
ENABLING THE INTRODUCTION OF THE FOREST METAPHOR IN ORGANISATIONS

Distinguishing individuals most likely to adopt and diffuse the forest metaphor to conceptualise the circular economy to drive transformative change

Thesis Research Project
MSc Industrial Ecology
Delft University of Technology and Leiden University

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By
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Thesis Research Project

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To whomever reads this, you are looking at my Thesis Research Project, marking the conclusion of my academic journey at TU Delft.

I can still vividly remember my first visit to Delft when I was in high school. The day was rainy — as it often is in the Netherlands — and though I enjoyed the company and a fun evening, I was not convinced that Delft would be the place for me. However, at the same time, I became increasingly certain that Industrial Design was the program for me. So, in 2017, I decided to start my bachelor's in Delft.

Now, looking back after more than seven years, and having moved from Delft to Amsterdam when starting my master's Industrial Ecology, I realize how special my time in Delft has been. It's funny to think that, while I may not have admitted this when I first started, the thought that my time in Delft is now officially over saddens me a little. It has been nothing short of amazing, filled with experiences and people who have shaped me as a person.

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Thank you all — I hope you enjoy reading my Thesis Research Project.

ABSTRACT

The pressing sustainability challenges have underscored the need for transformative measures within the global economy. The circular economy presents itself as an alternative to traditional linear models and promises transformative change. However, this transformative change is hindered by the remnants of linear thinking embedded in many circular economy definitions. To address this challenge, this research explores conceptual metaphors as a valuable tool for reshaping the understanding of the circular economy. Among these, the forest metaphor offers a compelling perspective, framing the circular economy as a forest. Yet, the potential of the forest metaphor remains theoretical. To determine its ability to drive the transformative change required for a circular economy, it is essential to translate the forest metaphor from theory into practice. Achieving this translation requires the practical implementation of the forest metaphor. According to the Law of the Few, certain key individuals play a disproportionately large role in the successful implementation of novel concepts. Therefore, this research aims to answer the question: How can the individuals most likely to adopt and diffuse the forest metaphor—"the Few"—be distinguished? The research is conducted in two phases. Phase 1 involved profiling the Few through a combination of literature review, expert consultations, and a validation process with focus groups. Nine key themes with 23 profiling criteria were identified, which were synthesized into a framework of three main categories, requiring an individual's capability, motivation, and situational alignment to fit the profile of the Few. Phase 2 focused on selecting the Few within an organization by translating the profiling criteria into an assessment tool, developed through stakeholder mapping, co-creation, and testing with a small participant panel. The tool uses one question per criterion to assess individuals against the profiling criteria to determine their alignment with the profile of the Few. The results suggest that while the framework provides valuable insights into the profile of the Few, the Few might be more effectively viewed as a dynamic group, with different individuals potentially contributing unique strengths at various stages of the adoption and diffusion of the forest metaphor. As for the assessment tool, the results offer a useful starting point for identifying these key individuals, though its broad focus and reliance on a single question per criterion might limit the depth of its assessment. Therefore, it could function best as an initial filter, paving the way for a multi-stage evaluation process. In conclusion, through the profiling framework and assessment tool, this research provides a method to distinguish the individuals most likely to adopt and diffuse the forest metaphor. This represents an initial step toward bridging the gap between its theoretical potential and practical application, enabling its introduction within organisations.

Keywords: *Circular Economy, Conceptual Metaphor Theory, Forest Metaphor, Profiling, Change Management, Assessment*

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1. INTRODUCTION

This section dives into the exact problem addressed in this research. First, the background of the problem will be described. From this, the underlying problem statement is identified, followed by the recognition of a knowledge gap. The section concludes with the research objective and questions.

1.1. BACKGROUND

To thoroughly understand the problem, a literature review is conducted. The review serves two primary objectives: providing a concise overview of the core concepts and establishing the presence of a knowledge gap.

1.1.1. THE NEED FOR TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE

In the face of escalating sustainability challenges, such as climate change, resource depletion, and socio-economic inequalities, the imperative for transformative measures becomes increasingly urgent (Zeng et al., 2022; European Commission, 2015). Many of these issues are largely driven by the current economic models, which prioritize economic growth over environmental and social considerations, often failing to account for externalities such as resource depletion, pollution, and inequality (Jackson, 2009; Rockström et al., 2009). This underscores the urgent need for transformative change.

Within this context, the circular economy, as shown in Figure 1, has gained attention as a promising alternative to conventional economic models that can deliver this transformative change through radically different outcomes (Bocken et al., 2016; Geissdoerfer et al., 2017; Murray et al., 2017; Temesgen et al., 2021). The circular economy

has proven to be effective in mitigating resource scarcity and reducing environmental degradation (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2013; Grafström & Aasma, 2021; Mitchell & James, 2015; Preston, 2012). As a result, the circular economy is globally endorsed by several entities (Korhonen et al., 2018), as well as becoming a central goal for organizations of all types. Frameworks such as the ISO standards (International Organization for Standardization, 2018) for the circular economy further reinforce the role of the circular economy as a critical approach for reshaping industries and driving transformative change.

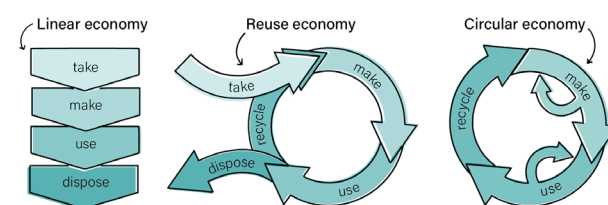


Figure 1: Types of economic models inspired by (Ashraf et al., 2024).

1.1.2. ONE OF THE CHALLENGES OF THE CIRCULAR ECONOMY

Due to the maturity and popularity of the concept, the circular economy is conceptualized in various ways, leading to diverse interpretations (Geissdoerfer et al., 2017; Millar et al., 2019; Schöggel et al., 2020; Watson, 1990). Kirchherr et al., (2023) underscore this diversity by highlighting 221 definitions, focusing on different aspects of the circular economy.

These definitions range from Boulding's (1966) closed-loop system concept to more contemporary interpretations that integrate ideas from industrial ecology, cradle-to-cradle, biomimicry, and the blue economy (Graedel & Allenby, 1995; McDonough & Braungart, 2002; Niero & Hauschild, 2017; Pauli, 2010; Pearce & Turner, 1991; Stahel, 2010). Yuan et al. (2006) emphasise the importance of material flow closure, while Webster (2021) focuses on restorative design. Bocken et al. (2016) categorise the circular economy as strategies to slow, close, and narrow resource loops. Geissdoerfer et al. (2020) describe it as an economic system designed to minimize resource input and waste by cycling, extending, intensifying, and dematerializing material and energy flows. Geissdoerfer et al. (2017) also emphasize value retention as a core principle. Ellen MacArthur Foundation (2013) encapsulates the circular economy through three guiding principles: eliminating waste and pollution, circulating products and materials at their highest value, and regenerating natural systems. Supporting strategies such as reducing, reusing, recycling, recovering, redesigning, and remanufacturing help achieve these objectives (Gong et al., 2020). Nevertheless, while definitions vary, most emphasise regenerative systems and sustainable practices (Govindan & Hasanagic, 2018; Kok et al., 2013), a focus also found in the recent ISO vision for the circular economy. By emphasising the decoupling of social and economic

growth from resource consumption, this vision advocates for the reduced, efficient, and effective use of resources while minimising harmful environmental impacts, drawing on observations of how natural systems function (International Organization for Standardization, 2018).

However, whichever of the various definitions is considered, one common challenge is prominently present—the persistent influence of linear economic thinking. Despite its goal of fundamentally reshaping economic systems, many interpretations of the circular economy remain entrenched in the traditional “take-make-dispose” mindset, focusing primarily on improving efficiency or resource use without challenging the linear growth model (Friant et al., 2020). Fromberg et al. (2022) and Murray et al. (2017) similarly point out that remnants of linear economic thought continue to influence how the circular economy is conceptualized. Further reinforcing this challenge, Corvellec et al. (2022) express concerns that conventional economic discourse, deeply rooted in linear thinking, shapes current circular economy narratives.

In essence, while the definitions promote sustainability, the underlying mindset often remains rooted in linear processes. To exemplify, many organisations may adopt recycling programs or energy-efficient production methods, but still rely heavily on continuous resource extraction and mass production, addressing symptoms of waste without shifting to truly regenerative models. This persistent influence of linear economic thinking limits the circular economy's ability to achieve its full, transformative potential to fundamentally rethink and redesign the entire economic system. Rather than merely tweaking the current linear model, the circular economy offers a new perspective that focuses on minimizing waste, keeping resources in circulation, and regenerating natural systems. Therefore, a key challenge in conceptualizing the circular economy, lies in overcoming this persistence of linear economic thought that continues to shape circular economy strategies (Fromberg et al., 2022).

1.1.3. CONCEPTUAL METAPHORS AS A VALUABLE TOOL

One way to address this entrenched linear thinking is through conceptual metaphors, which allow us to explore new lines of inquiry—such as reimagining the circular economy—by framing it through radically different perspectives compared to the linear economy. According to conceptual metaphor theory, around 98% of an individual's reasoning occurs unconsciously and relies on the “logic” of conceptual metaphors, shaping individual's thoughts, perceptions and behaviours (Lakoff, 2010). By enabling us to reframe familiar concepts in new ways (Duit, 1991), metaphors aid in conceptualizing and navigating our understanding. Conceptual metaphors allow us to understand one domain—typically abstract—by relating it to another, more concrete domain (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980).

These metaphors have the potential to function as valuable tools, providing new perspectives on complex ideas by drawing parallels between seemingly unrelated phenomena and experiences (Levin, 1982). While metaphors are often viewed as mere linguistic expressions (Steen et al., 1999), they play a much deeper role in shaping how we conceptualize abstract ideas, offering diverse applications (Xiu, 2011, 2013). Within the context of the circular economy, conceptual metaphors can potentially serve as a valuable tool to (re)shape the understanding of the circular economy (Fromberg et al., 2023), and facilitate the successful translation into practical applications (Kania et al., 2014).

However, in line with the challenge of entrenched linear thinking in circular economy definitions, the prevailing conceptual metaphors currently employed to understand the circular economy are also commonly used to conceptualize the linear economy, reinforcing similar patterns of thought (Fromberg et al., 2022). To illustrate, some of these commonly used metaphors mirror the linear economic thinking, such as machine and competitive metaphors, depict events unfolding in a sequential, predictable, and defined order, much like the phases of a sports game or the operation of a machine (Fromberg et al., 2022). To further demonstrate how this could constrain transformative change, consider the example in Table 1.

In contrast, the circular economy embodies a dynamic mindset (Ferreira et al., 2024), where life cycles

of materials and products intertwine in continuous loops. Thus, to more accurately mirror the principles of the circular economy, alternative metaphors to the currently prevailing linear ones might offer better alignment with its dynamic nature.

Table 1: Example of using the machine metaphor to understand the circular economy.

<p>Company GreenOak is a furniture company that aims to become more circular.</p>
<p>Scenario: (Unbeknownst to them) they use a linear mindset by adopting a machine metaphor.</p>
<p>Potential outcome: GreenOak approaches resilience in a machine-like manner by focusing on modularity and repairability. In machine systems, resilience comes from the ability to quickly repair or replace parts that fail. Instead of replacing an entire product when a single part malfunctions, GreenOak designs furniture with interchangeable components. For example, if a table leg breaks, customers can simply replace the leg rather than discarding the entire table. This ensures the product's lifespan is extended, while also reducing waste. This modularity makes the system more efficient, allowing GreenOak to respond to customer needs or issues without altering the entire product or system.</p>
<p>Interconnectedness in a machine system revolves around structured and coordinated relationships, designed for efficiency. Just as the parts of a machine work together in a highly coordinated way to achieve a function, GreenOak establishes structured partnerships with suppliers and recyclers. These partnerships ensure the smooth flow of materials—from sourcing sustainable wood to recycling at the end of the product's life. This approach focuses on making the entire supply chain efficient and streamlined, with each partner playing a specific role to keep operations running smoothly, much like how machine parts interact to achieve a larger goal. While these relationships are efficient, they are largely transactional and designed for practical coordination rather than deeper collaboration.</p>
<p>Adaptability in machine systems is driven by centralized control. This means that when changes are necessary—such as switching to more sustainable materials—decisions are made at the top level of the company and rolled out uniformly across all factories. GreenOak mirrors this centralized adaptability. For instance, if leadership decides to shift from using reclaimed wood to bamboo, this decision would be implemented across all regions in the same way. This allows for quick, consistent changes, focusing on uniformity and efficiency.</p>
<p>Finally, feedback loops in a machine system are essential for optimizing performance. Machines rely on data to track energy use, material efficiency, and overall productivity, enabling small adjustments to fine-tune operations. GreenOak applies this approach by using data-driven feedback to monitor the performance of their production process. For example, sensors track how much material is wasted or how much energy is used. If inefficiencies are identified, GreenOak can make small, targeted adjustments to improve resource use or streamline production. This allows GreenOak to enhance efficiency without making significant changes to the overall system, much like a machine that adjusts itself to operate more smoothly based on real-time data.</p>
<p>In this scenario, GreenOak makes incremental improvements to its existing linear system by adding circular practices such as modularity, efficient resource use, and structured partnerships. However, these are mostly an add-on to an otherwise linear process where the system stays fundamentally linear.</p>

1.1.4. THE POTENTIAL OF THE FOREST METAPHOR

The exploration of alternative metaphors, particularly nonlinear ones, sheds light on their potential to reshape both circular economy mindsets and practices (Du Plessis & Brandon, 2015). Among these, nature-based metaphors stand out, with the forest metaphor in specific (Fromberg et al., 2022, 2023). In this metaphor, the forest represents the “source domain”, from which insights are drawn, while the “target domain” is the circular economy, the abstract concept requiring comprehension (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Simply put, approaching the CIRCULAR ECONOMY as a FOREST (Fromberg et al., 2022).

The forest metaphor has gained significant traction due to its familiarity. Forests are a concrete and intuitive concept for most individuals, making this metaphor both accessible and practical compared to other nature-based metaphors—such as a desert or deep-sea life, which may seem too unfamiliar to many. Additionally, the principles of a forest closely resonate with those of the circular economy. By way of example, both systems showcase interconnectedness and complexity, where various elements—whether trees, plants, animals in a forest, or businesses, consumers, and governments in a circular economy—depend on one another for resources and survival (Tate et al., 2019). Similarly,

in both systems, resources flow seamlessly, creating balanced, self-sustaining environments. Forests also naturally embody nonlinear interactions, feedback loops, and self-regulation, where nutrients are continually cycled and redistributed. This mirrors the circular economy principle of keeping materials in use and regenerating systems. Furthermore, the resilience found in forests, where ecosystems adapt and thrive through diversity and mutual support, reflects the adaptability of a circular economy that encourages collaboration and flexible resource use to create mutual benefits for all participants. Another parallel is the forest's structure as a large, open system, which aligns with the circular economy's principle of a collective approach. Just as a forest functions without a single owner, relying instead on a network of interconnected species, the circular economy operates through shared responsibility and cooperation among diverse stakeholders. This resonance shows how the forest metaphor provides a participatory interpretation, unlike some other nature-based metaphors—such as a garden, which is typically owned and managed by a single entity and does not align with the circular economy's principle of an open system with a collective approach.

This resonance underscores the potential of the forest metaphor in (re)shaping the understanding of the circular economy. Building on this, the example in Table 2 demonstrates how the forest metaphor could lead to radically different outcomes than those currently generated. By applying these forest principles in practice through an enhanced or altered understanding of circular economy principles, the metaphor moves beyond theory and becomes a practical tool for transformative change, leading to the radically different outcomes that the circular economy promises.

Table 2: Example of using the forest metaphor to understand the circular economy.

<p>Company GreenOak is a furniture company that aims to become more circular.</p>
<p>Scenario: (Unbeknownst to them) they use a circular mindset by adopting a forest metaphor.</p>
<p>Potential outcome: In a forest, resilience is achieved through diversity and regeneration, where different species support each other to adapt and survive. GreenOak applies this idea by using diverse materials such as reclaimed wood, recycled plastic, and bamboo. In a forest, multiple species may serve similar functions—for example, several plant species may fix nitrogen in the soil—so if one species is compromised, others can step in to fill its role. Similarly, if GreenOak faces a shortage of one material, they can switch to another. This functional redundancy ensures that GreenOak remains resilient in the face of disruptions, much like forests survive through the diversity of species.</p>
<p>From the perspective of a forest, interconnectedness is best exemplified by mycelium networks, where fungi create underground connections between trees and plants, allowing them to share nutrients and support each other. GreenOak mirrors this by forming collaborative partnerships with suppliers, customers, and local businesses. For example, GreenOak shares by-products like sawdust and wood offcuts with biofuel companies, while receiving renewable resources in return. This continuous, mutually beneficial exchange mirrors the nutrient-sharing mycelium networks in forests, where all parts work together to support the ecosystem. GreenOak's interconnected system ensures that no material is wasted, with each by-product finding a new purpose elsewhere.</p>
<p>Adaptability in forests is demonstrated by how species independently adapt to changing seasons and local conditions. For instance, some animals in colder regions hibernate to conserve energy, while in warmer climates these animals do not, or certain trees develop smaller, waxy leaves in dry regions to conserve water, while in wetter forests, they grow larger leaves to capture more sunlight. GreenOak mirrors this decentralized adaptability by empowering local teams to adjust production based on the specific resources and conditions in their regions. For example, factories in bamboo-rich regions focus on bamboo-based products, while those near sources of reclaimed wood specialize in upcycled furniture. This decentralized approach allows GreenOak to stay flexible and responsive to changing environmental and market conditions, much like how forest species adapt to their surroundings independently.</p>
<p>Lastly, looking at regenerative cycles from a forest perspective is that nothing goes to waste—fallen leaves decompose and return nutrients to the soil. GreenOak adopts this principle through its take-back program, which encourages customers to return used furniture. The returned furniture is disassembled, with parts either recycled into new products or passed on to other industries. For instance, wood from returned items can be repurposed into new tables, while metal components might be sent to local manufacturers for reuse. This approach ensures that materials remain in constant circulation, just like how nutrients cycle through a forest.</p>
<p>In this scenario, GreenOak restructures its operations to fully integrate circularity into every aspect of the business. Circularity is no longer an add-on but becomes the foundation of a dynamic, interconnected, and regenerative system; it is embedded throughout the entire business model.</p>

1.2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

While the potential of the forest metaphor is acknowledged in theory, this recognition alone is insufficient. Though it lays the groundwork, it remains crucial to translate this theoretical potential into practical outcomes for the forest metaphor to drive real change. In other words, its potential to drive the transformative change promised by the circular economy must be demonstrated in practice.

This transition hinges on the implementation of the forest metaphor. To facilitate the implementation, this research draws on two concepts related to change management. The first concept involves the “Law of the Few”, which suggests that the success of any new idea is heavily dependent on a small group of key individuals who possess disproportionate influence in spreading that idea (Gladwell, 2002). Concentrating efforts on these key individuals maximizes the impact of the idea, reduces resistance, and overcomes barriers to its acceptance. The second concept builds on the notion of “change champions” or “change agents” (Ginsberg & Abrahamson, 1991; Wolverton, 1998)—individuals with the ability to lead change within organizations or broader networks. These individuals play a pivotal role in the implementation of new ideas. Kotter’s guiding coalition expands on this concept, highlighting the importance of forming a group of influential individuals who collectively drive and sustain the change effort (Kotter, 1996). This coalition ensures that the transformation is not only effective but also enduring, helping to maintain momentum as the new ideas spread throughout organizations or society.

Applying these concepts to this research reveals that certain key individuals can act as a bridge between the theoretical potential of the forest metaphor and its practical implementation among a broader audience, including those who may initially resist the concept. These key individuals are essential as they serve as the primary catalysts for the forest metaphor’s implementation.

For these key individuals to successfully implement the forest metaphor, the metaphor must be first adopted—defined as to begin to use something (Britannica Dictionary, 2024)— and subsequently diffused across broader networks—defined as the spread of something in many directions (Cambridge Dictionary, 2024). From now on these key individuals are referred to as the Few—the individuals most likely to adopt and diffuse the forest metaphor. The process of translating the theoretical potential of the forest metaphor into practical results is displayed in Figure 2.

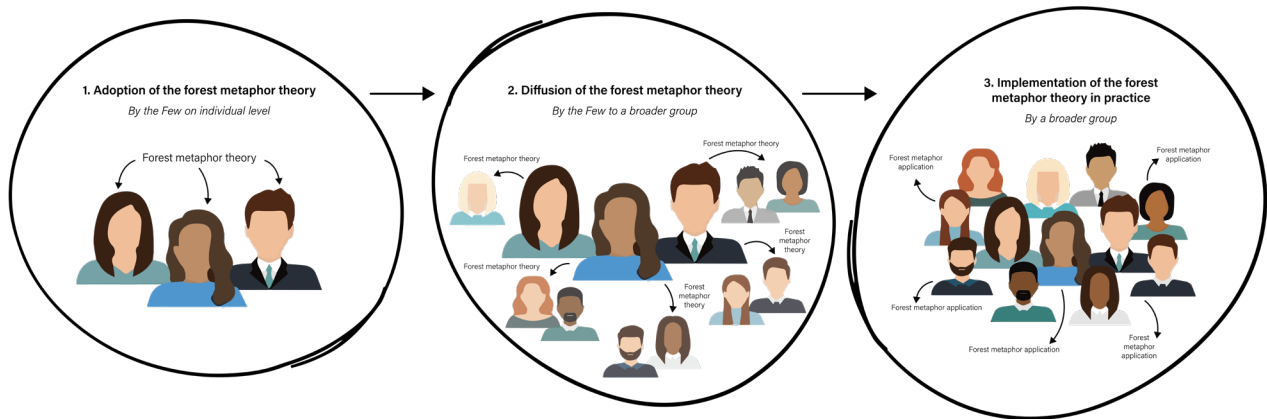


Figure 2: Process of implementing the forest metaphor theory into practice.

To understand what this process would look like in practice, it is important to consider the role of forest metaphor advocates. These advocates believe in the metaphor’s transformative potential and focus on its practical implementation. They introduce the metaphor to the Few, concentrating their efforts on educating and engaging this key group. In doing so, they ensure the metaphor is adopted by the Few, which enables its broader diffusion and eventual implementation across wider networks.

1.2.1. KNOWLEDGE GAP

The importance of the Few, and its role, are evident. However, the question remains: who are

they? There is a gap in knowledge regarding who the Few are and what makes them likely to adopt and diffuse the forest metaphor.

While there have been significant contributions in the literature and recognized connections within the scientific domains explored in this research, there is little research specifically addressing the identification of individuals in the context of the circular economy and conceptual metaphors like the forest metaphor. Current literature does not sufficiently explore the criteria that determine an individual’s likelihood to adopt and diffuse the forest metaphor, nor does it examine how these individuals can be found. Therefore, the journey toward practical implementation of the forest metaphor begins with identifying the characteristics of the Few. However, identification alone is not enough; it is also necessary to find the Few, so they can be specifically targeted and engaged to adopt and diffuse the forest metaphor.

In this research, the process of identifying the Few involves defining criteria to profile them,

while finding them will be achieved by developing a tool to select them from a larger group. The core issue addressed by this research is distinguishing the Few through profiling and selection within a targeted group, as illustrated in Figure 3.

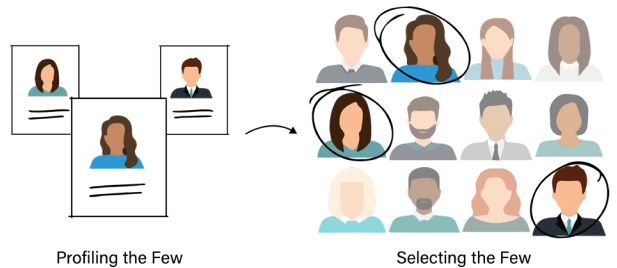


Figure 3: The steps to distinguish the Few.

In short, this research seeks to address the identified knowledge gap by exploring how to distinguish the Few. By addressing this gap, it aims to take a step toward bridging the divide between the theoretical potential of the forest metaphor and its practical application, with the hope that it may contribute to transformative change.

1.3. RESEARCH OBJECTIVE AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Distinguishing individuals most likely to adopt and diffuse the forest metaphor presents a challenge due to potential biases. While there are assumptions about who the Few might be and how to select them, the previous sections highlighted that there is no conclusive evidence supporting these assumptions.

Given this uncertainty, a more systematic and scientific approach is required to distinguish the Few. Therefore, the overarching objective of this research is to develop a method for distinguishing the individuals who are most likely to adopt and diffuse the forest metaphor. To provide this objective with direction and focus, the main research question to be answered is presented as:

How can the individuals most likely to adopt and diffuse the forest metaphor be distinguished?

The process of distinguishing the Few is twofold, finding who the Few are and then differentiating them. To effectively address this duality of the objective, the main research question is broken down into the following sub-questions:

- SQ1** How can the individuals most likely to adopt and diffuse the forest metaphor be profiled?
- SQ2** How can the individuals most likely to adopt and diffuse the forest metaphor be selected?

1.3.1. SCOPE

To ensure the attainment of realistic goals and establish clear focus and boundaries, a deliberate scope is defined throughout the research. Given the significant impact that organisations have on climate change and resource depletion (Friant et al., 2020; Riley, 2017), they are critical players in the transition to a circular economy. Despite commitments from many organisations to reduce emissions by 2050, there remains a considerable gap in implementing the circular economy principles within the organisational sector (Circle Economy, 2021). Therefore, this research specifically focuses on identifying the Few within organizational contexts.

1.3.2. RELEVANCE

This research aims to hold significance on both academic and societal levels. The societal relevance of this research becomes clear when considering broader sustainability challenges. The circular economy holds significant promise in addressing these environmental challenges and reimagining it through a metaphor shows potential (Erra et al., 2012; Väliverronen, 1998). The forest metaphor is designed to help reimagine and communicate the circular economy in ways that encourage transformative change. By taking an initial step towards advancing the implementation of this metaphor, the research seeks to support the adoption of circular economy principles. In doing so, it aligns with ongoing efforts to achieve sustainability goals.

Beyond its societal impact, this research is holds significance within the academic field

of Industrial Ecology, a multidisciplinary field focused on analysing material and energy flows within industrial systems and exploring how they can be reorganized to reduce environmental harm. Industrial Ecology is often described as the “toolbox for sustainable development,” offering systemic approaches to sustainability that seek to bridge the gap between industry and ecology (van Berkel et al., 1997). While this research explores the specific resonance between the forest metaphor and the circular economy, it exemplifies how metaphors can reshape conceptualizations and drive transformative change. It demonstrates how, in the field of Industrial Ecology, one of the tools for sustainable development can be the use of ecosystem metaphors for the reconstruction of industrial systems (Ferrão, 2007). While there are differences in focus between Industrial Ecology and the circular economy, both fields share the

common goal of integrating sustainability into industrial systems. This research highlights the potential of metaphors to serve as practical tools for achieving these goals across both domains.

2. RESEARCH DESIGN

In any research, a well-defined research design serves as a crucial component, offering clarity, transparency, and guided decision-making (Marczyk et al., 2010). This section outlines the overall approach and structure for this research, explaining the logical sequence of activities, as suggested by Chetty (2016).

2.1. RESEARCH APPROACH

This research adopts the Double Diamond (DD) approach, developed by the British Design Council (2005) and inspired by Bánáthy (1996). The DD approach, as adapted for this research, is visualized in Figure 4. The DD approach is recognized for its way to describe the steps taken in innovation and design processes, irrespective of methods and tools used. The DD model visualizes the innovation process as two consecutive diamonds, representing the duality of divergent and convergent thinking. Each diamond consists of two stages. The first diamond focuses on understanding the problem space. The discover stage is about gathering insights and exploring the research problem in depth, and the define stage that involves synthesizing these insights to clearly articulate the problem and establish criteria for success. The second diamond focuses on creating and refining solutions. Where the develop stage is where potential solutions are generated and iteratively refined, and the deliver stage involves implementing the solution and assessing its effectiveness in meeting the defined criteria.

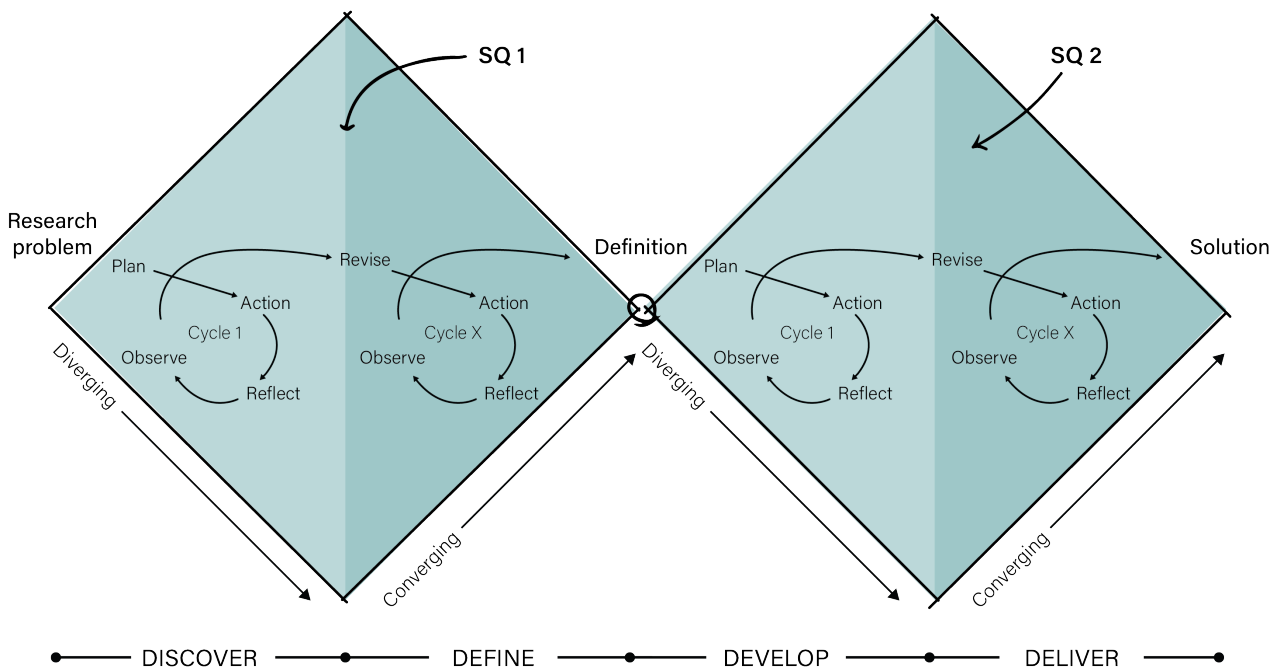


Figure 4: Double Diamond approach and the Action Research Spiral integrated to align with the approach of this research (Bánáthy, 1996; Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005).

The decision to adopt the DD approach for this research is grounded in its suitability for addressing complex and exploratory research questions (Kochanowska et al., 2022). The DD framework provides a systematic way to navigate the research process, which is essential for research that requires both a deep exploration of the problem space and the development of a practical, actionable solution. Moreover, the DD approach resonates well with the objective of this research, which is divided into two distinct sub questions. This alignment ensures a cohesive flow from one phase to the next, with the outcomes of the first phase directly informing the work of the second. The systematic nature of the DD approach helps maintain a clear and organized progression through the research, while its principles of design thinking and iterative problem solving allow for the necessary reflection and adaptation at each stage. To further enhance the iterative process, the principles of the Action Research Spiral, as proposed by Kemmis & McTaggart (2005), are also integrated into the research approach. This integration emphasizes the importance of ongoing reflection, continuous feedback, and iterative adjustments, ensuring that the research remains dynamic and responsive to new insights and challenges as they emerge.

2.2. RESEARCH STRUCTURE

This section outlines how the theoretical frameworks discussed inform the practical design of the research structure. The research is divided into distinct phases, each aligned with one specific sub-questions. Together, these phases address the two core objectives: profiling the Few and selecting the Few.

These phases are interdependent, with insights from the first phase directly influencing the next. The first diamond (Discover and Define) corresponds to the profiling phase, where the research focuses on generating and validating a profile to identify the Few. The second diamond (Develop and Deliver) aligns with the selection phase, where the profile will be translated into the designing and testing of a selection tool. Both phases will be described in detail in the subsequent phase sections, covering research methods, data requirements, and analytical techniques.

To provide a visual overview of this research structure, Figure 5 presents a research flow diagram. This diagram serves as a roadmap, illustrating the process from the initial research problem through each phase of the research to the final thesis, ensures a clear and logical progression towards answering the overarching research question (White, 2017).

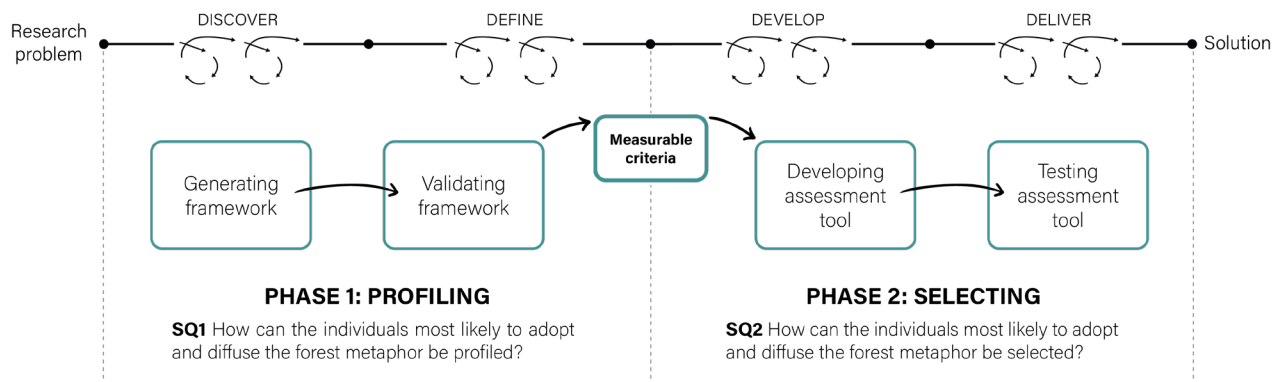


Figure 5: Research flow diagram.

2.2.1. RESEARCH PILOT

To test and refine the research design, a pilot study was conducted to simulate the research process within a short timeframe—starting with one day, then extending to a week—to identify obstacles, resource needs, and methodological adjustments before executing the full research.

Several approaches were tested during the pilot, including participant selection, data collection, and preliminary analysis. One approach involved identifying potential members of the Few and comparing them with non-members to build a profile. However, the main challenge was defining the profile of the Few and determining how to select them. This raised key questions: How could the selection process be validated

without clear criteria? And how could criteria be developed without a representative group? This created a chicken-and-egg dilemma: the criteria for selecting the Few needed to be tested, but the Few could not be identified without first developing these criteria. Combined with the risks of bias and time constraints, this issue highlighted the need for an alternative, more efficient approach.

As a result, the pilot prompted a shift toward developing a theoretical profile of the Few as a starting point, leading to a more feasible research process aligned with the research scope and the available resources.

3. PHASE 1: PROFILING THE FEW

GENERATING AND VALIDATING A FRAMEWORK

This chapter explores the first phase of the research. It will examine the criteria influencing the likeliness of individuals to adopt and diffuse the forest metaphor. Based on these findings, a conceptual framework will be developed to serve as a foundation for the second phase of the research.

3.1. INTRODUCTION

The first step is to effectively determine who the Few are and what differentiates them from others? Therefore, this phase of the research addresses the first sub-question:

SQ1 How can the individuals most likely to adopt and diffuse the forest metaphor be profiled?

The purpose of this question is to define a set of measurable criteria to profile the Few. This raises the more specific question of what makes an individual adopt and diffuse the forest metaphor.

In answering this question, it is crucial to understand what drives the Few. As explained before the Few have a dual role—adopting the forest metaphor and diffusing it. So, what determines this adoption and diffusion? According to the Social Identity Theory (Hogg, 2016), specific groups of people tend to share common characteristics. In this case, according to the theory, the Few share a unique combination of factors that enable them to adopt and diffuse the forest metaphor. Therefore, identifying the Few requires a comprehensive understanding of these factors.

Addressing these common factors allows for an approach known as profiling, a systematic analysis of various factors defining a particular group of individuals (Hildebrandt, 2008). It involves creating a detailed overview of specific criteria that highlight who these individuals are and what makes them unique in their capacity to adopt and advocate for the forest metaphor. Profiling serves the purpose of identifying the commonalities among the Few.

3.2. METHODS PHASE 1

This section outlines the methodology for the first phase of the research, which consists of generating and validating a framework to profile the Few, as illustrated in Figure 6. The outcome of this phase provides a set of measurable criteria that profile the Few.

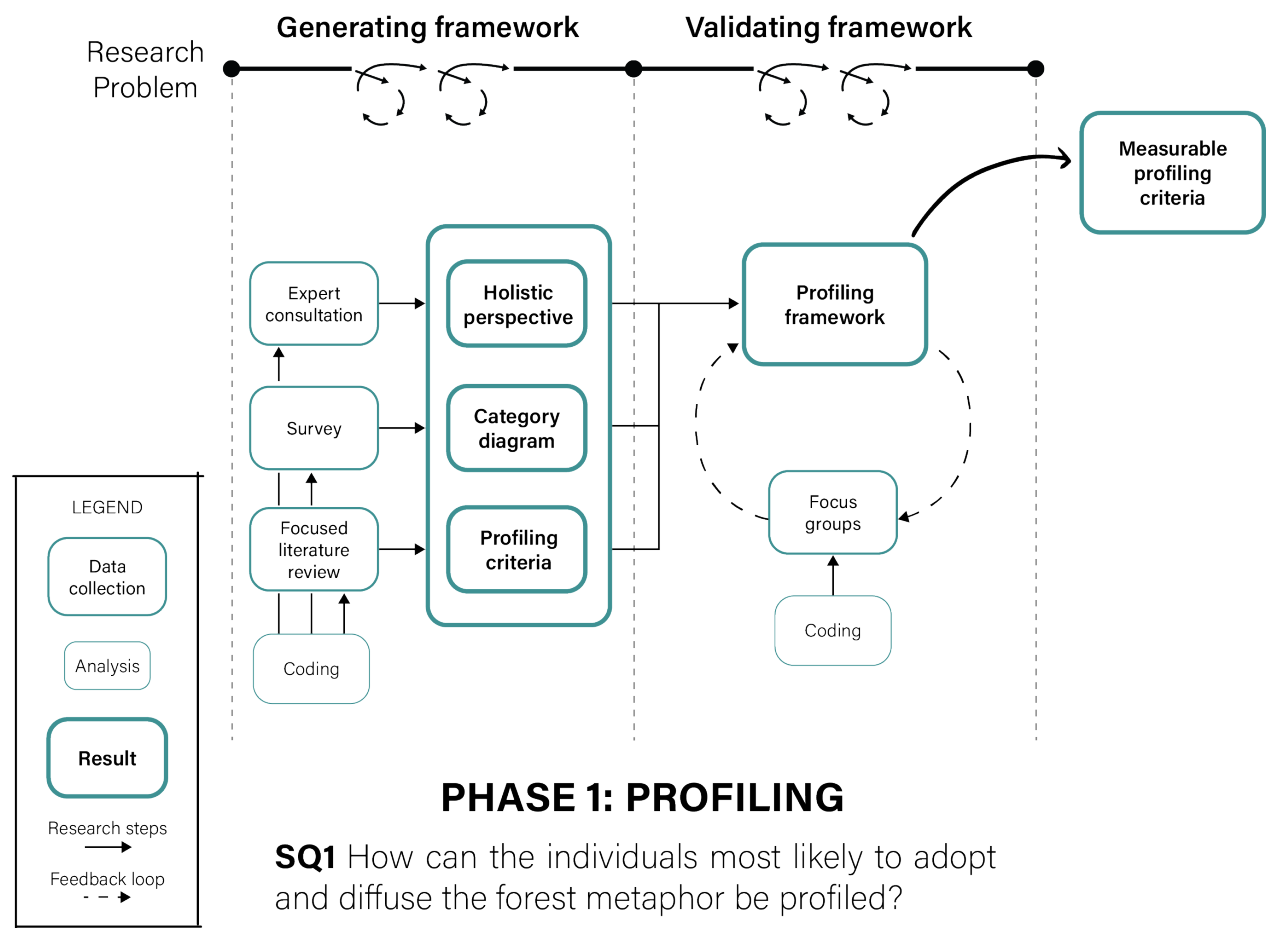


Figure 6: The methodology flow diagram for phase 1.

3.2.1. EXPLORING THE FIELD

The initial drafts of the framework and profiling criteria was developed based on intuition and expert consultations. These consultations aimed to verify whether the initial intuitions were recognized, measurable, and relevant, as well as to identify any areas that had not yet been considered. Experts were selected for their knowledge and expertise in fields pertinent to the research, with the additional consideration of their availability and willingness to participate. Due to time and resource constraints, the selection was limited to four individuals. Notably, all selected experts were female, which resulted from the researcher's reliance on a personal network predominantly composed of women willing to contribute. While the gender composition was not intentional, it is acknowledged here for transparency. This lack of gender diversity may have influenced the perspectives captured during the consultations. The demographics of the participants are summarized in Table 3.

Each expert was contacted, and consultations were conducted through online conversations lasting about half an hour to an hour. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to the consultations, ensuring that they were aware of the purpose and scope of the research, and that their insights could be used for the purposes of this research. At the beginning of each interview, the experts were provided with background information on the research objectives, as well as the most updated draft of the framework and profiling criteria. The conversations focused on the experts' perspectives on

Table 3: Expert consultation participants demographics.

NO.	FUNCTION/OCCUPATION	ORGANISATION	GENDER
1	Neuropsychologist	Amsta	Female
2	Doctoral candidate	Delft University of Technology	Female
3	Innovation lead	Unilever	Female
4	Behavioural specialist	Connection SGGZ	Female

the profile of “the Few,” particularly whether they recognized the framework’s dynamics, considered the criteria valid, and believed they could be measured effectively. Suggestions for refining and measuring the criteria were also solicited. During these consultations, detailed notes were taken to capture the key insights and suggestions provided by the experts. These notes were subsequently coded and categorised to adjust and refine both the draft of the framework and profiling criteria.

Following the expert consultations, a survey was conducted to minimise personal bias and gather external input on the relevance of the framework draft and criteria. The survey also aimed to identify any overlooked criteria and gather perspectives from non-experts to provide an outside viewpoint. It was distributed through the researcher’s personal network, with participants given one week to respond. A total of 15 participants, representing a diverse range of backgrounds and ages, completed the survey. The demographics of the participants are displayed in Table 4. The familiarity of the forest metaphor among the participants was based on the researcher’s judgment and the information available to them and consent was obtained from all participants at the beginning of the survey.

Table 4: Survey participants demographics.

NO.	BACKGROUND	FAMILIARITY WITH THE FOREST METAPHOR	GENDER	AGE
1	Education	Low	Female	22
2	Sustainability	Low	Male	28
3	Medical	Moderate	Female	19
4	Design	Low	Male	52
5	Medical	Moderate	Female	25
6	Marketing	Low	Non-binary	26
7	Social Sciences	Low	Female	21
8	Social Sciences	High	Female	33
9	Consultancy	Low	Male	53
10	Economics	Low	Female	24
11	Education	Moderate	Female	58
12	Consultant	Low	Female	50
13	Architecture	Moderate	Male	19
14	Social Sciences	Low	Female	60
15	Entrepreneur	Moderate	Male	59

The survey consisted of both ranking and open-ended questions for each profiling criterion from the most recent draft at that time, allowing for the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data. The questions were generated by the researcher to enable participants to rank the relevance of each criterion. Participants were then asked to share their thoughts and provide input on the criteria. Administered via Google Forms, the survey aimed to assess the relevance of the criteria and identify any additional criteria that may have been overlooked. Quantitative data were analysed using Excel to highlight the relevance of the criteria, while qualitative responses were reviewed to extract insights that could inform further refinement of the criteria. The feedback from both the expert consultations and the survey informed several iterations and refinements of the framework and profiling criteria draft.

3.2.2. ENHANCING THE ROBUSTNESS

To further refine the framework and profiling criteria, a focused literature review was conducted. The purpose of this review was to improve the robustness of the framework and criteria developed in earlier iterations by ensuring they were aligned with, and supported by, existing research. Additionally, existing frameworks were analysed to inform the development of the framework, aiming to create a more structured and comprehensive set of criteria, gain insights into underlying dynamics, and assess the overall completeness of the framework.

The literature review was targeted, concentrating on studies that could either support or challenge the developed criteria. Google Scholar was the primary tool for the literature search, focusing on topics directly related to the forest metaphor and the identified criteria, such as metaphor adoption and comprehension, environmental communication, and individual differences in receptivity. The search also considered different application contexts, such as healthcare and education, to ensure a broad understanding. In addition to this, backward snowballing was employed to identify foundational studies through the references of the initially selected articles, broadening the scope of the review and uncovering relevant works that may not have appeared in the original search.

- The selection of literature adhered to the following inclusion and exclusion criteria:
- 1. Credibility: The sources had to be from peer-reviewed journals or well-regarded academic publications.
 - 2. Relevance: The literature needed to be applicable to the objective of this research.

Once relevant and credible literature was identified, key information was extracted, focusing on how each source either supported or contradicted one or more criteria. Each criterion was reviewed against multiple sources to ensure its robustness. Simultaneously, relevant and credible theories were selected to inform the overall structure of the framework. The relevant theories were analysed, summarizing their key elements, strengths, and weaknesses. These analyses, combined with the defined profiling criteria, informed additional iterations of the framework draft and criteria. The result was a set of robust, literature-backed criteria within a structured framework, inspired by existing theories, and ready for validation.

3.2.3. VALIDATING THE OUTCOME

The final step of Phase 1 involved validating the preliminary framework and profiling criteria through two focus groups. Focus group one consisted of five experts with a deep understanding of the forest metaphor and its applications. These participants were selected for their ability to provide high-level, critical feedback, given their familiarity with the subject matter. In contrast, focus group two included four non-experts from diverse backgrounds. These individuals were selected from the researcher’s personal network based on their availability and willingness to participate within a two-week timeframe. The inclusion of non-experts allowed for an outside perspective, ensuring that the framework was clear and accessible to a broader audience beyond specialists.

The aim of these focus groups was to test specific elements of the framework and profiling criteria, focusing on three key areas. First,

participants shared their general impressions of the framework, offering initial thoughts on whether it seemed intuitive and comprehensive. This helped gauge the overall understanding and reception of the framework from both experts and non-experts. Second, the groups reviewed specific elements of the framework, evaluating the relevance and clarity of the profiling criteria. Participants provided feedback on which aspects were most effective, which were challenging, and which elements were confusing, unclear, or missing. Finally, participants were encouraged to provide concrete suggestions for improvement, identifying gaps in the framework or proposing additional elements that could enhance its comprehensiveness and usability.

The focus groups were structured differently. Focus group one, with the experts, was conducted online via Microsoft Teams and lasted one hour. Prior to the session, participants signed consent

forms and received background information about the framework and profiling criteria via Miro, an online collaborative whiteboard platform. This allowed them to review the materials ahead of time. During the session, the discussion was recorded, while participants also contributed their feedback directly to the Miro board through virtual post-its.

Focus group one, with the experts, was conducted as an interactive group discussion, led by the researcher, which allowed for discussions between participants. The session took place online via Microsoft Teams and lasted about one hour. Prior to the session, participants signed consent forms and received background information about the framework and profiling criteria via Miro, an online collaborative whiteboard platform. This allowed them to review the materials ahead of time. During the session, the researcher facilitated a discussion around key topics, and participants provided feedback through verbal comments. These discussions were recorded, and participants also contributed their feedback directly to the Miro board using virtual post-its. Focus group two, composed of non-experts, followed a different structure. Each participant was engaged in individual online sessions lasting about 30 minutes. During these one-on-one sessions, participants reviewed the framework and shared their feedback by posting comments directly on the Miro board.

The data collection process also slightly varied between the two groups. In focus group one, feedback was collected through both Miro post-its and transcribed comments from the recorded discussion, ensuring that all insights, both written and verbal, were captured. In focus group two, however, data was collected solely from the comments participants posted on the Miro board, as there were no recordings of these sessions.

To analyse the data from focus group one, the feedback was processed in two steps. First, the feedback was categorized into thematic categories based on what elements the comments addressed, such as “clarity,” “usability,” and “relevance of criteria.” In the second step, these categories were evaluated to determine necessary adjustments and were labelled according to the nature of the feedback, such as challenges, doubts, suggestions for improvement, or positive feedback. For focus group two, the non-expert feedback was analysed using a coding approach. Open coding was first applied to identify initial themes, followed by axial coding to refine and group the feedback into broader data points. Finally, selective coding was used to prioritize the feedback, organizing it into categories of “action required,” “review,” or “no adjustment necessary” based on its alignment with the research objectives and the goals of the framework.

The feedback from both focus groups played a critical role in refining the framework. The experts in focus group one provided in-depth evaluations of the framework’s structure and theoretical foundations, offering feedback on its comprehensiveness and identifying any gaps. Meanwhile, the non-expert participants in focus group two provided primarily a user-centred perspective, highlighting areas of the framework that were difficult to understand or apply in real-world contexts.

The final iteration of the framework incorporated the structured feedback from both groups, leading to a validated framework with measurable profiling criteria for the Few. Throughout the process, feedback from peers and supervisors was also sought to guarantee logical coherence, clarity, and alignment with the research objectives. These conversations further informed the final adjustments.

3.3. RESULTS PHASE 1

In this section, the profile of the Few is described through a holistic perspective, the dynamics between the elements and finally the measurable profiling criteria and the framework.

3.3.1. HOLISTIC PERSPECTIVE

Through the combination of approaches—intuitive insights, expert feedback, and a focused literature review, as explained in sections 3.2.1 and 3.2.2—a holistic overview of the key elements provided a clear structure for profiling the Few. This process integrated both top-down theoretical foundation and bottom-up practical insights, the complete results from the expert consultations are presented in Appendix A. The top-down approach adapted existing models to the research context, as one expert emphasized the importance of established frameworks:

Expert (Doctoral candidate): “In academic research, it’s crucial to rely on established frameworks. They help ensure that our views are systematic and that we’re not missing out on key factors.”

Meanwhile, the bottom-up aspect stemmed from expert consultations and intuitive insights, offering practical relevance.

As this iterative process progressed, three major categories stood out as essential for understanding the Few. However, each category proved to be nuanced and multifaceted, necessitating more granularity and precision. Insight from the expert consultations underscored the importance of certain elements. For instance, one expert from the behavioural field underscored the importance of focusing on motivation:

Expert (Behavioural specialist): “From my area of expertise it shows that motivation is indispensable when considering behaviour change.”

Similarly, the importance of external conditions was emphasized by another expert:

Expert (Neuropsychologist): “In my work, I’ve often seen how the environment can make or break an individual’s ability to thrive; external factors play a huge role.”

These insights confirmed that broad categories were insufficient for fully capture the variety of influences profiling the Few. To provide a more precise framework, the use of themes within these categories became essential.

Simultaneously, the analysis of well-established models and theories also confirmed the need for nuance through unique insights, as displayed in Figure 7. This analysis showed that no single framework could fully capture all the dimensions necessary for understanding the Few. By integrating elements of multiple frameworks, a more robust and nuanced model was developed to suit the specific context of this research. Certain categories began to stand out, and the literature provided theoretical support for distinguishing themes within the larger categories.

This synthesis offers a holistic and nuanced view by integrating insights from various perspectives, ensuring that no single model or a purely empirical approach dominated the analysis. Both the literature and empirical evidence pointed to the need for nuance—capturing different dimensions within each broad category. This need for finer distinctions led to the creation of the themes, ensuring that each category could be examined with greater depth and precision. Feedback from the focus group highlighted concerns about the distinction between the themes:

Focus group comment (Expert): “There seems to be some overlap between certain themes and categories. Perhaps you could consider rethinking the themes.”

This feedback led to a reconsideration of certain themes and their clustering within the broader categories. Finally, the culmination of this iterative process led to the identification of three core categories, each comprising three distinct themes:

1. **Capability**

This category captures the individual's ability to understand and apply the forest metaphor. Informed by the COM-B model's emphasis on Capability and the focus of Kotter's model on the importance of being able to drive change, the category entails both technical skills, leadership ability, and experience within an organization. The themes assigned to this category include:

- 1. **Knowledge** because it represents that individuals need the ability to understand the principles behind the forest metaphor.
- 2. **Skills** as this represent the cognitive and practical abilities that are required to apply the metaphor in real-world scenarios.
- 3. **Experience** because it highlights how hands-on experience in relevant fields is critical for effectively understanding the forest metaphor and its use.

2. **Motivation**

This category captures the internal drive and commitment necessary to engage with and promote the forest metaphor. This categorization is informed by COM-B model's emphasis on Motivation and Barr et al.'s focus on intention and psychological factors. The COM-B model highlights Motivation as a critical component for behaviour change, while Barr et al. emphasize behavioural intention. Together, these frameworks underscore the importance of aligning beliefs, attitudes, and values within the Motivation category. The themes placed in this category were selected based on their ability to influence an individual's intention to adopt and diffuse the forest metaphor:

- 1. **Beliefs** were included because they shape the individual's idea about the need for change, which is crucial for motivating the adoption and diffusion of the forest metaphor.
- 2. **Attitudes** were assigned to this category as they reflect an individual's predisposition towards adopting and diffusing new ideas, such as the forest metaphor.
- 3. **Values & Norms** were placed in this category because they guide behaviour by influencing what individuals consider important and morally right.

3. **Situation**

The structure of this category aims to include external factors that can either enable or hinder an individual to effectively adopt and diffuse for the forest metaphor. This categorization was strongly influenced by the Opportunity component of the COM-B model, which emphasizes the critical role of external factors in enabling behaviour. The inclusion of broader external influences from Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory and Kotter's focus on organizational dynamics further expanded the understanding of this category. This approach ensures that the category captures both immediate environmental factors and broader organizational contexts that support or obstruct the practical application of the metaphor within a given context. The themes that represented the external influences were assigned to this category:

- 1. **Resources** were included because access to reliable information, financial means, networks, and time availability are essential external factors that enable the successful adoption of the forest metaphor.
- 2. **Socio-Status** was categorized under Situation as it reflects the status an individual holds within an organization. A higher socio-status can enhance the individual's ability to mobilize support and drive the adoption and diffusion of the metaphor, making it a key external factor.
- 3. **Incentives** were placed in this category to account for the role external motivators, such as rewards or recognition, play in behaviour. Incentives can significantly enhance the likelihood of the forest metaphor's adoption and diffusion.

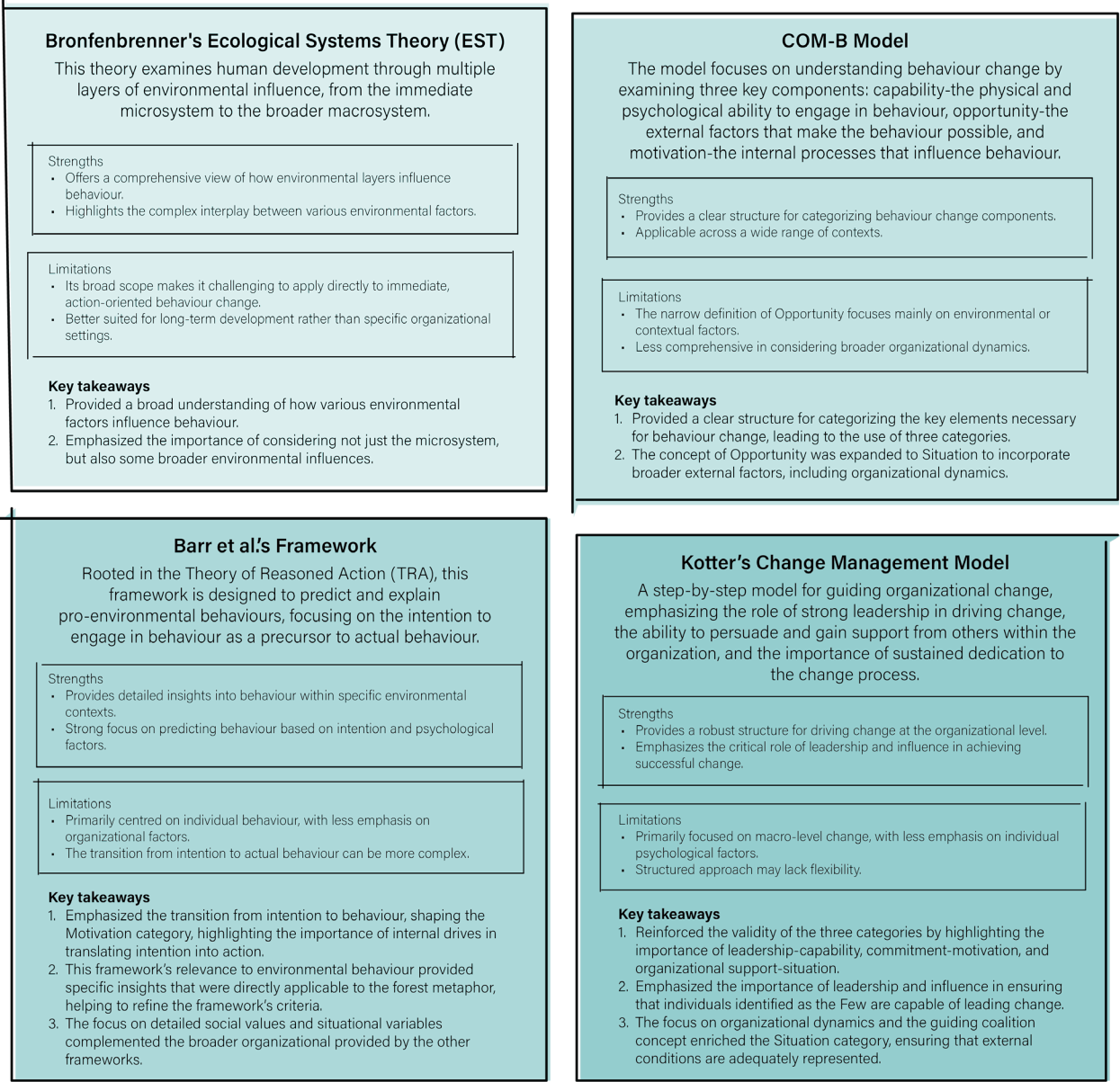


Figure 7: Overview of existing theories, models and frameworks (Barr & Gilg, 2007; Bronfenbrenner, 1992; Kotter, 1996; Michie et al., 2011).

3.3.2. THE FEW'S SWEET SPOT

As discussed in the previous section, profiling the Few involves a combination of three essential elements: an individual should be capable, be motivated, and be in the situation. This combination is critical because if any one of these elements is missing, the individual may lack the complete alignment required to be part of the Few, thereby reducing their likelihood of adopting and diffusing the forest metaphor effectively. One expert insightfully noted:

Expert quote (Behavioural specialist): "In my experience, people don't always act for the reasons you'd hope. Sometimes, they're driven by personal gain—like power or status—rather than the collective good or the core mission."

This comment emphasized the need to evaluate not just whether someone can perform a task, but also their underlying motivations. It reinforced the importance of considering the combination of motivation, capability, and situation when profiling the Few. The absence of one or more elements can affect an individual's ability to effectively fulfill the role. The following scenarios illustrate the impact of missing elements:

- 1. **Misaligned intentions:** Individuals with capability and situation but lacking motivation might have the skills and resources but may use them for personal gain rather than for the collective goal of sustainability.
- 2. **Restricted ambition:** Those with motivation and situation but lacking capability may have the desire and opportunity to contribute but lack the skills to make a meaningful impact.
- 3. **Ineffectual advocates:** Individuals with capability and motivation but in unsupportive situations may struggle to act effectively, leading to frustration and potential burnout.

This concept parallels the idea of Ikigai and the Feasibility-Desirability-Viability model, where success is achieved at the intersection of multiple elements (Brown & Katz, 2011; Kono & Walker, 2020). Similarly, for the Few, all three elements—motivation (wanting something), capability (being able to do it), and situational alignment (having the right context to act)—must be present. When these elements align, individuals are more likely to adopt and diffuse the forest metaphor effectively within an organization. To illustrate this the elements can be visualised in a Venn diagram, see Figure 8. Each circle represents one of the elements, and the intersection representing the Few within an organisation.

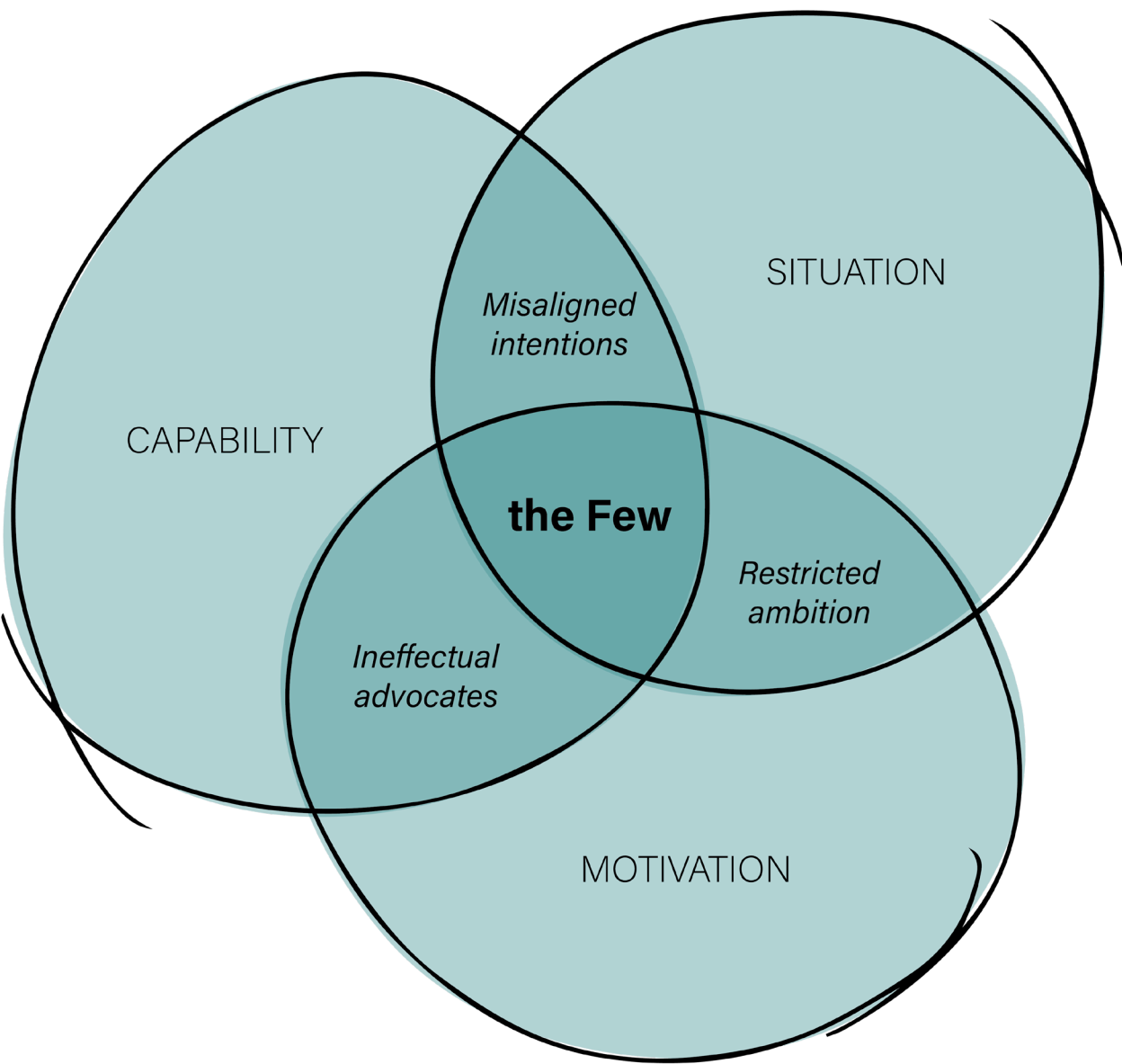


Figure 8: The Few's Sweet Spot diagram.

The Few's Sweet Spot diagram was developed in response to feedback from the focus groups. These comments made it clear that the interaction between the key elements was crucial but hadn't yet been

fully addressed. For example:

Focus group comment (Expert): "How are the Few motivated? Does it matter if they genuinely seek change and are self-motivated, or could they be adopting the forest metaphor simply because others are doing it, driven by social conformity? Think about what you want to emphasize here."

This comment highlighted the complexity of both motivation and situation, raising the question of whether individuals are driven by genuine desire for change or simply by external factors like wanting to look good or appear aligned with others. This realization led to the conclusion that being part of the Few requires more than just having power or position. True alignment in motivation, capability, and situation is needed to ensure individuals are genuinely committed to adopting and promoting the forest metaphor, rather than being motivated by external appearances.

Focus group comment (Expert): "It's unclear whether the barriers to adopting the forest metaphor are being adequately considered. It seems these barriers are ignored. Perhaps you could rethink how this is represented."

This prompted a deeper consideration of potential barriers, such as the absence of certain profiling criteria, and how these might hinder adoption. The concept of barriers was considered by the development of the diagram, illustrating how missing elements can obstruct the alignment required for the Few.

Focus group comment (Layman): "I wasn't sure how the weight of each factor is determined or how they're quantified. Perhaps you could consider making this more explicit."

This feedback highlighted the need to further explore and visualize the interaction between the three identified elements. The Few's Sweet Spot diagram represents the intersection of these elements and emphasises that all three are necessary for the effective adoption and diffusion of the metaphor.

Focus group comment (Expert): "I'm not sure I understand how the different factors interact with each other. Perhaps you could consider reviewing this part."

This feedback led to a closer examination of the interaction between motivation, capability, and situation. It informed the development of the diagram, clarifying that these elements do not function in isolation but must align for an individual to fit the profile of the Few.

3.3.3. THE PROFILING CRITERIA

To provide a more concrete and nuanced view of what defines each of the categories and themes as defined in the previous sections a detailed set of profiling criteria was simultaneously developed. The aim of the profile of the Few, is a set of measurable criteria, therefore these profiling criteria needed to be specific, measurable, and clearly structured.

Like the more holistic overview of the framework structure, the initial list of criteria emerged from intuition and expert input, and was further refined by a targeted literature review, and expanded based on survey data, which can be found in Appendix B. To ensure the criteria were organized logically and effectively, coding techniques were applied to assign each criterion to one of the nine themes. The 23 specific criteria as linked to the themes, are displayed in Figure 9.

Throughout this process, insights from the expert consultations and comments from the focus groups played a critical role in refining the profiling criteria:

Expert (Behavioural specialist): "Over the years, I've found that success isn't solely about being able to do something. It's the combination of many elements."

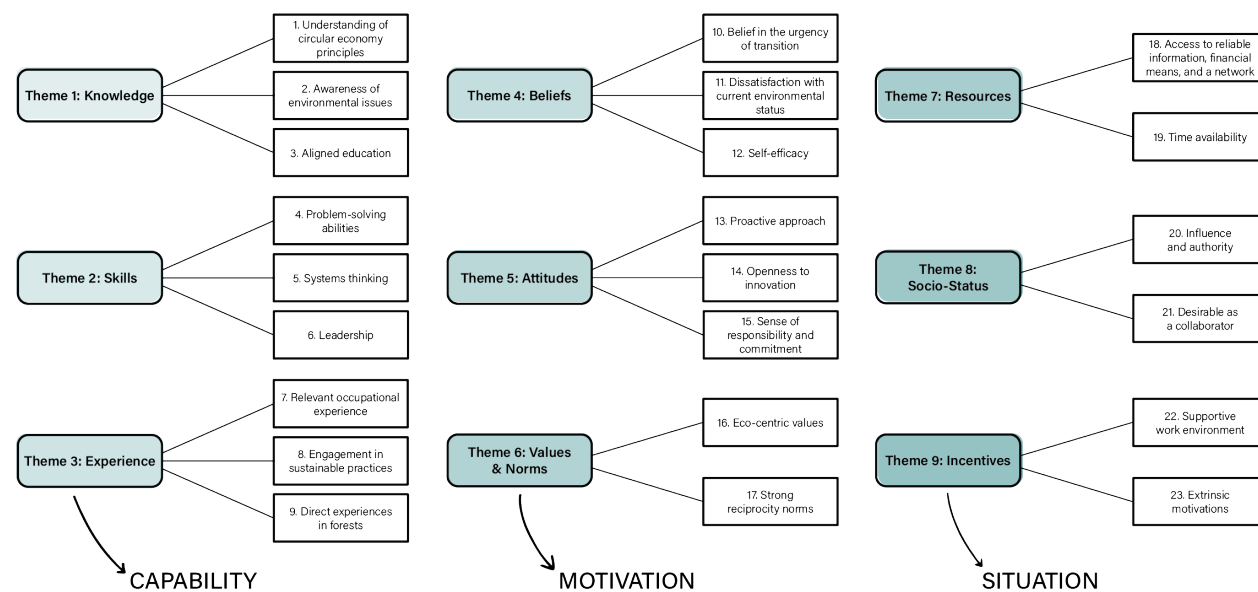


Figure 9: Coding tree for themes and criteria.

This perspective highlighted the need to assess a broad range of criteria, ensuring that the framework captured not just technical capabilities but also motivational and situational criteria.

Expert (Innovation lead): *"In my role at a large corporation, I've observed that innovation often starts with some people. When these are genuinely excited about an idea, it can really spread, motivating others and driving broader adoption."*

This insight confirmed the assumption that the Few should be able to spread and promote the forest metaphor within an organization. The criteria were adjusted to ensure they included this element of influence and the ability to impact others.

Focus group comment (Expert): *"Some of the terms in the framework were unclear or ambiguous to me. Perhaps you could consider clarifying these terms."*

The profiling criteria were reviewed and clarified, with additional explanations provided for each term to ensure clarity and comprehensibility.

Focus group comment (Layman): *"I wasn't clear on where the change factors fit in. They don't seem fully represented. Perhaps you could consider adding more detail here."*

Change factors were analysed again to determine whether they were adequately represented. One profiling criterion related to change ability was added to make the criteria more complete.

Focus group comment (Layman): *"What about including something like belief in one's power or influence? Perhaps you could consider adding this."*

Factors related to belief in personal power, social status, and elements that facilitate the spread of the metaphor were reconsidered and incorporated into the criteria, ensuring that they capture both internal and external dimensions of influence.

The feedback and expert insights ensured that the profiling criteria were broad enough to account for multiple dimensions of capability, motivation, and situation, while remaining clear and applicable. The final profiling criteria, along with detailed explanations of the and their relevance within the broader framework, are provided in Table 5. These criteria offer a structured and concrete means of profiling individuals based on their alignment with the three overarching categories.

Table 5: Profiling criteria for the Few described and explained.

Theme 1: Knowledge

1. Understanding of circular economy principles: Recognizing the principles of resource efficiency, waste reduction, and sustainability.

Desired: High level of understanding.

Relevance: Knowing about circular economy principles helps people understand the forest metaphor, which simplifies complex ideas by comparing them to natural cycles found in forests. This understanding makes it easier to see how resources can be reused and waste minimized. This criterion was supported by survey data, with over 75% of respondents identifying it as critical. Moreover, Kirchherr et al. (2023) highlight the importance of understanding these concepts, while Oskamp et al. (1991) emphasize that having good environmental knowledge is key to turning ideas into real actions.

2. Awareness of environmental issues: Being informed about current environmental challenges and the need for sustainable solutions.

Desired: Comprehensive awareness.

Relevance: Being aware of environmental issues makes the forest metaphor more relatable, helping to connect global challenges like climate change to everyday actions. Understanding these issues is the first step toward making environmentally friendly choices. This is supported by literature, Kollmuss & Agyeman (2002) explain that awareness is crucial for driving eco-friendly behaviours. Stern et al. (1993) add that this awareness needs to be paired with strong environmental values to lead to action.

3. Aligned education: Having a formal or informal education that supports the adoption of sustainable practices.

Desired: Strong alignment with relevant education.

Relevance: Education that focuses on sustainability provides the tools to fully grasp the forest metaphor and apply it in practical ways. Approximately 65% of survey respondents noted its importance, with Barr & Gilg (2007) highlighting that a relevant educational background makes it more likely for someone to adopt eco-friendly behaviours. This kind of education also encourages systems thinking, which helps in understanding how different parts of an ecosystem (or an organization) work together. Webster (2017) emphasizes how important systems thinking is for a circular economy.

Theme 2: Skills

4. Problem-solving abilities: The capacity to address complex environmental issues with innovative solutions.

Desired: High level of capability.

Relevance: Problem-solving skills are key for understanding and using the forest metaphor to tackle real-world environmental challenges. These skills help individuals think creatively and find new ways to solve problems, especially in complex situations. D'Zurilla & Nezu (2010) focus on the importance of problem-solving for dealing with environmental issues, and Guagnano et al. (1995) explain how these skills help turn environmental attitudes into actions. This was reinforced by survey data, with about 60% of respondents agreeing on its importance. Thibodeau & Boroditsky (2011) emphasize the role of problem-solving in effective environmental decision-making.

5. Systems thinking: Understanding and integrating the interconnected elements of sustainability within an organization.

Desired: Strong grasp of systems thinking.

Relevance: Individuals with systems thinking skills are more likely to adopt the forest metaphor because they naturally perceive the economy and sustainability as complex, interconnected systems. This mindset aligns closely with the circular economy, which, like natural ecosystems, operates through intricate relationships and feedback loops (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2012; Meadows, 2008). Webster (2017) confirmed the importance of systems thinking in making these connections within the circular economy, while David Byrne's work on complexity (2002) emphasizes that understanding such systems requires a holistic view. This makes systems thinkers particularly well-suited to grasp and apply the forest metaphor effectively.

6. Leadership: The ability to guide and influence others toward achieving goals.

Desired: High level of leadership proficiency.

Relevance: Leadership is crucial for guiding and influencing others toward achieving a broad range of goals. Effective leaders inspire and mobilize teams, fostering collaboration, innovation, and sustained effort, which are essential for success in any context. Kotter (1996) emphasizes the importance of leadership in creating and sustaining change, particularly in guiding organizations through transformations. His work aligns with that of Bass & Avolio (1994), who demonstrate the impact of transformational leadership on achieving organizational goals, and Yukl (2013), who highlights the role of leadership in fostering a shared vision, making leadership a key component of success across various domains.

Theme 3: Experience

7. Relevant occupational experience: Work experience that directly relates to sustainability or environmental management.
Desired: Significant and relevant experience.
Relevance: Hands-on experience in sustainability or environmental management makes it easier to apply the forest metaphor in practical ways. This experience helps turn abstract ideas into concrete actions within an organization. Steg & Vlek (2009) stress that real-world experience is essential for promoting eco-friendly behaviours in the workplace, and Stern (2000) confirms this by showing that practical experience often drives meaningful environmental action.

8. Engagement in sustainable practices: Active participation in initiatives that promote sustainability.
Desired: High level of engagement.
Relevance: Actively engaging in sustainable practices makes it more likely that someone will understand and embrace the forest metaphor. This kind of involvement helps reinforce the values and behaviours needed to create a circular economy. Survey data indicated that active participation is crucial, while Steg & Vlek (2009) note that being involved in sustainability efforts increases the chances of adopting new eco-friendly practices, and Barr & Gilg (2007) discuss how participation in such activities strengthens environmental values.

9. Direct experiences in forests: Personal or professional experiences that deepen the understanding of the forest metaphor.
Desired: Extensive direct experiences.
Relevance: Spending time in forests allows individuals to intuitively grasp the forest metaphor, which is based on natural cycles and relationships observed in these ecosystems. When someone has firsthand experience with forests, they can more easily draw parallels between the complex interdependencies in nature and the principles of a circular economy. This intuitive understanding is much harder to achieve for someone who has never spent time in a forest; for them, the metaphor might feel abstract or disconnected from their reality. While survey feedback was mixed, Chawla (1998) highlights how early experiences in nature can shape environmental awareness, and Schultz (2000) discusses how interacting with nature can influence environmental attitudes. Thus, direct forest experiences not only enhance understanding but also make the metaphor more relatable and practical.

Theme 4: Beliefs

10. Belief in the urgency of transition: A strong belief that immediate action is necessary to address environmental challenges.
Desired: Strong conviction.
Relevance: Believing that quick action is needed to address environmental issues is crucial for adopting the forest metaphor as a tool for understanding and promoting sustainable practices. This belief drives people to act swiftly and decisively, both in their personal lives and within their organizations. This criterion was supported by survey data, with 76% of respondents emphasizing its importance, and Clayton et al. (2015) emphasize how psychological factors drive urgent environmental action. Besides, Stern et al. (1995) show how strong beliefs about environmental limits can motivate proactive behaviour and Samuelson & Biek (1991) discuss how concerns about environmental threats can prompt action.

11. Dissatisfaction with current environmental status: A critical view of current practices and a desire for change.
Desired: High level of dissatisfaction.
Relevance: Dissatisfaction with the current environmental status is a key driver for adopting new models and metaphors, such as the forest metaphor. This dissatisfaction can be a powerful motivator for change, encouraging people to move away from unsustainable practices. The majority of the survey respondents agreed on its importance, further validated by literature linking dissatisfaction with changing behavioural intentions (Barr et al., 2005). According to Strike & Posner (1982), for a new concept to be embraced, the learner must first experience dissatisfaction with their existing understanding. This dissatisfaction opens the door for new ideas to be considered, especially if the new concept is intelligible, plausible, and fruitful. The forest metaphor, when seen as a solution to current environmental challenges, becomes more appealing and is more likely to be adopted if individuals are already critical of the status quo.

12. Confidence in personal ability to effect change: A belief in one's capacity to influence and drive change.
Desired: High level of confidence.
Relevance: Confidence in one's ability to make a difference supports the adoption of new metaphors that encourage sustainable behaviour. This confidence encourages people to take action and lead efforts toward sustainability, both individually and collectively. This criterion was supported by most of the survey respondents and further highlighted by Bandura (1986), who shows how self-efficacy is essential for behaviour change, while Geller (1995) discusses how this belief can inspire environmentally responsible actions.

Theme 5: Attitudes

13. Proactive approach: A willingness to take initiative and lead efforts toward sustainability.

Desired: Proactive and forward-thinking attitude.
Relevance: Being proactive is essential for adopting new sustainability models like the forest metaphor. Proactive individuals are more likely to not only embrace these ideas but also to encourage others to do the same, driving collective efforts toward change. Survey data highlighted its importance, with about 60% of respondents agreeing. Bateman & Crant (1993) show that proactive personalities are often the ones who initiate change.

14. Openness to innovation: The ability to embrace new and innovative ideas.
Desired: High level of receptivity to innovation.
Relevance: Being open to new ideas is important for integrating the forest metaphor into sustainability strategies. This openness allows individuals and organizations to adapt and apply novel concepts, which are crucial for staying ahead in a rapidly changing world. McCrae & John (1992) link openness to the ability to adapt to new ideas, and Rogers et al. (2003) discusses how innovative people are often the first to adopt and spread new concepts. The criterion was identified as crucial by 64% of survey respondents.

15. Sense of responsibility and commitment: A deep commitment to the principles of sustainability and the forest metaphor.
Desired: Strong dedication.
Relevance: A strong sense of responsibility and personal commitment to sustainability is crucial for adopting and applying the forest metaphor. Individuals who feel deeply responsible for the environment are more likely to embrace concepts and practices that align with these values, leading to consistent pro-environmental behaviour. Whitmarsh et al. (2011) emphasize the significant role that personal commitment plays in adopting pro-environmental behaviours and concepts. Stern et al. (1993) discuss how personal values and priorities, such as a sense of responsibility, influence environmental concern and action, noting that people are more likely to take pro-environmental actions when these align with their core values. Additionally, Stern (2000) shows that a strong personal commitment to sustainability is a key driver of environmentally significant behaviour, reinforcing the adoption of sustainable practices and metaphors like the forest model.

Theme 6: Values & Norms

16. Eco-centric values: A value system that places the environment at the center of decision-making.
Desired: Strong environmental values.
Relevance: Eco-centric values are crucial for adopting the forest metaphor, as they prioritize the health of natural systems in all decisions. People who hold these values are more likely to support and engage in practices that reflect the interconnectedness and balance found in nature. Schwartz's theory of basic human values (1992) identifies universal values that motivate pro-environmental behaviours, which align closely with eco-centric values. Stern (2000) also identifies eco-centric values as key drivers of environmentally responsible behavior, while Dunlap et al. (2000) offer tools to measure how these values influence actions, and 76% of survey respondents believe the criterion is relevant.

17. Strong reciprocity norms: The commitment to fairness and mutual benefit in interactions related to sustainability.
Desired: Strong sense of mutual benefit.
Relevance: Strong reciprocity norms promote cooperation and fairness, which are crucial for the collective adoption of the forest metaphor. These norms encourage people to think about how their actions affect others and to work together for mutual benefit, similar to the reciprocal relationships found in natural ecosystems. This was agreed upon by some survey respondents, but further supported by Blau (1964) discussing how reciprocity is key to social exchanges, while Cialdini (2003) shows how these norms can drive cooperative environmental efforts.

Theme 7: Resources

18. Access to reliable information, financial means, and networks: The availability of accurate and up-to-date data, financial resources to support initiatives, and connections with others who can provide support.
Desired: High level of resource availability across all three components—information, financial means, and networks.
Relevance: Access to reliable information is essential for effectively adopting and implementing the forest metaphor in sustainability practices, as it enables informed decision-making that aligns with sustainable principles. However, without sufficient financial resources to invest in necessary technologies and processes, even the most well-informed sustainability plans can fall short. Additionally, strong networks are vital for spreading and supporting the adoption of the forest metaphor, as they facilitate collaboration, knowledge sharing, and mutual support. These networks help bridge gaps in resources and expertise, making it easier to implement and sustain effective sustainability practices. This is supported by survey data, with around 70% of respondents agreeing on its importance. Additionally, this is reinforced by literature: Kirchherr et al. (2023) show that access to reliable information is crucial for the successful adoption of sustainability practices. Schanes et al. (2018) stress the importance of information in supporting sustainable practices, and Petty & Cacioppo (1986) further highlight how trusted sources, and clear messages help people embrace new ideas. Clayton et al. (2015) point out that financial limitations are a major barrier to adopting sustainable practices, and Gifford (2011) notes that lack of funds can prevent people from taking eco-friendly actions. Furthermore, Barr et al.

(2005) emphasize how networks help reinforce environmental behaviours.

19. Time availability: The allocation of sufficient time to plan, implement, and sustain sustainability initiatives effectively.
Desired: A high level of time availability dedicated to sustainability practices.
Relevance: Time availability is crucial for the successful adoption and implementation of sustainability practices. Adequate time allows for thorough planning, careful execution, and continuous refinement, ensuring that sustainability initiatives are effective and long-lasting. Research by Moser & Ekstrom (2010) and Stern et al. (1992) highlights that time constraints can hinder the effectiveness of environmental strategies and behaviour change. Additionally, Kollmuss & Agyeman (2002) emphasize the need for time to learn and internalize new practices, as well as to collaborate effectively with stakeholders. Without sufficient time, even well-designed sustainability efforts may fall short, reducing their overall impact.

Theme 8: Socio-Status

20. Influence and authority: The ability to shape decisions and drive change within the organization.
Desired: High level of influence and authority.
Relevance: Having influence and authority within an organization makes it easier to champion the forest metaphor and other sustainability initiatives. This criterion was supported by 75% of survey respondents. Leaders with strong socio-status can leverage values to inspire others, aligning with Schwartz's value theory (1992), which suggests that individuals in positions of authority can shape group norms and behaviours by emphasizing values such as universalism and benevolence. Kotter (1996) highlights the importance of leadership in driving successful organizational change, while Dunlap et al. (2000) discuss how environmental attitudes can be shaped by those in influential positions.

21. Desirable as a collaborator: Being seen as a valuable partner in collaborative efforts toward sustainability.
Desired: Highly desirable as a collaborator.
Relevance: Being regarded as a desirable collaborator can significantly enhance the effectiveness of sustainability initiatives. When people value your contributions and enjoy working with you, they are more likely to include you in key projects where concepts like the forest metaphor can be effectively applied to foster collective action. Cialdini (2001) explains how social influence can be harnessed in cooperative efforts, which was also recognized as important by 68% of survey respondents. Barr et al. (2005) note that being a respected and likable partner can amplify one's impact in sustainability initiatives.

Theme 9: Incentives

22. Supportive work environment: An organizational culture that supports and rewards sustainable practices.
Desired: Strong support in the work environment.
Relevance: A supportive work environment is crucial for the adoption of the forest metaphor and other sustainability initiatives. When an organization's culture encourages and rewards sustainable practices, employees are more likely to embrace and apply these concepts in their daily work. Schein (2010) emphasizes how organizational culture can shape employee behaviour. Similarly, Deci & Ryan (2000) discuss the role of supportive environments in motivating sustainable actions, with which 70% of survey respondents agree.

23. Extrinsic motivations: External rewards or recognition that motivate individuals to adopt new behaviours.
Desired: Presence of strong extrinsic motivators.
Relevance: Extrinsic factors, such as recognition, policy, rewards or social pressures, can drive the adoption of new behaviours, including the use of the forest metaphor for sustainability. While intrinsic motivation is powerful, extrinsic motivators can be particularly effective in encouraging the initial adoption of new practices. Deci & Ryan (2000) explain how extrinsic factors can complement intrinsic motivation, and Bateman & Crant (1993) highlight how proactive policies can encourage new behaviours.

A recurring point of feedback in the focus groups were comments related to the clarity of the profile's connection to the forest metaphor. One participant expressed this concern:

Focus group comment (Layman): "It wasn't clear to me how this profile specifically applies to the forest metaphor. Perhaps you could consider making that connection more explicit."

This feedback led to a more concrete explanation to demonstrate how the profile is not generic but is specifically aligned to the forest metaphor and how a profile could differ for other metaphors. While no research has been conducted on profiling for other metaphors, expectations are outlined below to illustrate the possible differences in the specific criteria for the profile of the Few for different metaphors.

For the forest metaphor, the profiling framework emphasizes knowledge related to natural systems, environmental awareness, and systems thinking. It focuses on individuals with eco-centric values, an openness to natural processes, and a commitment to sustainability. The framework also considers how external factors, such as resources and policies, support or hinder the adoption of self-sustaining practices.

In contrast, if applied to a garden metaphor, the framework could emphasize different criteria. While both metaphors involve natural elements, a garden has an owner and is more deliberately managed and regulated. As a result, the knowledge and skills could shift towards understanding the need for careful planning, design, and controlled interventions. Beliefs and values could focus on the importance of active management and human oversight to maintain order and achieve sustainability. External resources and policies could reflect how these factors enable or hinder environments that require more direct control. Experience could prioritize involvement in managing environments where regulation and intervention are necessary, reflecting a more hands-on approach.

Similarly, applying the framework to a war metaphor could result in entirely different criteria. Knowledge and skills could centre on strategic planning, tactical execution, and conflict management. Beliefs and values could emphasize competition, overcoming adversity, and strategic thinking. External resources could focus on how these factors support competitive, high-pressure environments. Experience might involve practical engagement in conflict scenarios or competitive situations, whether through simulations or real-world experiences that require leadership under pressure.

While the overarching categories could remain consistent, the specific criteria within each category would adapt to reflect the core principles of each metaphor. This differentiation highlights why the framework developed for the Few is uniquely suited to the forest metaphor, and not a one-size-fits-all model. By clarifying these potential differences, the specific alignment of the framework with the forest metaphor becomes more apparent.

3.3.4. THE FEW’S PROFILING CRITERIA FRAMEWORK

Integrating the profiling criteria, themes and categories from the previous sections into a radial diagram resulted in the The Few’s Profiling Criteria Framework, which is shown in Figure 10, all the earlier iteration of the framework can be found in Appendix C.

The framework serves as a visual representation of the profile for the Few, with the centre of the diagram symbolizing the Few themselves, encompassing the integration of all profiling criteria. The framework systematically visualises the organisation of the criteria into nine themes across the three overarching categories. This structure aims to not only provide a robust overview but also facilitate the practical application of the profile. It enables the identification of the Few by allowing individuals to be assessed against the defined profiling criteria.

Throughout the development process, feedback from focus groups played a key role in refining the framework’s visual elements and clarity. Below are some of the key focus group comments and the corresponding actions taken to improve the framework, the full results of the focus group are shown in Appendix D.

Focus group comment (Layman): "The colours and box sizes might be sending mixed messages. Perhaps you could consider simplifying these visual elements."

The use of colours was reassessed, and box sizes were standardized. Additional elements such as arrows were removed to simplify the framework and ensure the visual focus was clearer.

Focus group comment (Expert): "The overall flow of the framework could be smoother to enhance

understanding. Perhaps you could consider revising this."

The flow and layout of the framework were reviewed. The centre of the framework was adjusted to better clarify its purpose and enhance overall comprehension.

Focus group comment (Layman): "It's not entirely clear to me how the elements influence each other within the framework. Perhaps you could consider adjusting the visual representation to make this clearer."

The dynamics between the elements were clarified by adjusting the visual representation. Some positions within the framework were reviewed and modified to ensure the relationships between the elements were correctly represented.

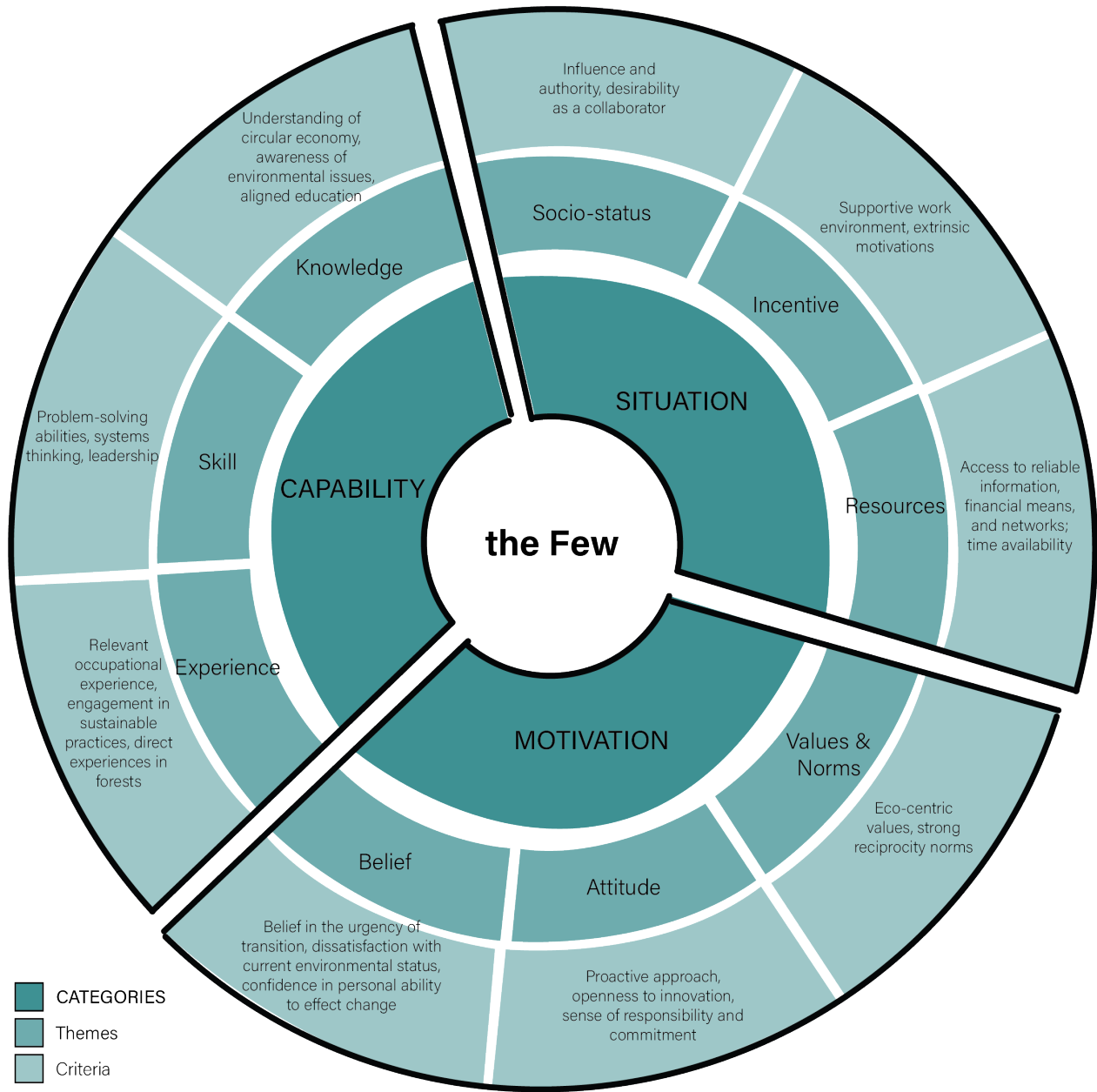


Figure 10: The Few's Profiling framework.

4. PHASE 2: SELECTING THE FEW

DEVELOPING AND TESTING AN ASSESSMENT TOOL

This chapter focuses on the second research phase, translating the measurable profiling criteria into an actionable assessment tool for selecting the Few within organizational contexts. The chapter outlines the methodological approach used to design, test, and refine this selection tool, followed by the results including the final assessment tool.

4.1. INTRODUCTION

As established before, distinguishing the Few is a twofold process: first profiling the Few and then selecting them. The previous chapter defined the profile of the Few, this chapter will therefore address the second sub-question:

SQ2 How can the individuals most likely to adopt and diffuse the forest metaphor be selected?

The purpose of this question is to develop and test a method to select the Few within organizational contexts.

This raises the need to systematically approach the development of such a method. Addressing this question allows for an assessment approach. Assessing is a method used to evaluate and measure specific attributes, competencies, and potential of an individual (Boyatzis, 1982; Brookhart & McMillan, 2020; Spencer & Spencer, 1993). In the context of selecting the Few, assessment ensures that individuals are evaluated against the profiling criteria, determining whether they belong to the Few. To execute this assessment effectively, there is a need for a tool specifically designed for this purpose.

4.2. METHODS PHASE 2

This section outlines the methodology for the second phase of the research, which consists of developing and testing an assessment tool to select the Few, as illustrated in Figure 11.

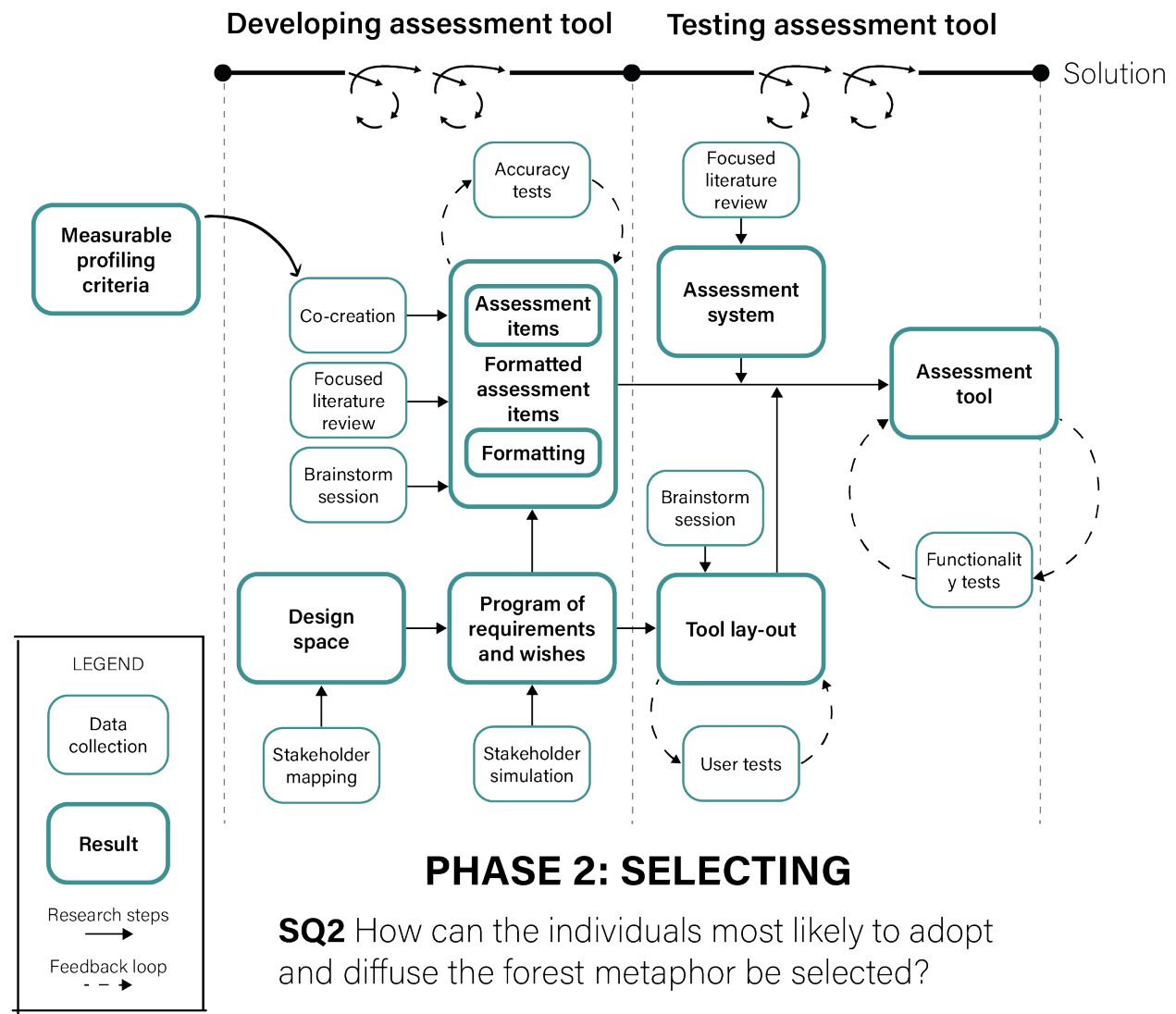


Figure 11: The methodology flow diagram for phase 2.

Throughout this phase, a group of six people—from now on referred to as the participant panel—participated in most of the interactive methods and testing, including the stakeholder simulation, brainstorming sessions, brainwriting. This group was selected due to their availability, willingness to participate, and the practical limitations of resources. Maintaining the same group of participants across different stages ensured that they were consistently involved, well-informed, and up to date with the background information necessary for meaningful contributions (Douglas, 2022; Latunde, 2017). Informed consent was obtained from the participant panel prior to the first participation. The demographics are summarised in Table 6.

Table 6: Participant panel demographics.

NO.	BACKGROUND	AGE	GENDER	NO.	BACKGROUND	AGE	GENDER
1	Architecture	21	Female	4	Education	56	Female
2	Entrepreneur	58	Male	5	Consultancy	25	Male
3	Medical	19	Female	6	Medical	24	Female

4.2.1. ANALYSING STAKEHOLDER FLOWS

The initial step in developing the assessment tool was conducting a stakeholder flow analysis. The goal of this analysis was to identify the key individuals and groups involved, understand their perspectives, and the environment in which the tool would be used. This understanding was crucial for shaping the design space and ensuring that the tool would meet the needs and expectations of all relevant parties and be effective in various organizational contexts.

The stakeholder flow analysis began by identifying the main actors who would interact with or be affected by the assessment tool. To capture the diverse perspectives and expectations of these stakeholders, their roles and concerns were discussed and documented. This analysis helped highlight the interactions between the stakeholders within the organizational context. The insights were instrumental in informing the subsequent cycles of the tool development, particularly in setting up the program of requirements and wishes.

4.2.2. STATING THE REQUIREMENT AND WISHES

With a basic understanding of the stakeholder landscape, the next step was to define the program of requirements and wishes (PoRW) for the assessment tool, which guided the tool's development. Initially, a draft of the program of requirements and wishes was created based on insights from the stakeholder mapping exercise. This draft served as a starting point for further refinement.

To validate and enhance this draft, a simulated stakeholder session was organized with the participant panel. In this session, the participants represented distinct roles from within the tool's environment. The goal of the session was to gather and prioritize the needs, expectations, and potential challenges associated with the tool from these different perspectives.

During the session, participants first worked in pairs, brainstorming the elements they believed were important from the perspective of their assigned role. This approach allowed each pair to consider the requirements specific to their role, fostering a more comprehensive understanding of the tool's potential use cases. After this initial brainstorming phase, all the specific requirements were presented and discussed collectively with

the entire participant panel. This discussion helped to consolidate diverse viewpoints and ensure that all relevant aspects were considered. The session was documented through capturing both the participants' notes and additional observations made during the group discussions.

Following the session, the feedback gathered from the stakeholder simulation was analysed through a process of categorizing the insights, and the program of requirements and wishes was refined. Additionally, the requirements were made more concrete and measurable, following guidelines from the Delft Design Guide (van Boeijen et al., 2013). This process ensured that each requirement was specific enough to be actionable during the tool's development.

The requirements were structured into three main groups: content-specific requirements, functionality, and user experience. Moreover, the requirements and wishes were prioritized based on their importance, which was determined by aligning them with the research objective and insights from the stakeholder map, which helped in focusing the tool's development on the most critical aspects.

4.2.3. DEVELOPING THE CONTENT

With the PoRW clearly defined, the focus shifted to developing the content of the assessment tool. This stage involved generating specific items to assess the presence of the profiling criteria in an individual. The content of these items needed to align with both the profiling criteria established in Phase 1 and the key elements from the PoRW developed in the previous stage.

The content development process began with a brainwriting session, conducted with the participant panel. Each participant was tasked with independently generating assessment item ideas related to the profiling criteria. To facilitate this, the profiling criteria were each written on separate sheets of paper, which were passed around among the participants, allowing everyone to add their input. This method ensured that each criterion was considered from multiple perspectives, resulting in a rich pool of potential assessment items (Heslin, 2009). After the brainwriting session, a collaborative discussion took place where participants refined and elaborated on the generated ideas. This refinement process helped clarify the items and consolidate overlapping suggestions.

The questions generated during the brainwriting session were then systematically analysed. The written data was first transformed into digital lists of items for each profiling criterion, allowing for better organization and further refinement. The digitalized data was imported into Excel, where a systematic cleanup process was conducted. This involved removing repetitive items, consolidating similar ideas, and clarifying or concretizing items where necessary.

To ensure the completeness and validity of the generated items, a focused literature review was conducted. This review identified some best practices and relevant examples from existing literature related to specific profiling criterion. By aligning the generated items with insight from this literature review, the review added a layer of validation to the content development process.

Based on the insights gained from the literature review, each list of items was revisited and refined. From each criterion's list, one assessment item was selected based on its relevance to the profiling criterion and its alignment with the PoRW. Besides, the selection focused on ensuring that the item was both clear and aligned with insights from literature. This selection concluded the content development cycle, ensuring that each profiling criterion was represented by a well-crafted and validated item. With the final set of assessment items complete, the content was ready to be formatted and integrated into the assessment tool.

4.2.4. FORMATTING THE CONTENT

The attention turned to determining the format of the assessment items. This process was first approached collaboratively to include multiple perspectives and encourage out-of-the-box thinking. A co-creation brainstorm session was organized with the participant panel. The session utilized the "How To" brainstorming method, as described in the Delft Design Guide (van Boeijen et al., 2013). "How To" questions related to the asking and answering of questions were written on large sheets of paper, and each participant was asked to write down their ideas on post-it notes, which were then placed on the corresponding sheets. This approach generated a significant amount of input and diverse ideas regarding both the question and answer formats.

Following the brainstorming session, the feedback and ideas were carefully analysed. The input was digitized and organized into lists corresponding to each "How To" question, and irrelevant or repetitive suggestions were removed.

The subsequent steps in the formatting process were carried out independently and involved selecting the most appropriate question formats (how the assessment item would be framed) and answer formats (how users could respond) for each assessment item. The question format was considered per theme of the criteria, ensuring that the format aligned with the nature of the criteria. Based on a focused literature review, appropriate formats were selected from the list of potential question formats for all nine themes.

For the answer format, the list of potential formats was evaluated, and each format was categorized as either suitable, potentially suitable, or unfitting based on the requirements outlined in the PoRW. This evaluation process helped narrow down the list of viable answer formats. The final list of suitable formats was then used to match one answer format to each of the nine themes, ensuring alignment

with the corresponding question format, as well as relevance to the assessment items. These decisions were also supported by relevant literature.

With both a question and answer format selected for each profiling theme, and an assessment item identified for each criterion, these elements were then combined to produce 23 robust assessment items, each with a well-defined question and answer format.

Finally, a quick literature exploration was used to identify a suitable assessment system that could be applied to all items. Once an appropriate, well-established system was selected, the assessment items for each criterion were aligned with this system, and the overall assessment process was clearly defined and made concrete.

4.2.5. DESIGNING THE LAY-OUT

The design of the layout for the assessment tool was developed through a user-centred approach, also utilizing a “How To” brainstorm method to generate ideas. The “How To” questions were based on elements that appeared to be relevant from a user perspective during the stakeholder simulation, which helped identify key user needs.

To evaluate the brainstorming ideas for each element, the C-box method was applied (van Boeijen et al., 2013). In this method, ideas are plotted along two axes: the x-axis represents the feasibility of the ideas, while the y-axis traditionally represents their newness. However, for this research, the y-axis was adapted to represent efficiency, aligning the C-box more closely with the design objectives of this research. The modification allowed for prioritizing the most effective and feasible ideas, ensuring a focus on practical implementation and performance.

The top-scoring ideas for each layout element were then subjected to quick testing with the participant panel. Using low-fidelity prototypes—such as sketches and wireframes—participants were asked to rate these layouts, providing feedback on which versions they preferred. This iteration enabled rapid identification of strengths and weaknesses for each layout element. By combining the best-performing elements based on user feedback, a final layout design was developed, aiming to align with user expectations.

4.2.6. TESTING THE OUTCOMES

With the development of the tool complete, the next step was to test it. This process was essential for gathering feedback and identifying areas for improvement before finalizing the prototype of the tool. The testing process was conducted in two distinct rounds: first, testing the assessment items for content validity and accuracy, and subsequently testing the entire tool to ensure that the content, format, and layout worked cohesively. Both phases of testing were conducted using the participant panel.

In this first round, the focus was on testing the content. The selected assessment items were presented to participants, who were asked to answer each question. After completing the questions, participants were also asked to respond to a self-assessment question about the same criterion. This process helped in comparing

participants’ responses to the assessment items with their self-assessments for each criterion, checking for accuracy and consistency.

If significant discrepancies between the participants’ answers and their self-assessments were observed, the respective assessment items were flagged for revision. These items were then adjusted to enhance clarity or accuracy and were retested to ensure improvements. In addition to comparing responses, participants were given the opportunity to provide qualitative feedback on each item, highlighting areas where the questions might have been unclear or difficult to interpret. All feedback comments were carefully analysed and coded as major and minor, and further refinements were made based on this input.

Once the individual assessment items were refined, the next round was to test the entire tool in its desired layout. This extra round of iterations aimed to ensure that the tool was in alignment with the requirements as outlined in the PoRW. Participants used the tool to complete the full assessment. After completing the assessment, a group discussion was facilitated with the participant panel to systematically address the PoRW. Feedback from this discussion helped identify any areas where the tool might have

fallen short of the requirements.

Feedback was reviewed to identify areas for improvement, including any recurring issues or concerns raised by the participants. Based on these findings, final adjustments were made to the tool, ensuring that the final prototype was fully optimized. As a result of this testing process, the outcome of Phase 2 was a tested assessment tool, designed to effectively select the Few within various organisational contexts.

4.3. RESULTS PHASE 2

This section details the outcomes of phase 2, focusing on the development, testing, and refinement of an assessment tool designed to select the Few.

4.3.1. THE DESIGN SPACE

Defining the design space for the assessment tool is crucial to understand the environment in which the selection will take place. To fully understand this, the various stakeholders were considered through a stakeholder flow analysis.

As outlined previously, the tool is intended for application within organizational contexts. It should enable forest metaphor advocates to systematically select the Few so they can be targeted to adopt and diffuse the forest metaphor within their organization.

The stakeholder flow diagram, shown in Figure 12, clarifies the relationships and interactions between the primary stakeholders—forest metaphor advocates, employees being assessed, and managerial figures within the organisation.

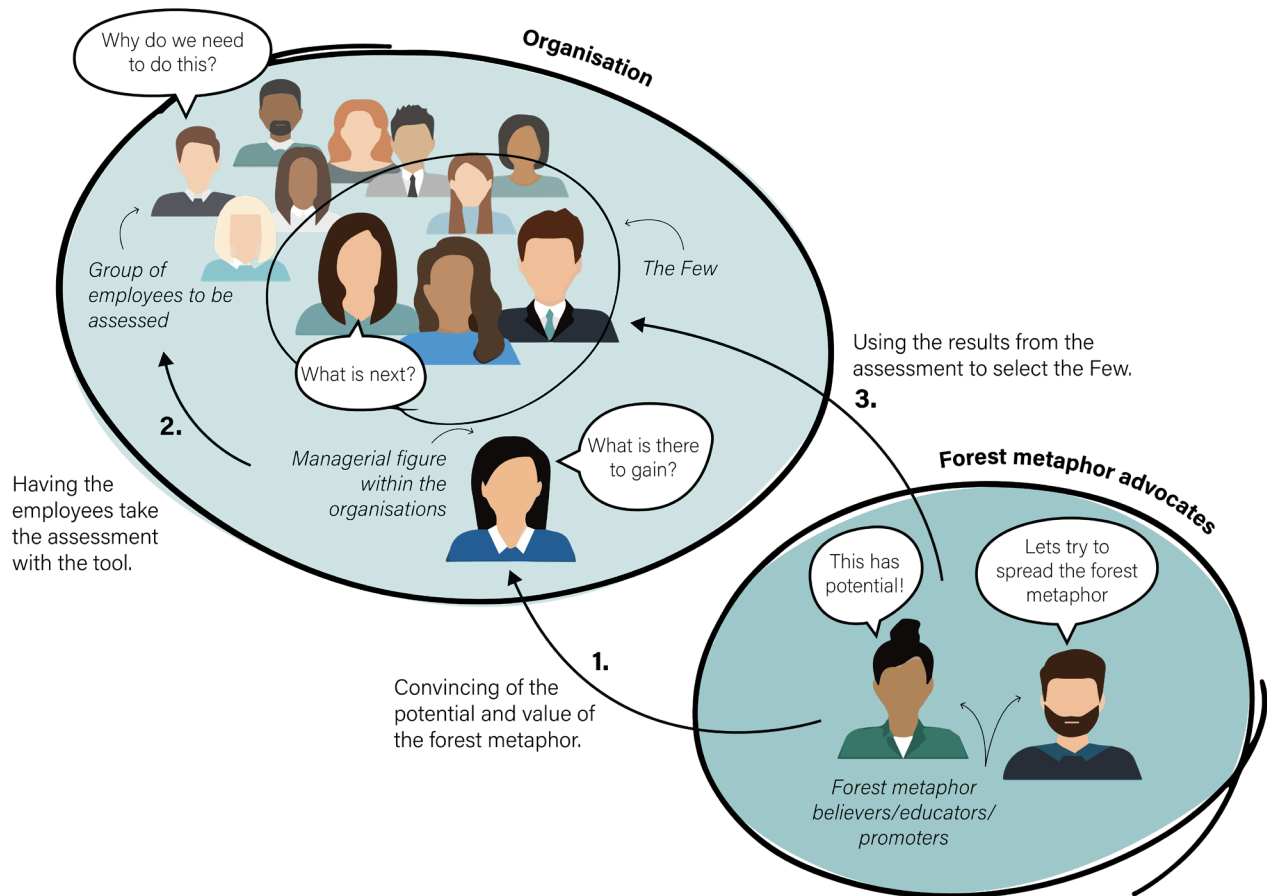


Figure 12: Stakeholder flow diagram defining the design space for the assessment tool to select the Few.

The primary stakeholders are briefly elaborate on:

- The **forest metaphor advocates** are aiming to implement and promote the forest metaphor within organizations. They are keen to distinguish the Few so that targeted efforts can be made to engage the Few and hopefully have them implement the metaphor effectively within the organizational culture.
- The **managerial figures within the organisations** oversee the implementation process of the tool. They must be supportive of giving the forest metaphor a chance within their organizations and have authorized the advocates to execute the assessment.

- The **employees being assessed** undergo the assessment. Those identified as part of the Few will be more directly involved in the practical application and promotion of the forest metaphor within the organization.

The stakeholder map reveals the space in which the design of the tool must operate. Addressing this allowed the development process to progress to the next step of specifying the requirements that illustrate this design space.

4.3.2. PROGRAM OF REQUIREMENTS AND WISHES

The PoRW was developed to guide the design of the assessment tool, ensuring it met the practical needs and expectations of all stakeholders. The insights from the stakeholder simulation highlighted several key considerations, as displayed in Figure 13, all the insights are shown in Appendix E.

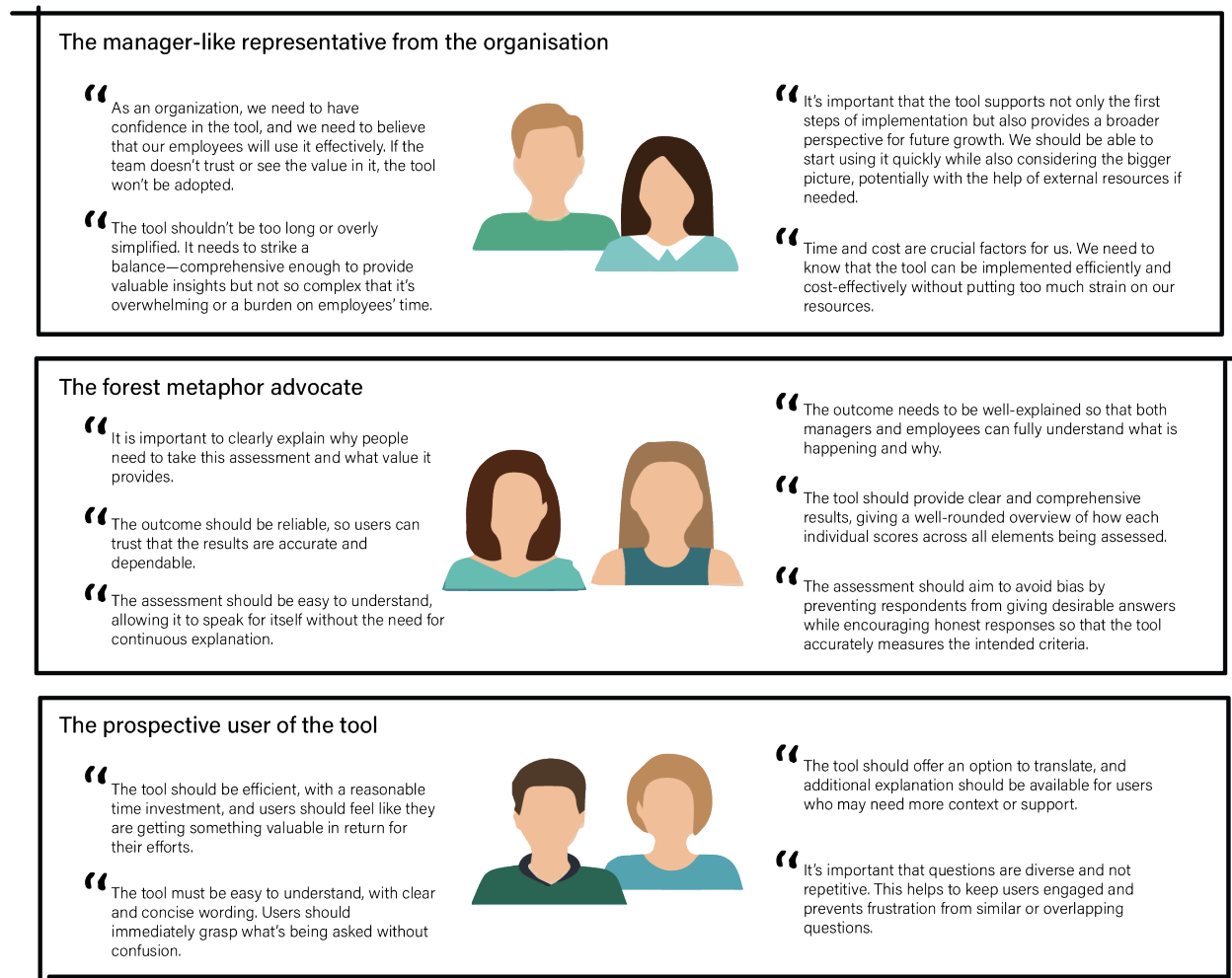


Figure 13: Insights from the stakeholder simulation.

Based on the stakeholder simulation the initial drafts were further refined and the final PoRW was established, the exclamation marks highlight the priority of the requirements—one exclamation mark being the lowest priority and three being the highest.

1. Content-specific

- R1 !!! Input validity:** The tool should use definite, objective answer format to ensure that all input is valid and easily quantifiable (Kane, 2018).
- R2 !!! Many data points:** The tool must gather as many data points as possible to provide a nuanced understanding of the respondent's answers (Förster et al., 2023).

- **R3 !!! Accurate criterion assessment:** The tool must ensure that the intended criteria are accurately measured and effectively reflect the true nature of what is being assessed.
- **R4 !! Criterion assessment:** The tool must implement an assessment system with a clear and transparent scoring rubric.
- **R5 Bias-free questioning:** The tool should be designed to avoid bias and socially preferred answers (Crowne & Marlowe, 1960).

2. Functionalities

- **R6 !!! Time management:** The tool should be designed to take no longer than 20 minutes to complete (Revilla & Ochoa, 2017).
- **R7 !!! Independence:** The tool should be designed for users to complete it independently, requiring no external help.
- **R8 !! Usability:** The tool must ensure that it is available everywhere, without requiring specialized software or equipment.

3. User experience

- **R9 !!! Understandable:** The tool must use straightforward, jargon-free language to ensure that all users, regardless of their background, can easily understand the assessment.
- **R10 !!! Clear:** The tool must provide clear, step-by-step instructions at the beginning and as needed throughout the assessment, as well as at the end of the assessment.
- **R11 ! Progress awareness:** The tool must include progress indicators or visual cues that update in real-time as users complete the assessment to keep them informed of their progress.
- **R12 ! Intuitive use:** The tool must have a user-friendly interface that is intuitive.

Wishes

- **W1 Data security:** It is preferred to ensure that user data is secure, with compliance to relevant data protection regulations.
- **W2 Accessibility:** It is preferred to design the tool to be accessible to users with disabilities, ensuring compatibility with screen readers and other assistive technologies.
- **W3 Design consistency:** It is preferred to maintain consistent design elements (e.g., colours, fonts, icons) across all pages to create a cohesive user experience.
- **W4 Scalability:** It is preferred to design the tool to scale, allowing for future expansions or increased user load without requiring major redesigns.
- **W5 Criteria management:** It is preferred to enable administrators to add, change, or remove criteria without requiring software updates, providing flexibility for future modifications.

With the requirements and wishes clear, the development of the tool could proceed and be measured against these defined requirements.

4.3.3. QUESTION AND ANSWER FORMATS

The selection of both appropriate question and answer formats for all criteria was driven by their performance against several of the requirements. The brainstorming session generated a comprehensive list of potential options for each, as presented in Appendix F1.

For question formats, accuracy and independence were prioritized, ensuring alignment with requirements **R3** and **R7**. The question formats selected demonstrated alignment with the requirements and are supported by literature, shown in Appendix G.

For the answer formats, objectivity and the ability to generate multiple data points were key considerations, addressing requirements **R1** and **R2**, as shown in Figure 14. The evaluation process identified several high-performing formats, which were then matched to the criteria and their corresponding question formats, based on relevance and supporting literature, as presented in Appendix G.

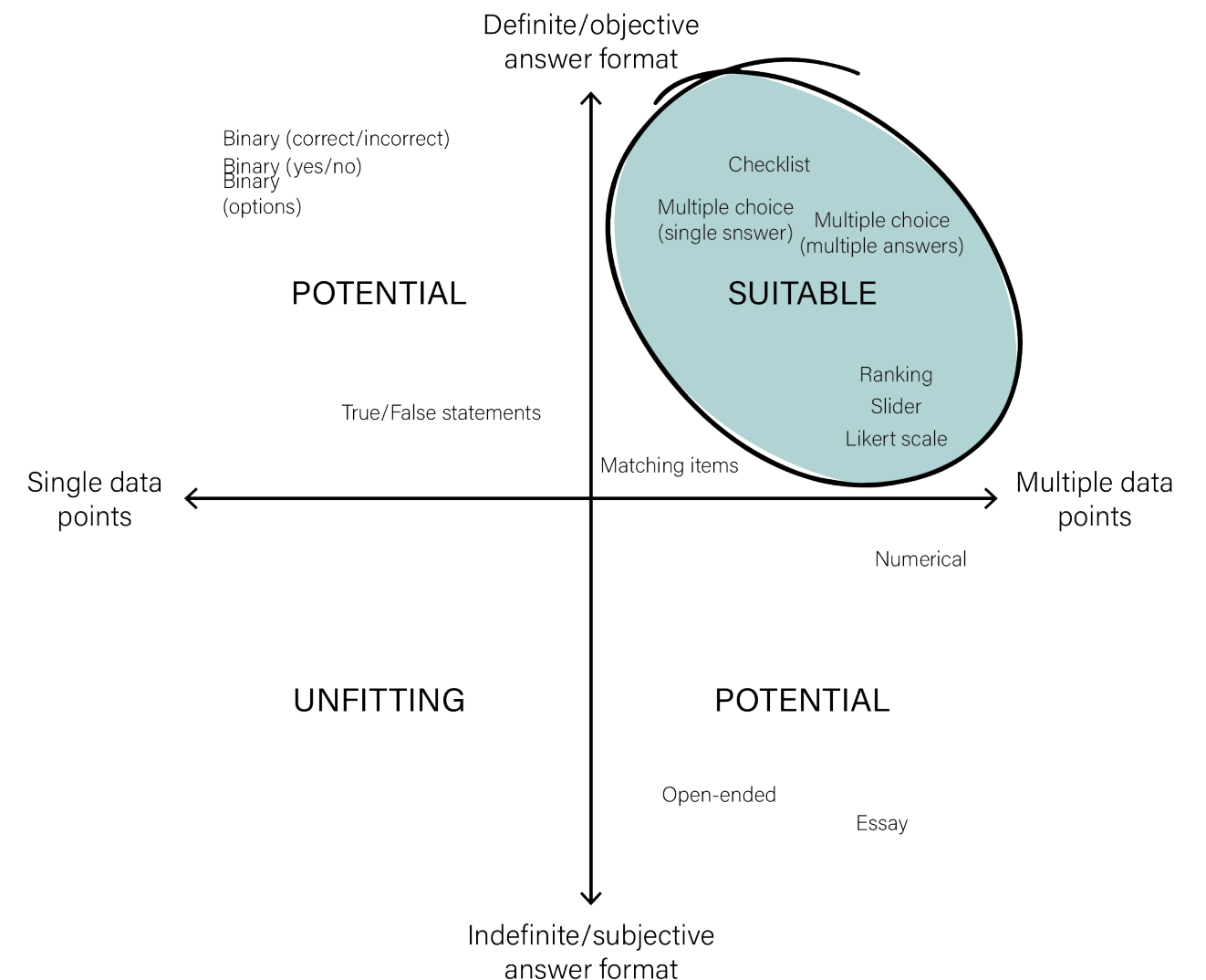


Figure 14: Evaluation of answer formats based on objectivity and amount of data points.

Testing highlighted areas for refinement. All the results from the testing are shown in Appendix H1 and H2, some insights are explained. For example, some participants suggested that certain questions could benefit from being framed differently.

Participant panel (No3): “This question could be clearer if you presented it as a scenario. Right now, it’s hard to visualize the context, but a specific scenario would make the options more relatable.”

This demonstrated that in some cases a scenario-based format could improve how participants relate to the questions, leading to adjustments in framing certain questions as situational or hypothetical scenarios. One participant pointed out an issue with binary answer choices:

Participant panel (No6): “Some questions felt too rigid. A more flexible approach—like a sliding scale or a ‘choose all that apply’ format—would give me a better way to answer accurately.”

As a result, some answers were reformatted to offer a wider range of response options, such as allowing participants to select multiple answers or rate their answers on a scale. This helped capture a more nuanced understanding of the participants’ perspectives. The final question and answer formats for each criterion are displayed in Table 7.

Table 7: Alignment of profiling criteria with question and answer formats.

THEME	CRITERION	QUESTION FORMAT	ANSWER FORMAT
Theme 1: Knowledge	1. Familiarity with circular economy principles	Knowledge	Checklist
	2. Awareness of environmental issues	Knowledge	Multiple choice (single answer)
	3. Alignment of education	Factual	Likert scale
Theme 2: Skills	4. Problem-solving abilities	Scenario-based	Multiple choice (single answer)
	5. Systems thinking	Scenario-based	Multiple choice (single answer)
	6. Leadership	Scenario-based	Multiple choice (single answer)
Theme 3: Experience	7. Relevant occupational experience	Factual	Multiple choice (single answer)
	8. Engagement in sustainable practices	Perception/opinion	Likert scale
	9. Direct experiences in forests	Self-assessment	Likert scale
Theme 4: Beliefs	10. Belief in urgency of transition	Perception/opinion	Likert scale
	11. Dissatisfaction with environmental status	Perception/opinion	Likert scale
	12. Confidence in personal ability to effect change (self-efficacy)	Self-assessment	Likert scale
Theme 5: Attitudes	13. Proactive approach	Scenario-based	Multiple choice (single answer)
	14. Openness to innovation	Forced choice (dilemma)	Multiple choice (single answer)
	15. Sense of responsibility and commitment	Self-assessment	Multiple choice (single answer)
Theme 6: Values & Norms	16. Eco-centric values	Forced choice (dilemma)	Multiple choice (single answer)
	17. Reciprocity norms	Scenario-based	Multiple choice (single answer)
Theme 7: Resources	18. Access to information and networks	Factual	Checklist
	19. Time availability	Self-assessment	Likert scale
Theme 8: Socio-status	20. Influence and authority	Scenario-based	Multiple choice (single answer)
	21. Desirability as a collaborator	Self-assessment	Likert scale
Theme 9: Incentives	22. Supportive work environment	Self-assessment	Likert scale
	23. Extrinsic motivations	Factual	Checklist

4.3.4. THE ASSESSMENT SYSTEM

The assessment system for the tool is designed to evaluate the presence of the nine themes in an individual. Each theme represents a key area of capability, motivation, and situational alignment, as discussed in Section 3.3.2., which utilizes the Few’s Sweet Spot diagram to emphasize the importance of balancing multiple aspects for successful adoption.

The tool employs a 1-10 grading scale, with a 6/10 threshold as the minimum passing score, chosen for its alignment with the Dutch grading system, which is widely used in educational and professional evaluations (Eurydice et al., 2019). This scale is straightforward to interpret and allows for nuanced assessments. The 6/10 threshold aligns with Dutch standards, where a score of 6 is considered “sufficient” (Nuffic, 2024).

To be classified as part of the Few, participants must score at least 6/10 in each of the nine themes, ensuring they possess the necessary capability, motivation, and situational alignment. The average score for each criterion within a specific theme is calculated, and if this average is 6/10 or higher, the theme is considered present; if it is below 6/10, the theme is not present.

To meet the R4 requirement and provide clear and transparent assessment rubric. The assessment results are categorized into four levels: Green (9 themes), Yellow (7-8 themes), Orange (4-6 themes), and Red (1-3 themes), as illustrated in Table 6. This structured approach ensures that the assessment system is not only effective in selecting the Few but also provides clear and actionable insight into the alignment of individuals with the profile of the Few.

Table 8: Assessment rubric for alignment with the profile of the few.

TOTAL THEMES (SCORE ≥ 6/10)	LEVEL	DISTRIBUTION OF THEMES	DESCRIPTION
9/9 Themes	Green: The Few	All 3 categories fully represented	Perfect balance across all categories. You are fully capable, motivated, and situationally aligned.
7-8/9 Themes	Light green: High performer	Themes well-distributed across all 3 categories	Strong alignment across most categories, with minor gaps in specific themes.
	Light green: Focused potential	1 category incomplete or weaker than others	Good potential, but missing balance in one category (e.g., capable but lacking motivation/context).
5-6/9 Themes	Yellow: Well-rounded candidate	All 3 categories represented	Good balance across categories, though 3-4 themes are missing. Ready with slight improvements needed.
	Yellow: Narrow focus	Themes concentrated in 1 or 2 categories	Potential exists but lacks balance across all categories. Focus needed on missing category/themes.
3-4/9 Themes	Orange: Developing contributor	Themes distributed across 2 categories	Partial alignment; good in some areas but lacking significantly in others.
	Orange: In progress	Themes concentrated in 1 category	Strong in one area but major gaps in the other categories.
1-2/9 Themes	Red: Emerging learner	Themes scattered or concentrated in only 1 category	Minimal alignment. Significant improvement needed across most areas.
0/9 Themes	Critical	No meaningful alignment across categories	Critical gaps across all categories. Immediate development required.

4.3.5. THE ASSESSMENT ITEMS

The assessment items were carefully designed to align with the 23 profiling criteria established in Phase 1. For each profiling criterion, the specific measurement focus was defined, and a diverse set of potential assessment items was generated through a brainwriting session, which can be found in Appendix I. This process resulted in a wide array of options for each criterion.

The selection of assessment items was made by matching the most relevant options from the brainwriting session to the specific measurement needs of each criterion. To ensure efficiency and meet the time management requirement R6, only one assessment item was selected per criterion. In

accordance with requirement **R9**, these items were refined to ensure understandable language.

Participant panel (No5): "Could you clarify what is meant by 'eco-centric'?"

For certain criteria, examples from literature provided valuable insights, aiding in the refinement and selection of the most accurate assessment items, which can be found in Appendix G.

The assessment items were tested to evaluate their accuracy in accordance with requirement **R3**. Insight revealed that some of the initial assessment items were ineffective in their original form, leading to several revisions. One participant noted that certain questions were "too vague" to allow for precise or meaningful responses.

Participant panel (No1): "This item was too vague. It didn't provide enough information for me to understand what was really being asked."

This led to adding more specific descriptions to ensure that questions were fully understood by respondents. Furthermore, some questions were initially seen as repetitive without offering additional value, which could possibly affect the overall accuracy of responses.

Participant panel (No2): "What do you hope to learn from item 11 that wasn't already tested in item 2? They seem like the same question."

These insights led to revisions by reconsidering, removing or merging redundant questions aiming at improving the value and reliability of the assessment items. Insights also showed that respondents struggled with similar answer options in some cases.

Participant panel (No4): "Sometimes answer options felt too similar, for example in item 6, making it hard to choose the most appropriate one."

This feedback resulted in revising and differentiating answer options to provide clearer and more distinct choices, making it easier for respondents to select the most accurate option. Furthermore, some participants pointed out that context was missing in certain questions, which confused respondents.

Participant panel (No2): "Item 9 didn't really make sense to me. It felt like it came out of nowhere, and I didn't understand the context."

To address this, clearer context was provided within the questions, attempting that respondents could better understand the intent behind the item.

As a result of this process, each profiling criterion was ultimately assigned one optimized assessment item, which matched with the question and answer formats established in Section 4.3.3., the full results of the testing can be found in Appendix H1 and H2.

Additionally, during the formulation of all the assessment items, consideration was also given to minimize the risk of socially desirable responses **R5**, a common bias in self-reported data (Meisters et al., 2020). To address this, the items were carefully worded to reduce the likelihood of respondents providing answers they believed to be socially acceptable, rather than truthful. Despite these precautions, it was assumed for the purpose of this assessment that respondents would answer honestly and would not deliberately attempt to influence the results. The complete set of optimized assessment items is presented in Table 9.

Table 9: Final assessment items for the tool, aligned with each profiling criterion.

CRITERION	WHAT TO MEASURE	ASSESSMENT ITEM	ANSWER POSSIBILITES	SCORING
1. Understanding of circular economy principles	Familiarity with circular economy principles	Which of the following describe principles of the circular economy?	A) Closing the loop of product life cycles. B) Emphasising resource efficiency. C) A system of continuous resource extraction. D) Designing out waste. E) Promoting recycling as the only solution. F) Maximising resource use over time. G) A consumption-driven economic model.	Scoring based on correct answers: A, B, D, F = correct (10 points for all right, reduce 2 points for each incorrect)
2. Awareness of environmental issues	Awareness of global environmental issues	The current state of the environment is best explained by:	A) Global environmental conditions are worsening due to human impact. B) Environmental issues are significant across multiple regions. C) Climate change is one of many pressing issues. D) Environmental stability is being challenged. E) The environment is undergoing moderate changes.	A = 10 B = 8 C = 6 D = 4 E = 2
3. Aligned education	Relevance and alignment of educational background with sustainability	Does your educational background relate/align to sustainability? (Think about courses, extra programs, study, etc.)	A) Yes, I specialized in it. B) Yes, I completed a program in it. C) Yes, I took some courses. D) No, but I have gained knowledge through self-study or personal interest. E) No, I have no formal background in it.	A = 10 B = 8 C = 6 D = 4 E = 2
4. Problem-solving abilities	Proficiency in applying problem-solving skills	"You are faced with a significant work-related issue. What is the first step you take?"	A) Break down the problem into smaller tasks. B) Conduct a thorough analysis before acting. C) Consult with team members for suggestions. D) Immediately start with the easiest part of the solution. E) Delay action to gather more information. F) Create multiple potential solutions for discussion.	A = 10 B = 8 C = 7 F = 6 D = 5 E = 3
5. Systems thinking	Ability to think holistically and understand interconnected systems	"You're working on a large project. How do you approach an issue that impacts multiple teams?"	A) Focus on solving the immediate problem within your team. B) Assess the impact on all teams and plan accordingly. C) Implement a phased approach and address broader issues later. D) Focus on areas where	B = 10 E = 8 C = 7 D = 5 A = 3

CRITERION	WHAT TO MEASURE	ASSESSMENT ITEM	ANSWER POSSIBILITES	SCORING
			issues are most visible. E) Consider both short-term and long-term impacts across all teams.	
6. Leadership	Effectiveness in leading and inspiring teams	"You have been assigned to a new project with a diverse team. What role would you take to contribute to the team's success?"	A) Take charge and make key decisions. B) Offer strategic guidance and advice. C) Assist by handling specific tasks as needed. D) Focus on executing tasks effectively. E) Encourage collaboration and teamwork to achieve results.	A = 10 E = 8 B = 7 C = 5 D = 4
7. Relevant occupational experience	Extent of professional experience in sustainability	Have you worked in positions that give you experience relevant to improving your organization's sustainability practices?	A) A bit, 0-2 years B) Quite some, 3-5 years C) Plenty, 6-10 years D) A lot, more than 10 years E) Can't remember doing anything else, over 15 years F) No relevant experience	E = 10 D = 8 C = 6 B = 4 A = 2 F = 1
8. Engagement in sustainable practices	Level of active participation in sustainable practices	Do you consider sustainability in your daily life and actively engage in practices such as recycling, clean-ups, energy saving, etc.?	A) Never B) Rarely C) Occasionally D) Frequently E) Very frequently F) Consistently G) Always	G = 10 F = 9 E = 8 D = 7 C = 6 B = 4 A = 2
9. Direct experiences in forests	Amount and quality of direct experiences in forest environments	How familiar are you with the elements and functioning of forest ecosystems based on your experiences in natural environments?	A) Very familiar; I have a strong understanding of forest ecosystems and their elements. B) Quite familiar; I understand many aspects of forest ecosystems and their elements. C) Somewhat familiar; I know the basics of how forest ecosystems function. D) Slightly familiar; I have limited knowledge of forest ecosystems. E) Not familiar at all; I have no experience with forest ecosystems.	A = 10 B = 8 C = 6 D = 4 E = 2
10. Belief in the urgency of transition	Strength of belief in the necessity for immediate action	"To combat environmental issues, it is urgent to take immediate action and there is a need for	Strongly disagree Disagree Slightly disagree Neutral Slightly agree Agree	Strongly disagree = 1 Disagree = 2 Slightly disagree = 4 Neutral = 5 Slightly agree = 6 Agree = 8

CRITERION	WHAT TO MEASURE	ASSESSMENT ITEM	ANSWER POSSIBILITES	SCORING
		change."	Strongly agree	Strongly agree = 10
11. Dissatisfaction with current environmental status	Degree of dissatisfaction with the current state of environmental affairs	"Are you frustrated by the progress in addressing environmental issues in your organization?"	A) Not at all. B) Not really. C) Yes, progress is slow. D) Yes, execution is poor and needs improvement. E) Yes, there is no action at all. F) It could be better.	A = 2 B = 4 C = 6 F = 7 D = 8 E = 10
12. Confidence in personal ability to effect change (self-efficacy)	Confidence in personal ability to effect environmental change	How confident are you in your ability to reduce your personal carbon footprint?	A) Not confident at all B) Slightly confident C) Moderately confident D) Very confident E) Extremely confident	E = 10 D = 8 C = 6 B = 4 A = 2
13. Proactive approach	Degree of proactivity in adopting sustainable practices	"The coffee machine is broken in your office. What do you do?"	A) Wait for someone to fix it. B) Inform a colleague about the issue. C) Start gathering information on how to repair it. D) Immediately attempt to fix it yourself. E) Organize a team to address the issue.	E = 10 C = 8 D = 6 B = 5 A = 2
14. Openness to innovation	Openness to new ideas and environmental metaphors	What would you rather:	A) Stick with a tried-and-tested solution. B) Take a step toward something new if there is strong evidence. C) Try something new that involves known uncertainties. D) Embrace completely novel approaches with high risk. E) Balance new ideas with existing ones.	D = 10 C = 8 E = 7 B = 5 A = 3
15. Sense of responsibility and commitment	Level of personal commitment to sustainability	You notice a colleague consistently disregarding protocols. What do you do?	A) Ignore it; it's not my responsibility. B) Remind them of the importance of following protocols. C) Report it to a supervisor. D) Organize a meeting to address better practices. E) Offer to handle the issue yourself.	D = 10 E = 8 B = 6 C = 5 A = 2
16. Eco-centric values	Influence of eco-centric values on decision-making	With what view do you approach the decisions you make?	A) Human well-being is the highest priority. B) All forms of biological life should be valued equally. C) The environment as a whole should be prioritized above all. D) A balance between human development and nature is essential. E) Sustainable development is key to long-term success.	C = 10 F = 9 E = 8 B = 7 D = 6 A = 4

CRITERION	WHAT TO MEASURE	ASSESSMENT ITEM	ANSWER POSSIBILITES	SCORING
			F) Preservation of biodiversity is paramount.	
17. Reciprocity norms	Presence and influence of reciprocity norms in sustainability	"You receive help from a colleague on a project. How do you respond?"	A) Offer to help them in return. B) Thank them and move on. C) Ignore the favour. D) Ensure they get recognition for their help. E) Offer to involve them in future projects.	A = 10 E = 8 D = 6 B = 4 C = 2
18. Access to reliable information, financial means, and a network	Availability and accessibility of resources	In your work, which of the following resources do you find most challenging to access?	A) Financial capital B) Reliable information C) Professional network D) None of the above	D = 10 1 option = 8 2 options = 5 3 options = 3
19. Time availability	Availability of time for sustainability initiatives	How much time do you typically have each week to focus on projects of personal preference outside your core job responsibilities?	A) Less than 1 hour B) 1-3 hours C) 3-5 hours D) 5-7 hours E) More than 7 hours	E = 10 D = 8 C = 6 B = 4 A = 2
20. Influence and authority	Level of influence and authority within social or professional circles	"When I present an idea to colleagues, the most common outcome is:"	A) My idea is often adopted as presented. B) My idea is carefully considered and shapes the final decision. C) My idea helps guide the discussion, with others adding their insights. D) My idea is acknowledged and contributes to ongoing conversations. E) My idea is one of many that shapes a collaborative outcome.	A = 10 B = 8 C = 6 D = 4 E = 2
21. Desirability as a collaborator	Perceived desirability as a collaborator	How desirable do you believe your input is in collaborative efforts?	A) Not at all desirable B) Rarely desirable C) Sometimes desirable D) Frequently desirable E) Very desirable	E = 10 D = 8 C = 6 B = 4 A = 2
22. Supportive work environment	Presence of a supportive work environment	How supportive is your work environment of personal projects or ideas?	Not supportive at all Slightly supportive Moderately supportive Very supportive Extremely supportive	Extremely supportive = 10 Very supportive = 8 Moderately supportive = 6 Slightly supportive = 4 Not supportive at all = 2
23. Extrinsic	Availability	Which of the	A) We receive financial	4+ options = 10

CRITERION	WHAT TO MEASURE	ASSESSMENT ITEM	ANSWER POSSIBILITES	SCORING
motivations	of extrinsic motivators for sustainable practices	following statements are true with regards to sustainable practices in your organization?	rewards when participating in sustainability practices. B) We get recognition from management for sustainable actions. C) The government mandates it. D) Organization policy supports it. E) We receive public recognition for our efforts. F) None of the above.	3 options = 8 2 options = 6 1 option = 4 F = 2

4.3.6. TOOL LAY-OUT

The final aspect of the assessment tool's development is its layout. The design process began with a brainstorming session, where "How To" questions guided ideation across six elements based on the requirements **R8**, **R10**, **R11**, and **R12**, which are concerned with the usability, clarity, progress awareness and intuitive use, as shown in Appendix F2. The results of this session were plotted on a C-box graph, shown in Figure 15, which evaluates each idea by plotting efficiency on the y-axis and feasibility on the x-axis. This visual representation helped identify the highest-scoring ideas for each design element.

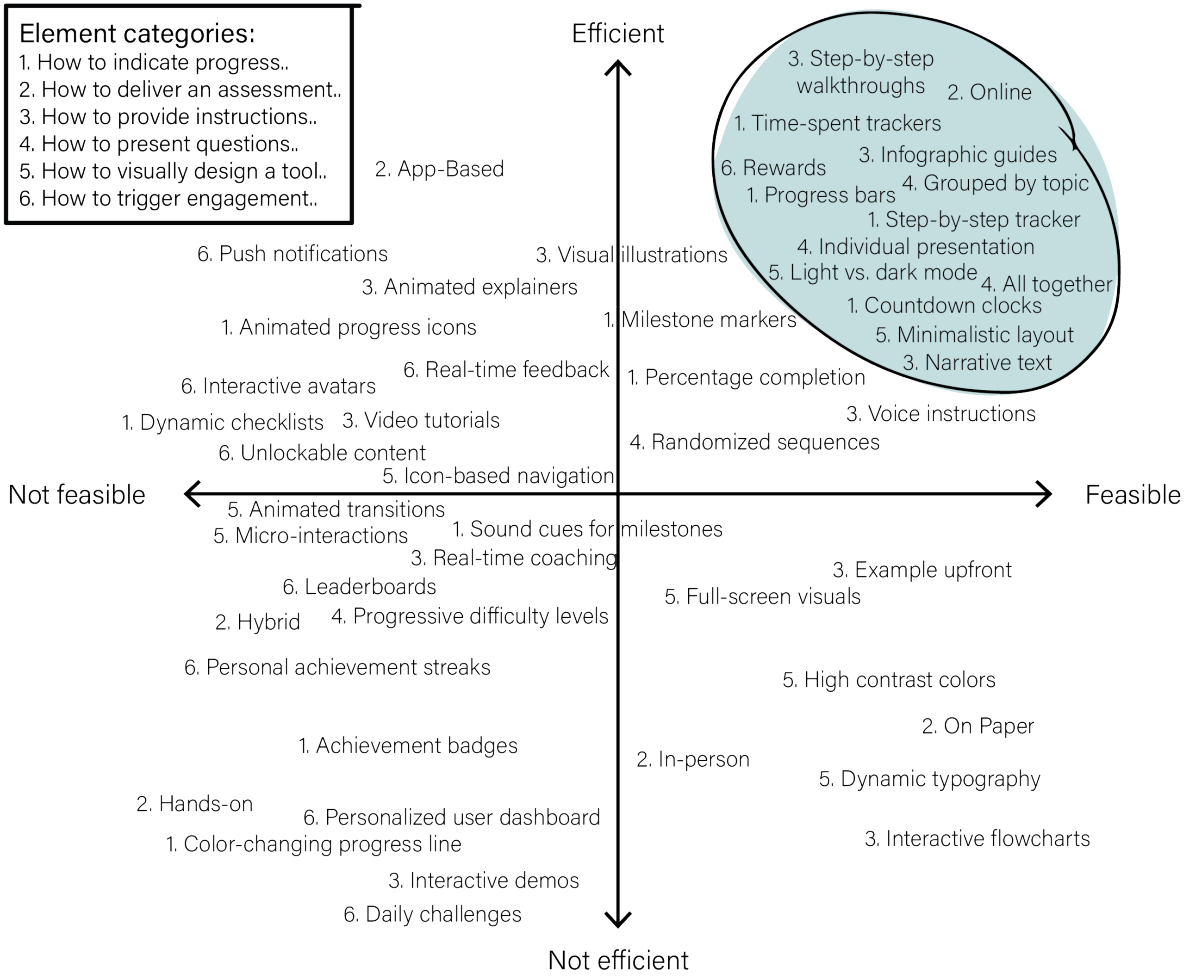


Figure 15: C-box graph plotting the efficiency of element ideas against their feasibility.

The results provided several key insights. First, for the tool's delivery method, only one idea scored particularly well: a web-based assessment tool. For the remaining elements, multiple ideas appeared both feasibility and efficiency. To narrow down the options, each of these ideas was tested, the complete results are presented in Appendix H3. The testing revealed valuable insights. Overall, simplicity was highly valued, although participants noted the importance of some degree of detail. For example, the participant panel shared feedback like:

Participant panel (No3): "A time indication is nice, but it might not capture all the nuance; a more concrete progress bar would be better."

Participant panel (No5): "I would prefer a combination of number of questions and the time that's left."

Participant panel (No6): "While one question at a time might work, I prefer grouping questions. It divides the content into manageable parts, helping maintain focus and providing a better overview."

These comments highlight the need for a balance between simplicity and sufficient detail and guided the selection of the most appropriate idea for each element. For several elements, ideas were combined. The combination of elements translates into the final design, which ensures that the tool is both practical and effective, meeting the specified requirements while remaining feasible to prototype. The key elements of the tool lay-out are highlighted in Figure 16.

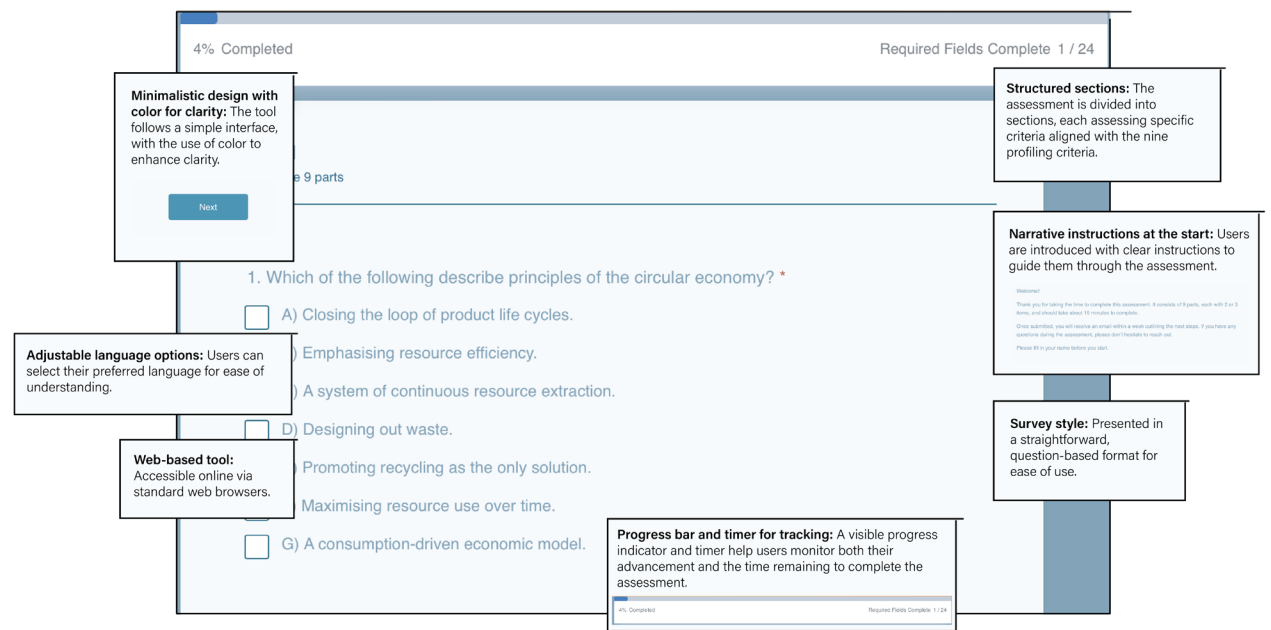


Figure 16: Outline of the key elements of the tool.

4.3.7. THE FEW'S ASSESSMENT TOOL

Integrating the assessment items and the lay-out presents the prototype of the Few's Assessment Tool. The final prototype is available to review and use through the QR code provided in Figure 17.



Figure 17: QR code to the Few's Assessment Tool prototype.

The tool development process was significantly guided by insights gained through testing. These insights were instrumental in refining the tool and ensuring that it met all the requirements for the assessment tool. During testing, most respondents were able to finish within the expected time, some found certain questions unnecessarily lengthy or repetitive.

Participant panel (No4): "Some of the questions took me some time to understand, which made the process take longer than expected."

In response, questions that were unnecessarily complex were reviewed and simplified in terms of language and structure. This adjustment helped maintain the tool's thoroughness while impacting the time needed for completion.

Another requirement of the tool was to allow users to complete the assessment independently. Feedback from participants indicated that most were able to do so, though some suggested clearer instructions would enhance their confidence.

Participant panel (No1): "I could answer everything on my own, but more detailed instructions would have made it easier to understand the goal and what was expected of me."

As a result, more comprehensive instructions were included at the beginning of the assessment, along with helpful prompts throughout. Additionally, some participants expressed that certain questions limited their ability to fully express their thoughts due to predefined answer options. They suggested that a comment section allowing them to explain their choices would improve their responses.

Participant panel (No5): "It would be helpful if question 8 allowed me to explain my choice. Some of the options felt incomplete, and a comment section would have let me clarify my thinking."

In response, one explanatory section was introduced at the end of the assessment, allowing respondents to provide some additional context for their answers. Moreover, ensuring that the tool was relevant to users from various industries and professional contexts was a challenge during the development. Some respondents, particularly those in specific sectors like healthcare, noted that certain questions were not entirely applicable to their work.

Participant panel (No3): "In healthcare, environmental impact isn't a big focus, so some of these questions don't really apply to my work."

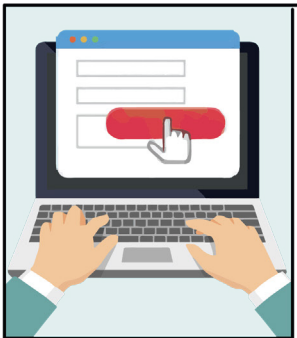
Based on this insight, rather than incorporating industry-specific examples, certain questions were generalized to focus on the presence of key criteria, regardless of sector. This change ensured that respondents across different industries could engage with the questions without feeling excluded or irrelevant. The storyboard, as shown in Figure 18, provides a clear explanation of the final tool's use.



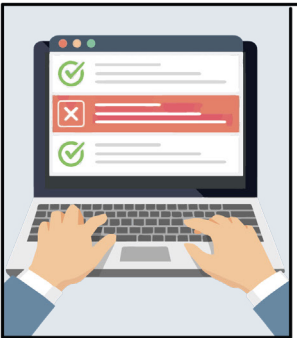
1. The process begins with an email notification that provides a link to the Few's Assessment Tool. Upon clicking the link, the user is welcomed and introduced to the purpose of the tool. Clear instructions are given to help users understand the importance of the assessment and how to complete it. The tool is designed to be independent, allowing users to complete it without external assistance.



2. Users proceed through the assessment, answering the questions. If needed, they can click on information icons beside each question to get additional context. Throughout the process users can track their progress.



3. Once the user submits their completed assessment, they are thanked for their participation. Additionally, they are notified that their responses will be reviewed, and they may be contacted later if they are selected for further engagement by the forest metaphor advocate.



4. After the assessment is submitted, the forest metaphor advocate receives the results. These results include a visual representation of the individual's alignment across the nine themes, indicating clearly where they meet necessary thresholds. Based on these insights, the advocate identifies individuals who are most likely to adopt and diffuse the forest metaphor within the organisation. The advocate then plans the next steps for further engagement, aligning future actions with the organisation's goals.

Figure 18: Storyboard explaining the assessment tool's use.

5. DISCUSSION

While the research meets the set objectives, there are several areas for improvement and numerous opportunities for further exploration. This chapter discusses the research findings, addresses the research limitations and provides recommendations for future research and practice.

5.1. INTERPRETATIONS

This research was designed to address a gap in the implementation of the forest metaphor. While it is argued that there is a need to distinguish the Few, there has been limited understanding of who these individuals, most likely to adopt and diffuse this metaphor within organizational contexts are. The research sought to distinguish these individuals by profiling and selecting them. The outcome was a framework with profiling criteria and an assessment tool designed to address this need. Several interpretations can be drawn from these findings, also shedding light on the broader implications of this research.

5.1.1. A DYNAMIC APPROACH

The profiling criteria developed in this research—organized into nine themes encompassing capability, motivation, and situational alignment—were systematically validated. This validation confirmed the criteria’s relevance and applicability in distinguishing the Few within organizational contexts. Developing the Few’s sweet spot diagram, where capability, motivation, and situation intersect, was crucial. This intersection highlighted that without alignment across these three dimensions, an individual’s potential to adopt and diffuse the forest metaphor could be limited. The diagram illustrated not just a theoretical construct but a practical necessity for profiling those best positioned to effectively adopt and diffuse the forest metaphor.

The profiling framework developed is intended to identify multiple individuals within an organization who each align with the profile of the Few. While the framework is comprehensive, encompassing a wide range of criteria, these findings could also suggest that it might be challenging to find individuals who fully embody all the criteria. Studies on team dynamics indicate that the most effective teams tend to consist of individuals with complementary skills, rather than expecting each member to meet every requirement (Hackman, 2002).

This observation leads to an interpretation that the Few might be more effectively approached as a dynamic group rather than individuals who each possess all the profiling criteria. Different individuals might excel in different areas, contributing their specific strengths at various stages of the adoption and diffusion process. For example, one individual might be particularly strong in strategic thinking during the conceptual adoption phase, while another might bring essential skills or financial means during the implementation phase. This approach is further supported by the concept of dynamic capabilities, which emphasizes that organizational success is often achieved through the recombination and leverage of diverse individual strengths (Eisenhardt & Martin, 2000).

Therefore, by viewing the Few as a collaborative group, organizations could leverage the collective strengths of multiple individuals. This dynamic approach could ensure that all necessary criteria are present within the group, even if no single individual embodies every criterion. It also suggests that the success of the Few might depend on how well these individuals can work together, each bringing their unique strengths to the process.

5.1.2. BALANCING DEPTH AND BREADTH

The assessment tool developed in this research offers a structured way to evaluate individuals against the 23 profiling criteria for the Few, proving to be both practical and effective. Its web-based format ensures accessibility and ease of use across various organizational settings, while the objective assessment items provide consistency and reliability, reducing bias. In addition to its practicality, testing the tool resulted in its ability to accurately assess the criteria. Assessing individuals to provide a clear result about whether they are part of the Few and where in the Few’s sweet spot diagram they are located allows for informed decisions about whom to engage in the forest metaphor’s implementation.

However, the tool’s reliance on a single assessment item for 23 criteria, might prioritize breadth over

depth. While this approach allows for a broad and quick assessment, it could potentially overlook the deeper, more nuanced presences of the criteria.

This interpretation suggests that the tool might be best used as a first-step filter, with more in-depth evaluation methods following the assessment. , as recommended by best practices in assessment (Arthur Jr. et al., 2003). After generating initial insights, organizations could use targeted interviews, case studies, or role-play scenarios to explore the deeper alignment of individuals with the profile of the Few. This multi-stage evaluation process could provide a more thorough and nuanced assessment, ensuring that those selected are not only broadly aligned but really possess the required criteria necessary to align with the profile of the Few. Combining broad initial assessments with focused follow-up methods allows organizations to capture the full complexity of the criteria (Thornton III & Rupp, 2006).

These interpretations highlight the potential need for a more flexible and dynamic approach to distinguish the Few, where a group-based strategy and a multi-stage assessment process could better capture the complexity of the criteria required for effectively adopting and diffusing the forest metaphor.

5.1.3. CONNECTION WITH EXISTING RESEARCH

This research primarily builds on and extends existing frameworks such as the COM-B model, Kotter’s Change Management Model, and Barr et al.’s framework on pro-environmental behaviour. These frameworks emphasize the strong relations between factors such as capability, motivation, and situation. This research built on these established frameworks and applied them to the context of adopting and diffusing the forest metaphor on a personal level.

The application of these established frameworks to the novel context of the forest metaphor represents a contribution to academia. The integration of these frameworks into a comprehensive assessment tool is a practical advancement, aiming to the gap between theory and application.

Moreover, this research contributes to the growing body of literature on the forest metaphor and could potentially influence future research on the forest metaphor. While the metaphor has been recognized for its theoretical potential, this research takes a first step towards translating the theory into the implementation of the forest metaphor. By developing a structured approach to distinguish the individuals who are most likely to adopt and diffuse the forest metaphor, this research lays the groundwork for future research to refine and build upon.

5.1.4. IMPLICATIONS ACROSS DIFFERENT LEVELS

The research has implications for organizations aiming to integrate circular economy principles into their operations. The identification of the Few through a profiling and selection process enhances the understanding of how metaphors like the forest can be effectively integrated into organisational practices. While the research itself does not directly initiate transformative change, it provides a foundation for future actions. The assessment tool developed in this research offers organizations a concrete method for distinguishing the Few. By focusing on those with the right combination of capability, motivation, and situational alignment, organizations can more strategically allocate resources and efforts towards achieving circular economy goals, aiming to make it an asset in the broader push towards a circular economy.

5.1.5. REFLECTION ON THE POTENTIAL OF THE FOREST METAPHOR

The forest metaphor aims to advance the circular economy by mirroring the principles of a forest, much like the field of industrial ecology, which uses nature’s systems as models to improve sustainability. This research seeks to bridge the gap between the theoretical potential and practical implementation of the forest metaphor, addressing the question: Can the forest metaphor truly be “something”? Can it be more than a theoretical concept?

This research demonstrates the critical role of key individuals in successfully implementing the forest metaphor. At the same time, it acknowledges that additional factors may significantly influence its success, as sociologists such as Thijs Bol emphasize how external pressures, rather than individual effort alone, can shape performance and success (Bol, 2024). This highlights the complexity of any system in which the forest metaphor would operate, with external conditions playing a pivotal role in its success or failure.

While the forest metaphor holds substantial potential, its ultimate effectiveness will depend on its ability to adapt to various contexts and engage with the broader systems that influence its implementation. Continued research and practical experimentation are necessary to determine whether the forest metaphor can fully deliver on its promise of transformative change. Although this research represents an important step in addressing the question of whether the forest metaphor is indeed “something,” further exploration will be crucial to fully answer this question and ensure its long-term success.

5.2. LIMITATIONS

While this research provides valuable insights, several limitations must be acknowledged. These limitations highlight areas where the robustness and applicability of the research might be affected.

First, a significant limitation of this study is the small and homogeneous sample used for both the validation of the profiling framework and the testing of the assessment tool. This limits the generalizability of the findings, as a small sample reduces statistical power and increases the risk of overlooking important effects. Additionally, the homogeneity of the sample limits the ability to determine how the tool would perform in more diverse populations, where factors such as cultural or socioeconomic differences may influence outcomes. This limitation raises concerns about how valid and robust the validation of the profiling framework and testing of the tool is. It suggests that further validation and testing with broader and more varied samples may be necessary to improve the robustness and applicability.

Moreover, the process of generating the profiling criteria and assessment tool involved subjective judgment and was influenced by the researcher’s interpretation, introducing some degree of bias. Additionally, despite efforts to conduct a thorough literature review and consultation with experts, there remains the possibility that certain relevant insights were inadvertently overlooked. This omission could impact the conclusiveness of the framework and tool, even though both were grounded in established theories and validated through rigorous processes. A related limitation concerns potential knowledge gaps in certain areas of the profiling framework and the development of the assessment items. Although efforts were made to address these gaps through a combination of literature review and expert consultation, some elements may not fully capture the complexities of the Few. In particular, the development of the assessment items was carried out without the direct inclusion of experts, raising concerns about whether these items accurately measure the intended profiling criteria. A broader range of expert consultation could have provided a more comprehensive

understanding of the necessary criteria and enhanced the precision of the assessment tool.

Furthermore, while the tool is methodically developed, its practical application in real-world settings has not been fully explored and tested. There may be challenges in its implementation that were not identified during the tests conducted in this research. Additionally, the weighting of the 23 criteria in the assessment tool is based solely on the finding that the three categories—capability, motivation, and situation—need to be balanced. As a result, all themes are weighted equally, which may not fully capture the nuanced importance of specific criteria in different contexts. This uniform weighting could limit the tool’s flexibility and precision in distinguishing the Few.

Additionally, the forest metaphor remains a novel concept, and its practical effectiveness in driving transformative change is still uncertain. While this research provides a step toward the adoption of the metaphor, its real-world impact has yet to be fully understood.

Finally, it must also be recognized that there are numerous ways to approach and address the research question posed in this research. The methods employed and the framework and tool developed here are not the only possible solutions and will likely evolve as new insights and approaches emerge—or if the research were conducted again. Nevertheless, the current approach has been carefully derived from established theories, brainstorm sessions and consultations with supervisors. Despite these limitations, the systematic approach taken in this research could provide a foundation for future work. The iterative approach and the combination of literature review, expert input, validation and testing has resulted in a profiling framework and assessment tool that are theoretically grounded, practically oriented, and reproducible. The crucial question moving forward is whether these research outcomes will indeed enable effective identification and engagement of individuals capable of implementing the forest metaphor.

5.3. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE WORK

Despite the identified limitations, this research has made significant strides in distinguishing the Few within organizations. Moreover, these limitations also indicate areas where possible further research could enhance and refine the research's robustness and applicability. To realise the full potential of this research, future efforts could focus on two main areas: refining the Few's profile and assessment tool and laying out the next steps to engage the Few in implementing the forest metaphor.

5.3.1. REFINING THE FEW'S PROFILE AND ASSESSMENT TOOL

To improve the concept of the Few, future work should aim to address the gaps identified in this research, particularly through greater involvement of experts. Expanding the range of expertise involved in refining the framework will improve the understanding of the Few and help captures the full complexity of the Few's role.

To enhance the accuracy and reliability of the Few's profile and assessment tool, further calibration is necessary. This could involve validation and testing with individuals who are already recognized as able to adopt and diffuse the forest metaphor. Such calibration exercises would help the accuracy and effectiveness of the assessment items, refine the assessment system, and ensure that the tool accurately distinguishes the Few. This step is crucial for establishing a baseline and enhancing the precision of the tool.

To fully understand the applicability and effectiveness of the Few's profile and assessment tool, it is essential to explore their use across different perspectives, locations, and cultures. By examining how the profile and tool perform in various cultural and geographic contexts, researchers can gain valuable insights into how these elements might need to be adapted. This exploration can also reveal the universality of the Few, or it may uncover culturally specific adaptations that could enhance its relevance and impact. Understanding these variations would not only broaden the Few's applicability but also provide a richer, more nuanced understanding of how organizational change is influenced by cultural and geographical factors.

5.3.2. LAYING OUT THE NEXT STEPS

Looking ahead, future work should focus on the next steps in realizing the potential of the forest metaphor. Distinguishing the Few is only the first step. Looking ahead, the roles of the main stakeholders—the forest metaphor advocates, the Few, and the targeted organizations— and their interactions must be clearly defined and supported.

As for the Few, future research should explore the specific actions and initiatives they should undertake to effectively adopt and diffuse the forest metaphor within their organization. Revisiting the scope outlined in the introduction, the focus should shift from merely distinguishing the Few to empowering them. They must be supported in their efforts to adopt and diffuse the forest metaphor, which could involve targeted education, resources, and ongoing professional development tailored to enabling them to fully realize the potential of the forest metaphor.

With regards to the forest metaphor advocates, a recommendation for future work would be the development of detailed implementation strategies using the Few's assessment tool. This includes creating practical resources such as storyboards, implementation roadmaps, and best practice guidelines to facilitate the seamless integration of the tool into organizations. However, perhaps more importantly, there should be a dedicated group of forest metaphor advocates to dedicate to this cause. These advocates should engage with organizations, convincing them of the forest metaphor's potential. Also, once the Few are distinguished, they will need guidance and education on the forest metaphor, which should be enabled by this independent group of advocates. Future research should explore the development and structure of such a group of forest metaphor advocates, as well as the best practices

for equipping these advocates to maximize their impact.

Shifting focus to the targeted organizations, the forest metaphor presents a unique opportunity to drive transformative change which is required for the circular economy to be successful, but its introduction and integration require careful consideration. Future research should investigate the best ways to introduce this metaphor across various organizational contexts, ensuring that it resonates with different cultural and operational environments. Pilot programs or case studies could be instrumental in assessing how the metaphor is received and utilized, providing valuable insights into its practical application and impact.

Lastly, given the transformative potential of the forest metaphor, empirical validation is essential. Longitudinal studies could be conducted to track how the metaphor influences organizations over time. These studies would provide crucial evidence of the metaphor's practical value, proving its potential to induce transformative change. This empirical validation would solidify the credibility of the metaphor and support its broader adoption.

6. CONCLUSION

This final chapter concludes the research project. The overall conclusion will be provided and on a final note, the research will be wrapped up with from a personal perspective.

This research builds on the potential of the forest metaphor to induce the transformative change promised by the circular economy. While recognizing that the forest metaphor holds significant theoretical value, its success hinges on its ability to drive this change in practice. This transition depends on the implementation, adoption, and diffusion of the forest metaphor. Concepts such as Gladwell's "Law of the Few" and the role of change champions highlight the importance of identifying key individuals—the Few—who have a disproportionate influence on successful implementation. This research set out to answer the question: How can the individuals most likely to adopt and diffuse the forest metaphor be distinguished? Through an approach that included the development of a profiling framework and an assessment tool, this research offers a systemic way to distinguish the Few within organizations.

The profiling framework forms the core of this approach, identifying key criteria necessary for profiling the Few. These 23 criteria each contribute to a well-rounded profile of those best positioned to adopt and diffuse the forest metaphor. The sweet spot diagram emphasizes the importance of balancing the criteria of capability, motivation and situation. This balance avoids selecting individuals who might lack the necessary skills or whose motivations may not align with the collective goals of sustainability.

Building on this profiling framework, an assessment tool was developed to apply these criteria systematically. The tool uses a scoring system based on a 1-10 scale, with specific thresholds for each theme to determine alignment with the profile of the Few. Each criterion is assessed through a carefully developed question, which ensure that all relevant aspects of an individual's capability, motivation, and context are assessed. The tool allows to effectively identify those who not only understand and support the forest metaphor but also have the practical ability to implement it within their organisation, as illustrated by the Few's sweet spot diagram.

In interpreting these outcomes, the framework offers a set of criteria that provide valuable insights into profiling the Few. However, given the diverse range of criteria, the Few may be more effectively approached as a dynamic group, with different individuals contributing specific strengths at various stages of the adoption and diffusion process of the forest metaphor. Furthermore, while the assessment tool offers a useful starting point for selecting the Few, its broad focus on numerous criteria, combined with its reliance on a single item per criterion, may limit the depth of the assessment. Therefore, it may function best as an initial filter within a more comprehensive, multi-stage evaluation process.

In conclusion, this research takes a step towards bridging the gap between the theoretical potential of the forest metaphor and its practical implementation within organizations. The research successfully answers the question of how the Few can be distinguished by providing a robust and practical approach through the combined use of the profiling framework with 23 criteria and the assessment tool. Just as a forest thrives through the intricate interplay of its diverse elements, so too can the circular economy flourish when nurtured by the right individuals within an organization.

6.1. PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE

As a believer in the potential of the forest metaphor, it feels only fitting to approach this research as a forest when reflecting on it from a personal perspective. In this section, I will briefly explore the research journey, the experiences and challenges I faced, the lessons I learned, and my personal performance and development throughout the project.

Starting this research could be compared to entering an unfamiliar forest. You never really know what to expect, and the path you plan isn't always the one you end up taking. When I began looking for a topic over a year ago, I didn't expect to end up here. Like a forest that goes through different seasons, this project has had its ups and downs. In many ways, it has been as much a mental and emotional journey as it has been an intellectual one.

One of the most prominent challenges I faced was dealing with constant insecurity—wondering what I should do, whether what I had done was right, and what I was doing at any given moment. Working alone and with professionals while not seeing myself as one made this feeling even stronger. But this challenge also pushed me to face these insecurities head-on, knowing that doubts like these are something I'll probably deal with throughout my life.

A lesson I had learned before, and that helped me during this project, was the importance of communication. Talking about my uncertainties helped reduce some of the stress. However, I also learned that I need to communicate even more—

about what I need, what I expect, and what I want, as well as what the others need, expect and want. This kind of communication was key in facing the challenges of this research.

My main goal was to graduate and to produce work that I could be content with. While it's not yet certain whether I will achieve the graduation part, I am getting to a point where I'm content with what I've accomplished in this project. Looking back, I see that I've gained valuable experience in managing different stakeholders and that I've grown more confident and competent in doing so.

Assessing myself, I would say I've made progress, both on a personal and academic level. Throughout this project, I've had moments where things finally clicked, and I thought, "Ah, so this is how it works." But I've also had moments where I looked back at what I did a month ago and wondered, "What was I thinking?" To me, these experiences are indicators of development, showing that I improved as I went.

Overall, this research has taught me, once again, the importance of making a plan and just starting, knowing that things will inevitably change along the way. It's not about having everything figured out from the beginning, but about being adaptable and willing to keep moving forward, even when the path isn't clear. Just as a forest thrives through its resilience, this project has reinforced the value of perseverance and the willingness to push ahead, no matter the obstacles. Just do it!

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