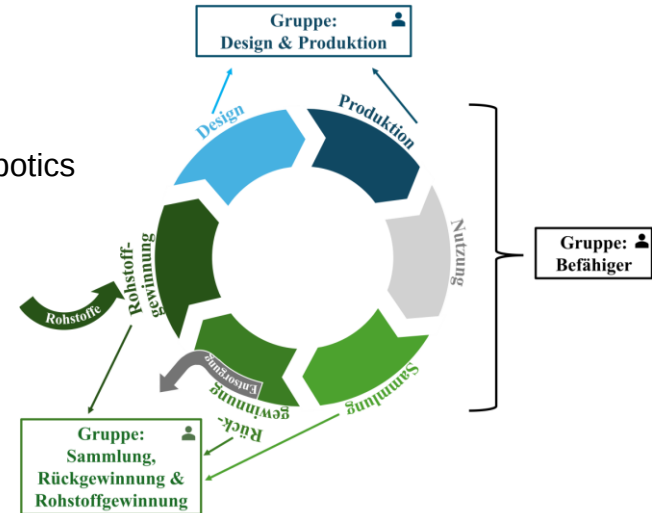
While it is mainly the companies involved in the circular value chain that need to implement the twin transformation, enablers can help to simplify this process.

Study: Twin Transformation in the Circular Economy - Preliminary Results (n = 39 Interview partners from CE companies)

Motivation to support the Twin Transformation

Group: Collection, recovery, & raw material extraction

The fear of losing jobs to emerging technologies such as robotics and automation is perceived as a hindrance.



The individual motivation of respondents in all three groups to promote twin transformation and thus contribute to sustainability beyond corporate boundaries is perceived as a facilitating factor.

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Use competence development for
organizational development:
actively shaping digital transformation!

Become A VeränderungsMacher*in (Change Maker)

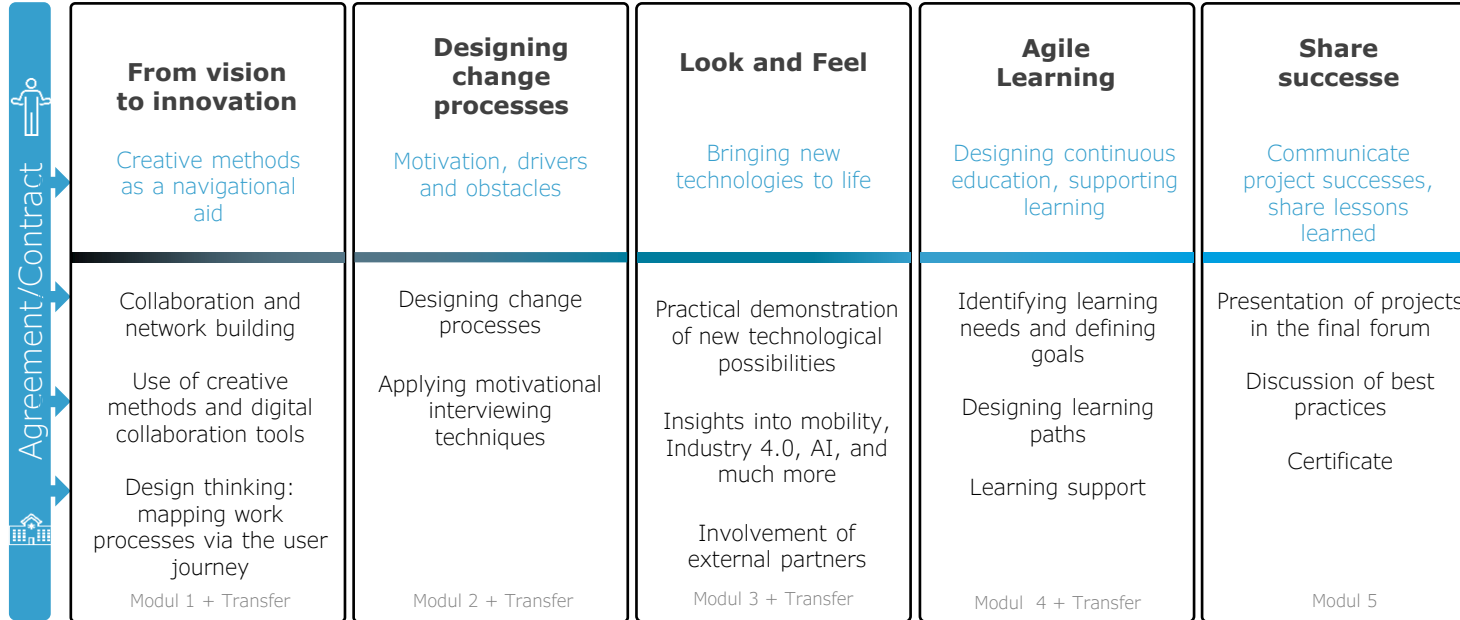
START: January 2026



VeränderungsMacher*in for competence development



Working on related projects during continuing education



Reflection and evaluation, involvement of leaders/managers

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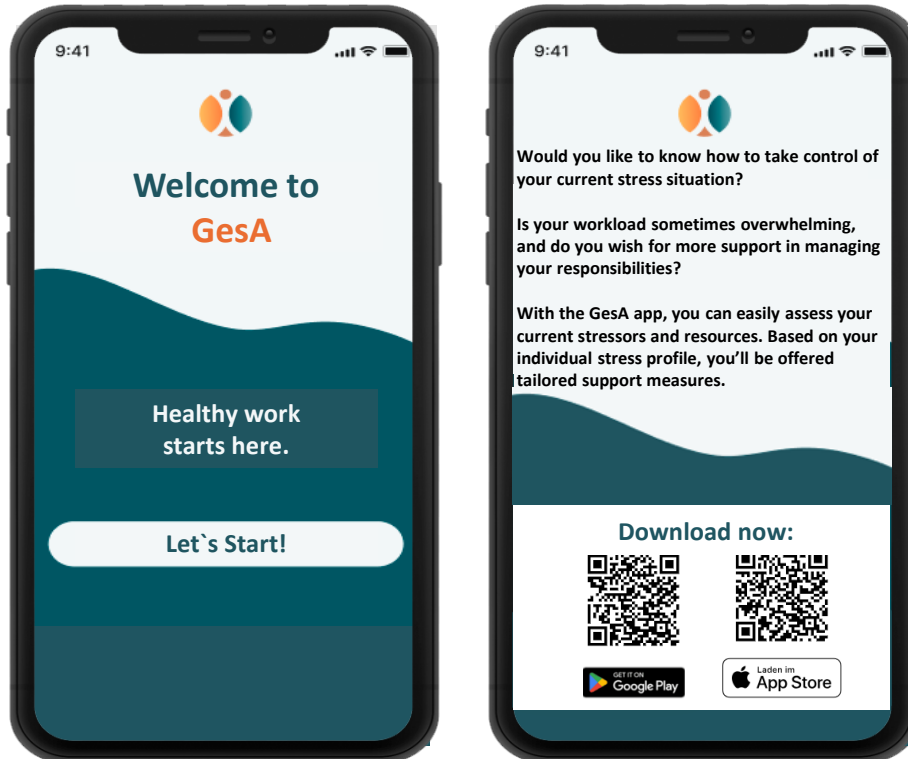
How to Participate



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GesA: The App for Healthy Work



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A Playful Work Design Approach to Boost Work Engagement within the Circular Economy



Background:

- Mental health issues cost the global economy over USD 1 trillion annually, with projections up to USD 6 trillion by 2030 (The Lancet Global Health, 2020; WHO, 2022).
- Organizational measures often focus on harm prevention, while positive approaches – such as strengthening personal resources – remain underutilized (Rugulies et al., 2023).
- Work engagement is a key factor for well-being, performance, and retention, making it a promising entry point for novel interventions targeting this neglected focus (Mazzetti et al., 2023).

Aim:



- To analyze job demands and resources in the circular economy, conduct a systematic review of the literature to identify suitable interventions, and collaboratively **develop effective, context-specific strategies to promote human-centred working conditions in the circular economy.**

Intervention study starting in spring 2026

We invite all members of the REWIMET network to participate in the study. The intervention to promote *Playful Work Design* is specifically aimed at employees in the **blue-collar** sector. If you are interested or have any further questions, please contact: Stefano.Mattana@tu-braunschweig.de



Workshop Invitation: “Action Planning for Promoting Sustainability”



Would you like to promote ecological sustainability in your company/institute while actively involving your team?



Take part in our **free 2-hour in-house workshops** on sustainability promotion with an internal **team of 3–5 employees** as part of our research!

The workshop is accompanied by recordings (audio & video) as well as questionnaires before and after the session.



Workshop goal: With psychological guidance, you will develop concrete action plans for your organization within your internal team.

If you are interested, have questions, or would like more information, feel free to contact Kristien Klaka (kristien.klaka@tu-braunschweig.de).

Let's connect! Upcoming events

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04.11. KREIS+-Meeting

Information for Guests:

From 12:00 noon: light lunch, From 1:00 p.m.: start of the event

Registration by email: kompetenzzentrum-kreis@tu-braunschweig.de



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19.05.2026 SONKREIS (Workshops)
20. - 21.05.2026 Circularity Days



<https://circularity-days.com/>

17.-19.03.2027
Frühjahrskongress
Gesellschaft für Arbeitswissenschaften



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Thank you for your attention!

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Linkedin:

<https://www.linkedin.com/company/kompetenzzentrum-kreis/posts/?feedView=all>

ResearchGate:

https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Simone_Kauffeld



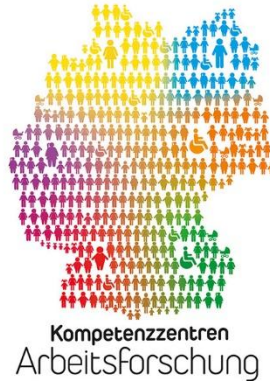
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Projektträger Karlsruhe
Karlsruher Institut für Technologie

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