

# Circular Economy: The Next Level of Company Success

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Editors

# Circular Economy: The Next Level of Company Success

A Comprehensive Study on How to Create  
Value and Improve Operational Excellence  
Through Circularity

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# Preface

Circular Economy (CE) is gaining significant momentum in businesses. Initially, this was motivated by environmental concerns, particularly those related to CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. Recently, there has been a noticeable shift in customer opinions towards environmentally responsible products. This will be a major differentiation factor for companies, further strengthened by evolving regulatory frameworks and requirements. In addition, the scope of CE initiatives has expanded to also include further effects such as resource scarcity and supply chain instability. Furthermore, it has been observed that CE initiatives can result in cost savings for companies and have great potential for innovation.

Contrasting sharply with the prevailing Linear Economy (LE) take–make–dispose approach, CE is shifting the aim towards the use and repeated use of resources in closed loops. This paradigm shift is prompting a fundamental rethinking of our approach to material usage.

We ask ourselves: What must companies do to align with this new way of thinking? Conversations within our group of colleagues and with students revealed that the topic CE needs a deep understanding of potential concepts, as well as a nuanced exploration of feasibility and implementation approaches.

Over the course of two years and more, 20 students and research assistants participated in our research at different stages. The dialogue with our fellow professors and experts at the Eastern Switzerland University of Applied Sciences (OST) further enriched our understanding, bringing diverse perspectives to the challenges of the different approaches.

On top of a comprehensive review of the literature, we collected insights from more than 500 companies on their view on CE and their current implementation status. Additional in-depth case studies provided detailed information on companies and their obstacles to implement CE specifically. We summarise our learning in the Rapperswil Circular Economy Model to guide companies on the path to circularity.

Our research clearly showed that integration of CE is a must for every company. Naturally, not all concepts are similarly relevant and the depth of implementation will vary greatly depending on the nature of the business and its value chain.

Our book not only intends for practice but also adds to the academic discussion of CE. It also helps to establish a solid foundation in our different lectures, where CE has become an integral part.

This book would not have been possible without the work and commitment of many people. We thank the students in the 2021 master class who started the journey of circular economy research in practice with us. They are listed alphabetically: Giuliano Bernard, Morena DiSilvestre, Samuel Folini, Patrick Looser, Sylvan Mächler, Fabio Marti, Odin Peter, Mladen Petraskovic, Mauro Ramirez, Mathilde Schäfer, Philipp Thomann and Raphael Welter. Not all of the above students decided to participate as authors in this book, but their first insights were valuable, and their investigations set the pace for this book.

What is science without colleagues who challenge ideas and provide support where necessary? Therefore, we want to thank our colleagues who were always eager to explore innovative concepts and who supported the students in their first research on CE, namely Prof. Dr. Daniel Keller, Prof. Dr. Daniel Politze, Prof. Dr. Felix Nyffenegger and Prof. Dr. Rainer Bunge.

The second year of master students, who engaged in the case studies, walked the extra mile to become the first authors in the chapters of Part II of this book. Their names can be found in the book, but we especially want to thank them for their commitment and enthusiasm: Nico Bleisch, Denis Hammer, Yannik Keller, Raphael Meyer, Roger Rinderer, Raffael Römer and Reto Weber.

We also express our gratitude to the dedicated team of scientific assistants of the Institute of Product Development and Design (IPEK) at OST who played a pivotal role in the realisation of this book. Their unwavering commitment to excellence, meticulous organisation of inputs, growing expertise with LaTeX and thorough proof-reading significantly contributed to the quality and coherence of the final manuscript. A special thanks goes to the research assistant Nicolas Hofer, whose tireless efforts in gathering and organising data during his Master's Thesis, as well as his attention to detail, ensured the accuracy of the scientific content. His commitment to this book and to the topic of CE is truly exceptional.

Two more contributors spontaneously agreed to add their expertise to make our discoveries more useful in practice: Prof. Daniel Schwendemann from OST and Prof. Dr. Ramesh Subramoniam from the University of Texas at Dallas (UTD), who undoubtedly enhanced the overall depth and credibility of this work.

In addition to the professional support received, we are grateful to our friends and family for their patience and support during the writing and editing process. Their understanding and encouragement has played an invaluable role in the realisation of this book.

Rapperswil, Switzerland  
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# About This Book

Without any doubt, the current prevailing Linear Economy principle of take-make-dispose is inherently unsustainable: Raw materials are extracted, transformed into products, and discarded as waste after use. The resulting environmental and economic challenges brought together both practitioners and academics to develop more sustainable methods for production and consumption. Especially the concept of Circular Economy has received a lot of attention. But despite many technical solutions, a key question for practical implementation has remained unanswered until now: How can enterprises integrate Circular Economy into their business strategy to leverage success?

This book examines the topic of Circular Economy in an entrepreneurial context. It describes ten options for companies to retain value and identifies drivers and enablers for implementing Circular Economy in businesses.

A survey among more than 500 industry experts revealed the extent to which retention options were implemented in practice. For the first time, relevant drivers and enablers for each retention option were identified. On top of this, case studies of successful circular market offerings shed light on each retention option in detail.

The knowledge gained from research and the further shared experiences of experts that contributed to this book result in a 6-step management model. This model provides guidance on how to implement Circular Economy in organisations as an element of operational excellence and as a source of product, service, and business innovation. Now, every enterprise can start the journey!

As the survey and the cases show: Circular Economy is a promising way to the next level of company success. The book at hand will help organisations to develop their own individual approach that matches their business model. In short, you will find:

- First comprehensive analysis of 10 retention options, their drivers, and enablers.
- Survey of more than 500 companies and in-depth case studies for each retention option.
- Practical research-based implementation model for companies.

# Contents

<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction to This Book</b> .....	<b>1</b>
	Katharina Luban, Nicolas Hofer, and Roman Hänggi	
<b>Part I The Retention of Value in a Circular Economy</b>		
<b>2</b>	<b>Introduction to Part I</b> .....	<b>19</b>
	Katharina Luban	
<b>3</b>	<b>Approaches, Drivers and Enablers of Circular Economy – A Theoretical View</b> .....	<b>21</b>
	Nicolas Hofer, André Podleisek, Roman Hänggi, and Katharina Luban	
<b>4</b>	<b>Implementation of Circular Economy in European Industrial Companies – A Survey</b> .....	<b>63</b>
	Nicolas Hofer, André Podleisek, Roman Hänggi, and Katharina Luban	
<b>Part II Analysis of Successful Circular Economy Cases</b>		
<b>5</b>	<b>Introduction to Part II</b> .....	<b>125</b>
	André Podleisek	
<b>6</b>	<b>R0 Refuse and R1 Reduce</b> .....	<b>129</b>
	Nico Bleisch and Katharina Luban	
<b>7</b>	<b>R2 Reuse</b> .....	<b>145</b>
	Roger Rinderer and Katharina Luban	
<b>8</b>	<b>R3 Repair</b> .....	<b>163</b>
	Yannik Keller, Raphael Welter, and Roman Hänggi	
<b>9</b>	<b>R4 Refurbish</b> .....	<b>179</b>
	Denis Hammer, Patrick Looser, and Roman Hänggi	

<b>10</b>	<b>R5 Remanufacture</b> .....	<b>197</b>
	Raphael Meyer, Odin Peter, and Katharina Luban	
<b>11</b>	<b>R6 Repurpose</b> .....	<b>217</b>
	Nicolas Hofer, Roger Rinderer, Morena Di Silvestre, and André Podleisek	
<b>12</b>	<b>R7 Recycle</b> .....	<b>235</b>
	Raffael Römer and André Podleisek	
<b>13</b>	<b>R8 Recover</b> .....	<b>253</b>
	Reto Weber and André Podleisek	
<b>14</b>	<b>R9 Remine</b> .....	<b>271</b>
	Nicolas Hofer, André Podleisek, Katharina Luban, and Sylvan Mächler	
 <b>Part III Practical Implications of Circular Economy</b>		
<b>15</b>	<b>Introduction to Part III</b> .....	<b>283</b>
	Katharina Luban	
<b>16</b>	<b>Using the Framework of Drivers and Enablers to Evaluate Circular Business Ideas</b> .....	<b>285</b>
	Katharina Luban, Mladen Petraskovic, and Raphael Meyer	
<b>17</b>	<b>Rethinking and Positioning Plastics for Circular Economy</b> .....	<b>307</b>
	Daniel Schwendemann, André Podleisek, and Nicolas Hofer	
<b>18</b>	<b>Digital Transformation of Remanufacturing</b> .....	<b>325</b>
	Ramesh Subramoniam	
<b>19</b>	<b>The Rapperswil Circular Economy Model – A Guide to Successful Implementation</b> .....	<b>341</b>
	Roman Hänggi, André Podleisek, Katharina Luban, and Nicolas Hofer	
<b>Glossary</b> .....		<b>379</b>
<b>References</b> .....		<b>393</b>



## About the Editors



**Prof. André Podleisek** is a specialist in Sustainability and Quality in Industry. His enthusiasm for environmental protection and Circular Economy began when he studied 20 years ago. Since then, he has been employed by global industrial companies as a Sustainability Officer, where he has changed their way of doing business to incorporate Circular Economy. Recently, he joined the university to pass on his practical sustainability knowledge to the next generation of industrial engineers.



**Prof. Dr. Katharina Luban** is a distinguished expert in the field of Supply Chain Management. She dedicates her professional endeavours to pioneering modern, technology-driven solutions that enhance logistics operations, procurement activities and product cost. A focal point of her research, teaching and consulting efforts lies in embracing Circular Economy principles, which play a pivotal role in fortifying supply chains for long-term resilience in the ever-evolving landscape of the future.



**Prof. Dr. Roman Hänggi** is an expert in Production Management, having accrued 25 years of experience in the industry at all levels of hierarchy. His passion for the ongoing development of lean in the digital age continues to motivate him today. He assisted numerous industrial companies in their journey to become operational champions through the combination of lean and digitalisation. His expertise has enabled him to incorporate Circular Economy into the operational excellence path in both practice and research.

# Acronyms

AHP	Analytic Hierarchy Process
AI	Artificial Intelligence
ANSI	American National Standards Institute
AR	Augmented Reality
B2B	Business-to-Business
B2C	Business-to-Consumer
BIM	Building Information Modelling
BPA	Bisphenol-A
BPF	Business Performance Factors
C2C	Consumer-to-Consumer
CCU	Carbon Capture Utilisation
CE	Circular Economy
CEBM	Circular Economy Business Models
CHF	Swiss Francs
CLSC	Closed-Loop Supply Chains
cobot	Collaborative Robots
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
EEE	Electrical and Electronic Equipment
EIP	Environmental Impact Points
EOL	End-of-Life
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency
EPR	Extended Producer Responsibility
ERP	Enterprise Resource Planning
ESG	Environment, Social and Governance
EU	European Union
EUR	Euro
GBP	Great Britain Pound
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GWP	Global Warming Potential
I4.0	Industry 4.0
IAM	Independent Aftermarket

IoMT	Internet of Manufacturing Things
IoT	Internet of Things
IPEK	Institute of Product Development, Industrial Engineering and Product Lifecycle Management
IWK	Institute for Materials Science and Plastics Processing
KPI	Key Performance Indicators
LCA	Life Cycle Assessment
LE	Linear Economy
LED	Light-Emitting Diode
LIB	Lithium-Ion Battery
LO	Lista Office
MCP	Manufacturers of Convenience Products
MDP	Manufacturers of Durable Products
MNP	Manufacturers of Non-durable Products
MPC	Manufacturers of Parts and Components
NFC	Near-Field Communication
OE	Original Equipment
OE-CE	Operational Excellence Circularity
OEM	Original Equipment Manufacturer
OES	Original Equipment Service
OST	Eastern Switzerland University of Applied Sciences
PA	Impact Assessment
PaaS	Product as a Service
PAH	Polycyclic Aromatic Hydrocarbons
PBT	Polybutylene Terephthalate
PE	Polyethylene
PET	Polyethylene Terephthalate
PLA	Polylactic acid
PLC	Product Lifecycle
PLM	Product Lifecycle Management
PM-CE	Product/Service/Business Model Innovation Circularity
POM	Poly-Oxy-Methylene
PP	Polypropylene
PRV	Pressure Regulating Valve
PSS	Product Service System
PVC	Polyvinylchloride
R	Retention Option
R0	Refuse
R1	Reduce
R2	Reuse
R3	Repair
R4	Refurbish
R5	Remanufacture
R6	Repurpose
R7	Recycle

R8	Recover
R9	Remine
RA	Reclaimed Asphalt
RAP	Recycled Asphalt Pavements
RFID	Radio Frequency Identification
RIC	Remanufacturing Industries Council
RIME	Repair and Installation of Machinery and Equipment
RL	Reverse Logistics
ROI	Return on Investment
RQ	Research Question
rTPU	Recycled Thermoplastic polyurethane
RW	Retail and Wholesale
SBB	Swiss Federal Railways
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SME	Small and Medium-sized Enterprises
SPLM	Smart Product Lifecycle Management
SVC	Service Industry
TA	Time Assessment
TCO	Total Cost of Ownership
TPE	Thermoplastic elastomer
TRA	Theory of Reasoned Action
UNEP	United Nations Environmental Programme
USD	US Dollar
UTD	University of Texas at Dallas
VR	Virtual Reality
WEEE	Waste from Electrical and Electronic Equipment
WERZ	Institut für Wissen, Energie und Rohstoffe Zug
WTB	Wind Turbine Blade
WWF	World Wide Fund for Nature

# List of Figures

Fig. 1.1	Main question of this book: Which success factors enable which approach to circular economy? .....	5
Fig. 1.2	Methodology of this book .....	6
Fig. 1.3	Procedure for identifying the drivers and enablers of Circular Economy .....	8
Fig. 1.4	6-step management model for the implementation of the Rapperswil CE Model .....	11
Fig. 1.5	Structure of this book .....	12
Fig. 3.1	The Linear Value Hill (own representation adapted from [22]) .....	25
Fig. 3.2	The Circular Value Hill (own representation adapted from [22]) .....	26
Fig. 3.3	Product Lifecycle Management [26] .....	27
Fig. 3.4	Retention strategies in the circular economy model from the perspective of manufacturing companies (own representation based on [21]) .....	31
Fig. 3.5	CE integrated into product lifecycle process (CE extended PLM) based on [21, 26] .....	35
Fig. 3.6	Process for identifying relevant literature .....	38
Fig. 4.1	Choropleth map of company headquarters distribution by country .....	76
Fig. 4.2	Implementation of circular economy in companies (n = 512) .....	78
Fig. 4.3	Impact of circular economy strategies on BPFs (n = 351) ....	80
Fig. 4.4	Inter-industry comparison of CE impacts on material costs ....	82
Fig. 4.5	Comparative analysis of CE impacts on material costs by integration level .....	83
Fig. 4.6	Inter-industry comparison of CE impacts on manufacturing costs .....	84
Fig. 4.7	Comparative analysis of CE impacts on manufacturing costs by integration level .....	84

Fig. 4.8	Inter-industry comparison of CE impacts on company's resilience against resource-related risks .....	85
Fig. 4.9	Comparative analysis of CE impacts on company's resilience against resource-related risks by integration level .....	86
Fig. 4.10	Inter-industry comparison of CE impacts on company profits .....	87
Fig. 4.11	Comparative analysis of CE impacts on profits by integration level .....	87
Fig. 4.12	Inter-industry comparison of CE impacts on technological advancements .....	88
Fig. 4.13	Comparative analysis of CE impacts on technological advancements by integration level .....	89
Fig. 4.14	Inter-industry comparison of CE impacts on sales .....	90
Fig. 4.15	Comparative analysis of CE impacts on sales by integration level .....	91
Fig. 4.16	Inter-industry comparison of CE impacts on the reduction of waste .....	92
Fig. 4.17	Comparative analysis of CE impacts on reduction of waste by integration level .....	92
Fig. 4.18	Inter-industry comparison of CE impacts on company image .....	93
Fig. 4.19	Comparative analysis of CE impacts on company image by integration level .....	94
Fig. 4.20	The adoption and interest frequency of Rs among all participants (n = 512) .....	95
Fig. 4.21	Rs practised by conscious (n = 351) and unconscious (n = 161) CE practitioners .....	96
Fig. 4.22	Future R plans for conscious (n = 351) and unconscious (n = 161) CE practitioners .....	98
Fig. 4.23	Weighted collective results for drivers ordered according to clusters (n = 5,259) .....	99
Fig. 4.24	Driver popularity heatmap for R0 to R9 where 'n' denotes the aggregate count of driver selections for a given R .....	101
Fig. 4.25	Comparison of participants choices for Rs across 15 different drivers .....	102
Fig. 4.26	Weighted collective results for enablers across all Rs .....	105
Fig. 4.27	Enabler popularity heatmap for R0 to R9 where 'n' denotes the aggregate count of enabler selections for a given R .....	106
Fig. 4.28	Comparison of participant choices for Rs across eight different enablers .....	107
Fig. 4.29	Weighted collective results for motivational factors why entities intend to start Rs (n = 583 choices) .....	111

Fig. 4.30	Motivational factors popularity heatmap for R0 to R9 adoption in the future .....	112
Fig. 4.31	Comparison of eight motivational factors driving companies' intention to implement Rs in the future .....	113
Fig. 5.1	Methodology case studies Part II .....	126
Fig. 6.1	Overview of the product design strategies (own representation based on [7]) .....	131
Fig. 7.1	Infrastructure of kooky [10] .....	148
Fig. 7.2	GWP disposable cup with lid versus kooky reusable cup with lid (adapted from [18]) .....	157
Fig. 8.1	The CE concept of Lista Office LO (own representation adapted from [16]) .....	168
Fig. 9.1	KYBURZ Switzerland's MultiLife concept for battery sustainability (own representation adapted from [17]) .....	183
Fig. 10.1	Lifecycle of a remanufactured product .....	198
Fig. 10.2	Remanufacture process (own representation adapted from [6, 9]) .....	199
Fig. 10.3	Distinguish between Remanufacture, Refurbish and Repair (own representation adapted from [10, 13]) .....	201
Fig. 10.4	Industrial symbiosis through customer exchange .....	212
Fig. 10.5	Industrial symbiosis through customer exchange with new business models .....	213
Fig. 11.1	Reuse versus Repurpose of flat glass: On the left, Reuse if the flat glass is used in the facade; on the right, Repurpose if the flat glass is used as interior partitioning walls .....	219
Fig. 11.2	Remine versus Repurpose of PET bottles: On the left, a bag produced by Tide Ocean SA from remined ocean-bound bottles [9]; on the right, bottles repurposed into a canoe .....	219
Fig. 11.3	Creative applications of repurposed wind turbine blades by ANMET: On the left, a repurposed WTB as a lounge chair; on the right, a repurposed WTB as a bridge grinder in Poland (photo courtesy of ANMET [22]) .....	221
Fig. 11.4	Repurpose spawns creativity: On the left side, chair made out of jeans. On the right side, backpack made out of T-shirts made by Nicolas Heeb [30] .....	221
Fig. 11.5	Unique furniture from repurposed wooden crates (photo courtesy of reWood [31]) .....	222
Fig. 11.6	Prototype of the FREITAG messenger bag from 1993 made out of used truck tarpaulins, bicycle inner tubes and car seat belts (photo credits: FREITAG [33]) .....	225
Fig. 12.1	Recycling cycle for asphalt .....	239
Fig. 12.2	Reduction of CO <sub>2</sub> -equivalent (own representation derived from [17]) .....	242



Fig. 12.3	Cost structure of asphalt manufacturing	244
Fig. 13.1	Example of a heat recovery drainage channel of the company (copyright by Joulia SA [19])	257
Fig. 13.2	Operating principle of the heat recovery units (copyright by Julia SA [19])	258
Fig. 13.3	Comparison of possible savings of the heat recovery units at 0.15 CHF per kWh over 50 years	266
Fig. 14.1	Remine within circular economy (own representation adapted from [1])	272
Fig. 16.1	Concept of renting reusable food packaging	288
Fig. 16.2	Concept of reCIRCLE (own presentment based on [9])	289
Fig. 16.3	Concept of Vytal (own presentment based on [12])	290
Fig. 16.4	Concept of GreenToGo (own presentment based on [13])	291
Fig. 16.5	Break-even point for restaurants offering reCIRCLE packaging	296
Fig. 17.1	Global production of materials in mill. tonnes/year in 1970, 2019 and 2022 (own representation based on [5, 6])	308
Fig. 17.2	Distribution of primary plastics by polymer type (EU27+3) (own representation derived from [20])	311
Fig. 17.3	Schematic overview of the end-of-life scenarios for plastics	313
Fig. 17.4	Plastics recycling future	319
Fig. 17.5	Thought of path for high quality recycling	320
Fig. 17.6	Recycling ski boots to plastic granulates	321
Fig. 18.1	Product lifecycle as described in this chapter shows evolution of sales over time	328
Fig. 18.2	Production and aftermarket business models of a manufacturing enterprise	328
Fig. 18.3	Case study of an electronic automotive product A conducted by the author in 2008/2009	329
Fig. 18.4	Integrated business model with a PLC approach for a remanufacturing enterprise	330
Fig. 19.1	Collective relevance for drivers ordered according to clusters ( $n = 5,259$ )	343
Fig. 19.2	Driver popularity heatmap for R0 to R9 where 'n' denotes the aggregate count of driver selections for a given R	344
Fig. 19.3	Summary of drivers of eight case studies	345
Fig. 19.4	Successful retention strategies for relevant drivers	345
Fig. 19.5	Collective relevance for enablers across all Rs	346
Fig. 19.6	Enabler popularity heatmap for R0 to R9 where 'n' denotes the aggregate count of enabler selections for a given R	347
Fig. 19.7	Summary of enablers of eight case study companies	347
Fig. 19.8	Operational excellence model 'Lean-Digital-Green'	353

Fig. 19.9	Implementation patterns through CE .....	356
Fig. 19.10	The Rapperswil Circular Economy Model .....	361
Fig. 19.11	Selection of circularity drivers of the example company .....	362
Fig. 19.12	Selection of retention strategies of the example company .....	362
Fig. 19.13	Defined impact of circularity drivers for resilience strategy ...	363
Fig. 19.14	Actual situation of the example company's circularity .....	365
Fig. 19.15	Actual situation of the example company's circularity in a diagram .....	366
Fig. 19.16	Level of ambition separated for operational excellence and product/service/business model .....	370
Fig. 19.17	Level of ambition for operational excellence .....	371
Fig. 19.18	Level of ambition for product/service/business model innovation .....	371
Fig. 19.19	Priority matrix .....	372
Fig. 19.20	PLM extended by contribution to Circular Economy and related Retention Options based on [17, 18] .....	373
Fig. 19.21	Assessment and evaluation of path to level of ambition .....	375

# List of Tables

Table 1.1	Ten options to CE that are relevant to industrial companies .....	7
Table 1.2	Participants of the industry survey .....	8
Table 3.1	Overview of the retention options and their description .....	29
Table 3.2	Waste categories to capture value from .....	36
Table 3.3	Boolean literature search string and results .....	39
Table 3.4	Overview of previous literature reviews on drivers, enablers, or barriers .....	41
Table 3.5	Factors that drive European manufacturing companies to adopt Rs .....	43
Table 3.6	Enabling factors for European manufacturing companies to practice Rs .....	49
Table 4.1	Drivers propelling European companies to adopt Rs .....	68
Table 4.2	Enablers that make the practices of Rs appealing .....	70
Table 4.3	Characteristics of the survey participants .....	75
Table 4.4	Location of company headquarters .....	76
Table 4.5	Mapping the 15 original drivers to 8 consolidated motivation factors .....	110
Table 6.1	Drivers of the <i>Refuse</i> and <i>Reduce</i> case .....	136
Table 6.2	Enablers of the <i>Refuse</i> and <i>Reduce</i> case .....	138
Table 7.1	Drivers of the <i>Reuse</i> case .....	150
Table 7.2	Enablers of the <i>Reuse</i> case .....	153
Table 8.1	Difference of <i>Repair</i> to other retention options .....	166
Table 8.2	Drivers of the <i>Repair</i> case .....	171
Table 8.3	Enablers of the <i>Repair</i> case .....	173
Table 9.1	Difference of <i>Repair</i> to other retention options .....	182
Table 9.2	Drivers of the <i>Repair</i> case .....	185
Table 9.3	Enablers of the <i>Repair</i> case .....	187
Table 9.4	Some disassembled components and their usability .....	189
Table 9.5	Used vehicles sold globally .....	189
Table 10.1	Drivers of the <i>Remanufacture</i> case .....	205

Table 10.2	Enablers of the <i>Remanufacture</i> case	208
Table 11.1	Drivers of the <i>Repurpose</i> cases	228
Table 11.2	Enablers of the <i>Repurpose</i> cases	229
Table 12.1	Drivers of the <i>Recycle</i> case	245
Table 12.2	Examples of customer-driven deviations from the standard [18]	247
Table 12.3	Enablers of the <i>Recycle</i> case	248
Table 13.1	Drivers of the <i>Recover</i> case	261
Table 13.2	Enablers of the <i>Recover</i> case	263
Table 13.3	Components of smallest and largest heat recovery unit (data according to [20])	264
Table 13.4	Possible savings and amortisation of heat recovery units	266
Table 16.1	Drivers for the <i>Reuse</i> case	294
Table 16.2	reCIRCLE subscription models based on [9]	295
Table 16.3	Enablers for the <i>Reuse</i> case	298
Table 16.4	Converting the relevance of the drivers and enablers into a multiplier	299
Table 16.5	Description of the scores in the cost-utility analysis	299
Table 16.6	Evaluation criteria for enabler E.V2 transparency	300
Table 16.7	Evaluation criteria for enabler E.T4 outsourcing	301
Table 16.8	Evaluation criteria for enabler E.C1 engagement	301
Table 16.9	Evaluation criteria for enabler E.M1 logistics	302
Table 16.10	Evaluation criteria for enabler E.M2 collection	302
Table 16.11	Utility analysis	303
Table 17.1	Plastic types and examples of use [own representation derived from [20]]	312
Table 18.1	Automotive industry survey conducted in 2008 and 2010	329
Table 18.2	Digital remanufacturing technologies ranked based on AHP analysis	335
Table 18.3	Digital remanufacturing technologies linked to PLC phases	337
Table 19.1	R provokers to generate conflicts about ambitions	369