

# NOT MY BUSINESS: HOW INDIVIDUALS' COGNITIVE FRAMES AND ROLE IDENTITIES INFLUENCE CORPORATE SUSTAINABILITY

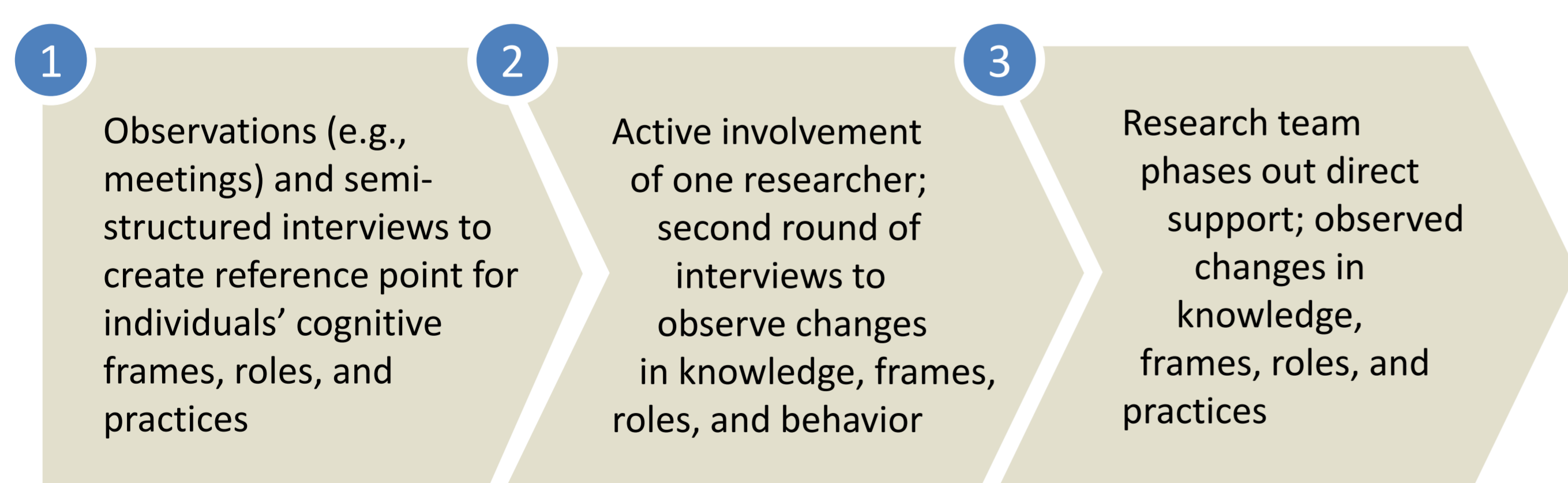
We investigate how cognitive frames and role identities jointly shape individuals' engagement in corporate sustainability. Drawing on a longitudinal case study of a sustainability project within a medium-sized firm, we show that sustainability in companies is strongly dependent on (a) the interaction between individuals' cognitive frames and role identities and (b) their evolution over time.

## Motivation

- Strong increase in number of studies that examine **role of cognition for corporate sustainability** (e.g., Hahn, Preuss, Pinkse, & Figge, 2014)
- Much of the previous work in the area is either **conceptual** or limited to studying the **senior management team** (Hahn et al., 2014)
- Studies provide limited insights into relationship between individual cognition and sustainability action for a **broader** range of organizational members who may **differ in their role identity**, i.e., their perceived self-view of their role within an organization (Chreim, Williams, & Hinings, 2007)
- Existing work focuses on **classifying frames in a static way**, not providing a detailed understanding of how individuals dynamically adjust their frames over time (Cornelissen et al., 2014)

## Method

- **18-month qualitative case study** of a sustainability project within a **medium-sized car retailing and service firm in Germany**
- Prior to the start of the project, company showed **very limited efforts** related to sustainability
- Data collected from **various sources in three phases** to track sustainability-related cognitive frames, role identities, and action **at the individual level**



- Data analysis using **analytical induction** (coding and pattern matching) to develop process framework

## Results

COGNITIVE FRAME	Win-Win Frame	Limited, Instrumental Sustainability Action	Strong Sustainability Action
	Trade-off Frame	No Sustainability Action	Limited, Activist Sustainability Action
		Economic Role Identity	Hybrid Role Identity
ORGANIZATIONAL ROLE IDENTITY			

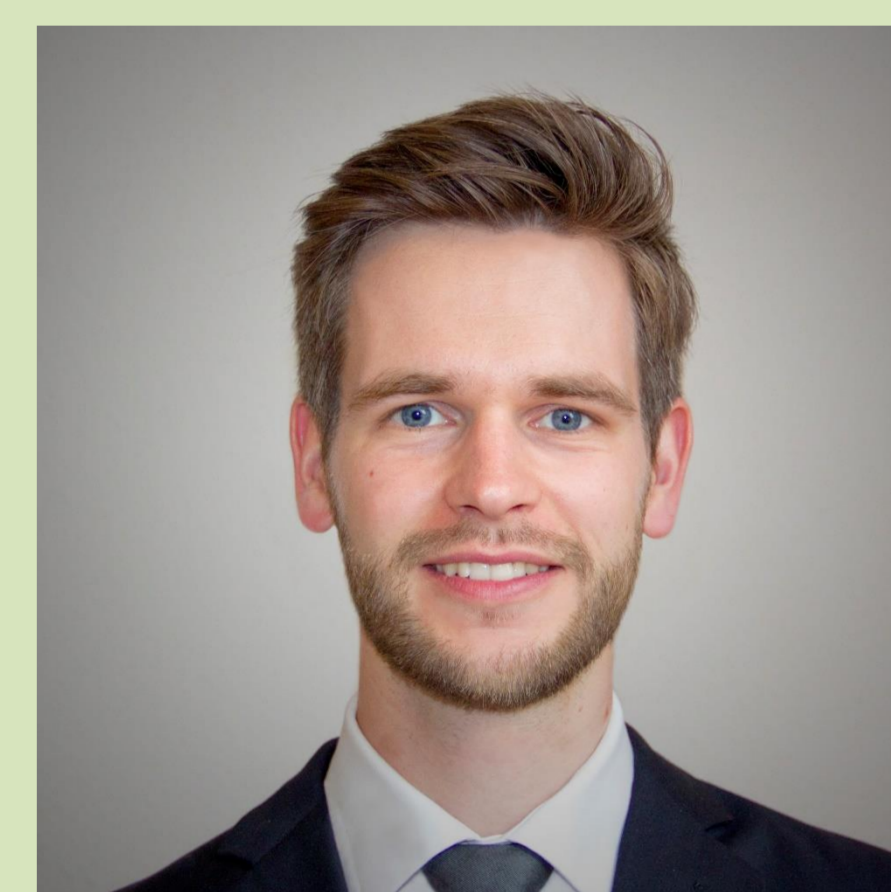
## Implications

- **Sustainability action depends on both cognitive frames and role identity:** Even if an individual perceives sustainability as a win-win, sustainability action remains limited if the individual's role identity does not include sustainability aspects ("not my business")
- **Organizational role identity moderates changes in cognitive frames:** individuals who perceived their primary role to consist of economic activities often ignored information about sustainability practices, thereby preventing cognitive frame adjustments
- **Personal identity as important driver** of changes in roles and related role identity; **resource and legitimacy conflicts as inhibitors** of changes in roles

## Dr. Jörn Hoppmann

### Research interest

- Strategic management
- Sustainability management
- Innovation management



### Lectures

- Einführung in die Betriebswirtschaftslehre (Bachelor)
- Unternehmensstrategien (Bachelor)
- Strategisches Management (Master)
- Corporate Social Responsibility (Master)
- Unternehmen und institutioneller Wandel (Master)

## Literature

- Ashforth, B. E., & Schinoff, B. S. 2016. Identity under construction: How individuals come to define themselves in organizations. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior*, 3: 111-137.
- Hahn, T., Preuss, L., Pinkse, J., & Figge, F. 2014. Cognitive frames in corporate sustainability: Managerial sensemaking with paradoxical and business case frames. *Academy of Management Review*, 39(4): 463-487.