

Developing Knowledge-based Dynamic Capabilities for Shared Value Creation in Circular Supply Networks

Anna Sibińska

Marketing Department, University of Łódź, Poland

anna.sibinska@uni.lodz.pl

Abstract: This paper examines the development of knowledge-based dynamic capabilities (KBDCs) within a circular supply network and their role in enabling shared value creation. It analyses the interplay among knowledge acquisition, knowledge generation, and knowledge combination capabilities as they emerge through interorganizational collaboration and investigates how these capabilities contribute to economic, environmental, and social value outcomes. An exploratory case study was conducted within a circular supply network in Poland comprising grain producers, distributors, feed manufacturers, farms, and processors engaged in circular exchanges of materials, services, and by-products. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, focus groups, study tour observations, and internal documents. The findings indicate that all forms of KBDCs, such as knowledge acquisition, generation, and combination, are actively developed through collaboration among network actors. High relational embeddedness, manifested through trust, joint problem-solving, and mutual commitment, is identified as the central enabler of KBDC development. Knowledge acquisition is enhanced through interactions that enable actors to assimilate strategic, operational, and contextual knowledge. Knowledge generation arises from collective efforts orientated toward circularity, whereas knowledge combination is facilitated through the integration and reconfiguration of knowledge flows across the network. These processes foster shared value creation, manifested in economic efficiency and supply chain resilience, environmental restoration through regenerative production and closed-loop practices, and social benefits such as local skill development and community education. The study advances understanding of how KBDCs support shared value creation within circular supply networks by elucidating the interplay among distinct knowledge capabilities and demonstrating that collaborative interactions underpin their development. Contributes to the knowledge management literature by showing how KBDCs emerge from joint interactions and are reinforced through industrial network relationships in a circular economy context. The study illustrates how organisations can embed environmental and social objectives into their strategic core by leveraging KBDCs to develop circular solutions and simultaneously achieve economic, environmental, and social value.

Keywords: Knowledge-based dynamic capabilities, Shared value, Value co-creation, Inter-organisational collaboration

1. Introduction

Circular supply networks have received attention in academic research as networks seek to integrate circularity with larger sustainability and value-creation goals. Scholars have examined these networks through various lenses, including industrial ecology, green supply chain management, comprehensive sustainability frameworks, and circular economy approaches (Amir et al, 2022). However, despite this expanding literature, the field remains conceptually underdeveloped. Circular supply networks are commonly viewed as contexts in which value arises from regenerative resource flows, waste minimisation, and the reuse of outputs as inputs in new value cycles. In these contexts, value creation goes beyond strictly economic results to also include ecological restoration and social benefits.

This broader perspective aligns with shared value, which stresses creating economic, environmental and social value simultaneously (Sibińska and Krawiec, 2023). In circular supply networks, shared value arises when firms increase competitiveness while reducing ecological harm, supporting communities, and strengthening long-term network relationships. It also relies on continuous learning and on capabilities that enable organisations to acquire, create, and integrate knowledge across organisational boundaries. The knowledge-based view treats knowledge as a core organisational resource shaped by social interaction (Grant, 1996), while knowledge-based dynamic capabilities (KBDCs) emphasise the ability to obtain, generate and combine knowledge in dynamic environments (Phalswal et al, 2024). The development of KBDCs in circular supply networks remains underexplored, especially regarding how inter-organisational interactions shape knowledge-acquisition, generation and combination capabilities and how these processes support shared value creation. In summary, research on circular supply networks has examined circular practices and sustainability outcomes but offers limited insight into the knowledge mechanisms that produce these outcomes. Addressing this gap is crucial because circular supply networks rely on collaboration among multiple actors and such collaboration is likely to be central to mobilising and transforming distributed knowledge.

The present study investigates how knowledge-based dynamic capabilities develop within a circular supply network to enable shared value creation. Drawing on an exploratory case study of a circular agri-food supply network in Poland, the paper examines how knowledge acquisition, generation, and combination emerge

through inter-organisational collaboration and how these capabilities support economic, environmental and social value outcomes. The study addresses the following research question: *How do inter-organisational interactions foster knowledge-based dynamic capabilities' development for shared value creation in networks?* By addressing this question, the paper aims to improve understanding of how KBDCs evolve to support circular collaboration and to explain how shared value emerges from interactions among actors in the network.

2. Theoretical Background

Research on circular supply networks is growing, but the field remains conceptually fragmented. Existing studies adopt environmental perspectives from industrial ecology and green supply chain management, holistic sustainability frameworks that integrate economic, social, and environmental outcomes, and circular economy principles focused on regenerative resource cycles (Taghikhah, Voinov and Shukla, 2019; González-Sánchez et al, 2020; Aryee et al, 2025). Despite this diversity, circularity is widely recognised as one of the key mechanisms to advance the transitions of the circular supply network by reducing waste and resource consumption. They do so through closing, slowing, narrowing, intensifying, or dematerialising material loops, and by embedding circular strategies into supply chain management to strengthen sustainability performance (Geissdoerfer *et al.*, 2018; Lahane, Kant and Shankar, 2020).

Within the circular supply chain network, value creation becomes the guiding logic. Firms aim to propose, create, deliver, and capture value through long-lasting product use, remanufacturing, refurbishing, the use of renewable resources, and reductions in environmental and social costs (The Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2013). Circular flows ensure that production outputs are reintegrated as inputs for new value cycles rather than treated as waste (Vlajic, Mijailovic and Bogdanova, 2018).

Circular supply networks provide a foundation for shared value creation, whereby economic, social, and environmental value emerge simultaneously within a networked context. Shared value encompasses organisational efforts to enhance competitiveness while generating societal and environmental benefits (Sinthupundaja, Kohda and Chiadamrong, 2020; Sibińska and Krawiec, 2023). Economic value creation (EVC) denotes the capacity of network participants to endure, prosper, and function effectively to achieve growth and financial viability while introducing new products and services (Paulraj, 2011). Social value creation (SVC) refers to benefits delivered to society or local communities, such as improved well-being and safety, increased awareness and protection of people's rights, and significant progress in alleviating social problems (Maletič, Maletič and Gomišček, 2018). Environmental value creation (EnVC) relates to reductions in ecological harm, the elimination of waste and pollution, and overall environmental improvement (Maletič, Maletič and Gomišček, 2018).

Creation of shared value in circular supply networks requires continuous learning and the development of dynamic capabilities that facilitate effective interorganisational relationships. These capabilities are grounded in the knowledge-based view (KBV), which positions knowledge as a central organisational resource shaped through social interactions both within and across firm boundaries (Grant, 1996). Bratianu and Bejinaru (2020) extend this perspective by conceptualising knowledge as "knowledge dynamics," highlighting processes of knowledge transformation that support the evolution of an organisation's knowledge base.

Dynamic capabilities emerge through repeated interactions that produce new knowledge and stimulate capability development (Prieto and Easterby-Smith, 2006). Faccin et al (2019) describe knowledge-based dynamic capabilities (KBDCs) as a firm's ability to obtain, generate, and combine knowledge to exploit opportunities in dynamic environments. Furthermore, Zhen et al (2011) distinguishes three forms of KBDCs as knowledge-acquiring capabilities (KACs), knowledge-creation capabilities (KCCs), and knowledge-combination capabilities (KCCs). The acquisition of knowledge encompasses the processes and routines of recognising and acquiring internal and external knowledge (Cohen and Levinthal, 1990) and covers creative searching and strategic sense-making (Pandza and Thorpe, 2009). The generation of knowledge is defined as the practices of organising the ability to develop and enhance new knowledge creation (Nonaka, 1994). Integration and application of internal and external knowledge is the focus of knowledge combination capabilities (Bindra et al., 2023). The development of KBDCs within circular supply networks remains underexplored. A central question concerns how interorganisational interactions (Perna *et al.*, 2022; Guercini, La Rocca and Perna, 2024) shape the emergence of knowledge-acquisition, knowledge-creation, and knowledge-combining capabilities. Understanding these developments is essential to explain how KBDCs contribute to shared value within circular network settings.

3. Methodology

An abductive research approach examined how knowledge acquisition, generation, and combination capabilities develop for shared value creation in circular supply networks (Dubois and Gadde, 2002). Iteration between empirical evidence and theory generated new insights. This approach suited the exploratory research question and the limited prior work linking circular supply networks to shared value creation (Sibińska and Krawiec, 2023) and to knowledge-based dynamic capabilities (Bindra et al., 2023). As no universally accepted framework for measuring shared value exists (Dembek, Singh, and Bhakoo 2016), this study defined shared value as the aggregate of firms' economic, social, and environmental impacts and assessed it by adapting Bloom and Smith's (2010) rating approach to organizational performance in these three areas. A single exploratory case study analysed a circular supply network centred on a grain and cereal producer in Poland. Beyond cereal and grain production, the network redistributes waste streams and by-products for animal feed, thus operationalising circular flows (Montag, 2022). Network actors jointly create economic, environmental, and social value. The analysis focuses on stakeholders most directly involved in shared value creation, enabling in-depth examination of the interactions shaping KBDCs (see Table 1).

Table 1: Overview of circular supply network actors

Name of the actor	Organisation's core activities	Role of the actor within the network
Grain Food Producer and Distributor	The company manufactures organic and conventional grain products.	The focal company that integrates all other supply network organisations in waste management processes to produce food products.
Food Waste Processor	A feed manufacturer that uses grain-based raw materials to produce feed for poultry, swine, and cattle.	It acquires grain by-products from network companies to produce feed and brokers the sale of by-products and finished products to farms.
Feed Manufacturer	A feed manufacturer that uses grain-based raw materials to produce feed for cattle.	It uses products supplied by other manufacturers in the network to produce feed.
Farmland	A medium-sized farm that grows winter and spring crops and raises cattle.	It provides the raw materials such as wheat to the grain food producer.
Buckwheat Processor	The company specialises in purchasing, producing, and selling buckwheat and millet groats.	It provides buckwheat and millet and transportation services to grain producers and Distributors.
Farm Apiary	This family-owned business sources high-quality varietal honeys and other bee products.	It is a supplier of honey and bee products and materials to the grocer and distributor of grains.
International Group of Agricultural Producers and Processors	This international group of enterprises produces cereals, oil crops, potatoes, sugar beets, milk, dairy cattle, and other products.	It supplies wheat and oil products as raw materials and delivers grain harvest waste and by-products for cattle feed.

Source: Author's own work

Primary data were collected between July 2024 and December 2025 through ten in-depth interviews, a study visit to the Grain Food Producer and Distributor, and participant observation. Organisations and informants were selected via purposive and snowball sampling based on recommendations from the focal organisation's management. Data collection comprised three stages: (1) an exploratory interview with a company representative to map network actors and key circular practices in grain production and waste utilisation; (2) a study visit to directly observe technological and production processes and clarify circular flows; and (3) additional supplier interviews to deepen insights into interactions, shared practices, and collaboration. Four interviews and the observation were conducted in person, six interviews were conducted via MS Teams due to distance. All interviews were recorded and transcribed to ensure confirmability and transparency (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). The interview protocol addressed organisational roles in circular processes, resource deployment, and interaction episodes in shared value creation.

The primary data came from multiple actors in the circular supply network. For the grain food producer and distributor, material included four in-depth interviews (CEO, Sales Director, Purchasing Specialist, Production and Technological Director); study visit with observations (CEO, Production and Technological Director, production staff); seven internal documents; and one external source (web pages). For the Food Waste Processor, data comprised an in-depth interview with the cofounder and two external sources (website, industry

report). In-depth interviews were also conducted with the General Director of the Feed Manufacturer, the owner of the Farmland actor, the General Director of the Buckwheat Processor, and the Vice President of the Management Board of the Farm Apiary. For the International Group of Agricultural Producers and Processors, data included an in-depth interview with the CEO and one external source (website).

The analysis employed abductive reasoning and systematic combining (Dubois and Gadde, 2002), iteratively moving between the empirical material and the evolving theoretical framework. Data collection and analysis were conducted in parallel, whereby preliminary interpretations informed subsequent rounds of inquiry. Drawing on interview transcripts, field notes, and secondary documents, the study first generated a descriptive account of circular practices. It then examined interaction episodes in terms of their outcomes to identify manifestations of shared value creation, building on established conceptualisations (Sinthupundaja, Kohda and Chiadamrong, 2020). Given the absence of a universally accepted approach for measuring shared value (Dembek, Singh, and Bhakoo, 2016), economic, social, and environmental value creation was assessed using Bloom and Smith's (2010) rating of organizations' economic, social, and environmental achievements. The empirical material was coded into three categories of knowledge-based dynamic capabilities derived from the proposed framework (Zheng, Zhang and Du, 2011).

4. Results

The findings show that knowledge-based dynamic capabilities (KBDCs) develop through repeated interactions within the circular supply network and are closely tied to shared value creation. The results are organized into three themes: KACs and shared value creation, KGCs and shared value creation, and KCCs and shared value creation.

4.1 Developing Knowledge Acquiring Capabilities (KACs)

The study identifies three types of knowledge-acquisition capabilities: technical, process, and marketing. These capabilities develop through repeated inter-organisational interactions that help actors identify, access, and assimilate external knowledge from multiple sources. Technical knowledge mainly arises from interactions focused on creating environmental value by improving environmental conditions. These improvements include greater crop resilience, better soil analysis, and compliance with ecological standards, which support ecosystem protection.

The findings show that developing process knowledge acquisition capabilities depends on interaction mechanisms among network actors, such as meetings and quarterly quality audits. These mechanisms create economic value by helping firms detect supplier bottlenecks, improve raw material and quality assurance systems, better align products with customer and market requirements, and strengthen operational and strategic decisions and processes.

Marketing knowledge acquisition enables network actors to recognise market requirements, achieve higher parity with prevailing standards, and thus create economic value. In addition, marketing knowledge about farmers' needs, feed applications, and market conditions supports social value creation such as regional development and stabilises network relationships (see Table 2).

Table 2: Developing knowledge acquisition capabilities in shared value creation processes

Episodes of interactions	Shared Value Outcomes	Actors involved	KACs development
Meetings and technician seminars with farmers and experts	Enhancement of crop survival and mitigation of plant stress (EnVC)	International Group of Agricultural Producers and Processors Grain Food Producer and Distributor	Learning advanced technical knowledge and remote sensing analysis methods
Meetings and quarterly quality audits	Boosting product quality and cutting waste through better inputs (EVC)	International Group of Agricultural Producers and Processors Buckwheat Processor Grain Food Producer and Distributor Farm Apiary	Identifying supplier capacity bottlenecks in raw materials and acquire external knowledge on global standards.

Episodes of interactions	Shared Value Outcomes	Actors involved	KACs development
Gathering collectively market and industry data	Improving product quality and providing the parity standards to the industry (EVC)	Grain Food Producer and Distributor International Group of Agricultural Producers and Processors	Collective acquisition of market, laboratory, packaging, quality information and knowledge
Performing laboratory tests	Ensuring safe, high-quality products and stronger alignment and trust (EVC)	Grain Food Producer and Distributor Farmland	Acquiring knowledge on raw material quality and customer requirements
Participation in regional festivals and agricultural events	Promote regional development by using local suppliers (SVC)	Grain Food Producer and Distributor Farmland	Acquiring knowledge of organic certification and market requirements
Regular meetings with local farmers	Economic and financial support for farmers through stabilised by-product purchase contracts (SVC)	Grain Food Producer and Distributor Farmland Food Waste Processor Feed Manufacturer	Acquiring knowledge about farmer needs, feed applications and market conditions
Communication and meetings on certification standards	Protecting ecological integrity (EnVC)	Grain Food Producer and Distributor Farm Apiary	Acquiring knowledge about ecological certification, quality testing, and cross-border logistics

Source: Author's own work

4.2 Developing Knowledge Generation Capabilities (KGCs)

Capabilities to acquire process, technical, and marketing knowledge foster new knowledge and expertise. The capability to generate novel knowledge is closely tied to building expertise in circular solutions, as actors collaboratively design new solutions, routines, and process know-how in response to environmental challenges and emerging opportunities. Instead of merely transferring existing knowledge, these interactions create new agronomic, technological, and organisational knowledge within the network. Collaborative experimentation has been shown to promote reciprocal learning in the development of environmentally value creation. Social value creation that is exemplified by joint workforce development programmes, is supported through the strengthening of community engagement, the enhancement of awareness of circularity, and the generation of knowledge about innovative regenerative production solutions. Economic value creation is facilitated by the generation of novel technological and process-related knowledge, which in turn underpins market diversification, reduced input utilization, enhanced production capacity, improved cost efficiency, and decreased operational downtime (see Table 3).

Table 3: Developing knowledge generation capabilities in shared value creation processes

Episodes of interactions	Shared Value Outcomes	Actors involved	KGCs development
Kick-off meeting on diverse multi-species crops	Soil quality and resilience improvement (EnVC)	International Group of Agricultural Producers and Processors Grain Food Producer and Distributor	Development of proprietary expertise in soil management and crop rotation
Joint experimentation	Market diversification and lower inputs (EVC)	International Group of Agricultural Producers and Processors Grain Food Producer and Distributor	Creation the specialistic knowledge on low-input cultivation protocols
Creation of production plant	Developing new production capacity and reducing waste (EnVC) to improve economic competitiveness (EVC)	Grain Food Producer and Distributor Farmland	Generating new technological and process knowledge to innovate grain cleaning and processing

Episodes of interactions	Shared Value Outcomes	Actors involved	KGCs development
Establishing of a reuse policy	Realize cost savings (EVC) and environmental advantages (EnVC)	Grain Food Producer and Distributor Farmland	Generating new process knowledge on using by products as inputs to new processes.
Co-organising and co-funding a local workforce empowerment programme	Local community's development through recruiting and training local workers in circular practices (SVC)	Grain Food Producer and Distributor Farmland Buckwheat Processor	Building community engagement and knowledge in circular and regenerative production solutions
Jointly negotiation cooperation procedures	Transparent transactions and stable business relationships (EVC)	Grain Food Producer and Distributor Farmland Buckwheat Processor Farm Apiary International Group of Agricultural Producers and Processors	Developing new quality assessment and procurement protocols
Collaborative management of production breakdowns	Reduction of downtime and adjustment of production schedules (EVC)	Grain Food Producer and Distributor Farmland Food Waste Processor Feed Manufacturer	Developing new routines for problem-solving and production adjustment

Source: Author's own work

4.3 Developing Knowledge Combination Capabilities (KCCs)

Regarding the development of knowledge combination capabilities, the findings show that this development is linked to generating knowledge and enhancing expertise on circular issues. KACs enable actors to recognise and absorb agronomic, technical, market, and regulatory knowledge through audits, meetings, testing, and ongoing exchanges. KCCs then allow actors to integrate heterogeneous knowledge across organisational boundaries, combining operational, technological, and market-related knowledge from different organisations and functions. KCCs are primarily associated with economic value creation.

The integration of farmers' experiential knowledge with corporate standards, as well as the synthesis of multi-country procurement knowledge, contributes to increased income, enhanced supply stability, and improved competitiveness. Similarly, the combination of technical data enables actors to reduce input use, stabilise business operations and promote more sustainable soil management, thereby fostering environmental value creation. Moreover, the integration of accounting, logistics, and production-related knowledge reduces costs, strengthens quality assurance, improves efficiency, and enhances both organisational and economic synergies across the network (see Table 4).

Table 4: Developing knowledge combination capabilities in shared value creation processes

Episodes of interactions	Shared Value Outcomes	Actors involved	KCCs development
Contributing to national meetings and participating in trade shows	Rising incomes, stable supply, and greater competitiveness (EVC)	International Group of Agricultural Producers and Processors Grain Food Producer and Distributor Food Waste Processor Feed Manufacturer Farmland	Integrating farmer knowledge with corporate standards and multi-country procurement expertise

Episodes of interactions	Shared Value Outcomes	Actors involved	KCCs development
Integrating technical data	Reduced inputs and yield stability (EVC) and sustainable soil cultivation (EnVC)	International Group of Agricultural Producers and Processors Grain Food Producer and Distributor	Aggregating multi-source data for business decisions
Business process consolidation meeting	Lower admin costs; better synergy; long-term economic value (EVC)	Grain Food Producer and Distributor Feed Manufacturer	Integrating accounting, logistics, and production knowledge into organizational routines
Jointly negotiations with external parties	Cost savings, better quality assurance, and industry standardisation (EVC)	International Group of Agricultural Producers and Processors Grain Food Producer and Distributor	Cross-company knowledge sharing in quality, procurement, and logistics
Joint logistic management system	Improvement of mutual logistics efficiency (EVC)	Grain Food Producer and Distributor Feed Manufacturer	Integrating schedules and logistical knowledge

Source: Author's own work

5. Discussion

This study examines how inter-organisational interactions build knowledge-based dynamic capabilities for shared value creation in a circular supply network. In specific, the study makes three theoretical contributions.

Firstly, this study advances debates on knowledge-based dynamic capabilities (KBDCs) in inter-organizational networks (Bindara et al, 2023). The findings show that knowledge acquisition, generation, and recombination build cumulatively through repeated collaboration among network actors. Relational embeddedness is the key condition enabling these capabilities at the network level. The configuration of KBDCs examined here rests on reciprocity, which drives the creation of new knowledge and specialized expertise. The results further indicate that actors integrate and coordinate knowledge through socially embedded interactions that allow them to address circular challenges and market demands. This aligns with prior business network research (Perna et al., 2022; Guercini, La Rocca and Perna, 2024) while offering a deeper understanding of how circular network settings foster KBDCs.

Secondly, this study advances the KBDCs framework (Zheng et al, 2011) by offering refined insights into the dynamic interplay among KACs, KGCs, and KCCs, thereby clarifying the mechanisms through which one type of capability shapes, enables, and transforms another. The findings indicate that knowledge acquisition exerts a direct and positive influence on the development of both knowledge generation and knowledge combination capabilities. Although dynamic capabilities exhibit common foundational characteristics across organisations, they vary in the ways in which they are enacted and deployed (Eisenhardt and Martin, 2000). These processes indicate that KBDCs develop in a relational way, in which the activities of acquiring, creating, and integrating knowledge reinforce one another and strengthen capabilities.

Thirdly, the study reveals new aspects of shared value creation in circular supply networks (Amir et al, 2022) by emphasizing the role of KBDCs. Prior research has focused on circularity, regenerative resource flows, and sustainability outcomes, but has offered limited insight into the knowledge mechanisms that enable these outcomes. It has suggested that circular supply networks create value by closing resource loops and reducing environmental and social costs, while the knowledge-based view sees knowledge as a strategic resource shaped through social interaction (Grant, 1996). Building on these perspectives, this study shows that shared value creation in circular supply networks depends not only on material recirculation, but also on knowledge-intensive interaction. Circularity is enacted through episodes in which actors access external knowledge, co-develop new solutions, and integrate dispersed expertise into coordinated practices.

6. Conclusions

This study examines how knowledge-based dynamic capabilities (KBDCs) develop through inter-organisational interactions in a circular supply network and how they enable shared value creation. The results show that knowledge acquisition, generation, and combination capabilities build through repeated collaboration among

network actors and jointly support economic, environmental, and social value. KBDCs in circular supply networks are interaction-driven and relationally embedded. By tracing how specific interaction episodes generate different KBDCs and shared value outcomes, the study clarifies the micro-level mechanisms linking inter-organisational collaboration, knowledge dynamics, and shared value creation at the network level.

Based on a single case, the study nevertheless offers analytical transferability beyond the analysed network. The identified mechanisms as interdependent knowledge acquisition, generation and combination capabilities, and the centrality of relational embeddedness, are not specific to the agri-food sector and are likely relevant to other circular and sustainability-oriented inter-organisational networks. However, transferability is limited by the specific institutional and relational context of the studied network. Less mature or more transactional networks may display different capability dynamics. Future research could use comparative and longitudinal designs across diverse network configurations and institutional environments to test whether these patterns hold, especially in circular networks with different technologies, power structures, or degrees of formalisation.

Practically, the findings suggest that managers in circular supply networks should invest in relational and knowledge-management processes. Regular knowledge exchange, joint experimentation, collaborative problem solving and integrating dispersed operational and sustainability knowledge are critical for strengthening circular practices and shared value outcomes.

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