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**Circular Economy as a Strategy for Inclusive Growth: Human Capital Qualification in the Context of International Transition****Heloisa Candia Hollnagel**

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This study examines how circular economy (CE) principles can extend well beyond material recycling to foster inclusive growth, global competitiveness, and transformative human-capital development in small and medium-sized enterprises in emerging economies. Drawing on the experience of a firm that transitioned from a traditional logistics operation to an internationally integrated circular service platform, the presentation illustrates how circularity can emerge through knowledge flows, digital services, and intercontinental value-chain interactions. To meet global competitive pressures, the company streamlined its workforce from 150 employees to a highly qualified core team of five, prioritizing efficiency, technological integration, and cost optimization across international markets. This restructuring was supported by horizontal management practices, continuous learning routines, agile decision-making, and predictive analytics—mechanisms that reduced operational waste, enhanced performance, and strengthened workforce capabilities. These advancements directly align with SDG 8, one of the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals and focus on promoting inclusive and sustainable economic growth, productive employment, and decent work for all. International circularity plays a central role in the case: some countries contribute market access and regulatory expertise, others provide technology, innovation, and capital, while additional

regions incorporate reusable packaging into export-oriented value chains. Together, these multidirectional exchanges reflect an expanded conception of circularity, one that transcends material loops and evolves into a global ecosystem of shared knowledge, services, and resources. The impacts are significant: tripled revenue, highly competitive cash-flow cycles, a reversed 107-day operational cycle, and increased international credibility. The findings demonstrate how circular strategies, combined with workforce requalification and digital transformation, can position emerging-market SMEs as resilient, inclusive, and sustainable actors within the global circular economy.

**Biography**

Brazilian researcher, Dr. Heloisa Candia Hollnagel is Associate Professor at the Federal University of São Paulo (UNIFESP – Osasco Campus, Brazil). She holds degrees in Biological Sciences and Mathematics, with a Master’s and Ph.D. in Sciences from USP. Her academic work focuses on public policy, women entrepreneurship and sustainability practices, such as Circular Economy, and climate change mitigation strategies for small businesses. She is part of the Graduate Program in Administration: Digital Transformation and Sustainability in Organizations and Society (UNIFESP) and the Professional Master’s in Civil Engineering (Sustainability) at Universidade São Judas Tadeu. She also presides over the Pick-upau Environmental Agency and serves as “Water Ambassador” for the Women for Water Partnership in Brazil.