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## **Obituary Prof Klaus J. Zink**

We mourn the death of our institute's founder, long-standing director and honorary chairman Prof. Dr. rer. pol. habil. Klaus J. Zink, who passed away in Iserlohn / Germany on September 26, 2024. The Institute for Technology and Work (ITA) e.V. at the Rhineland-Palatinate Technical University (RPTU) of Kaiserslautern-Landau has thus lost its founding father and guiding spirit.

For more than five decades, Klaus J. Zink dedicated himself to human factors and ergonomics research and the improvement of working conditions at the national and international level in his scientific teaching, research and publication activities as well as in his personal commitment. He often focused on target groups that are otherwise overlooked, such as people with disabilities, child laborers, textile workers, nursing staff, coffee harvesters, and click workers. His numerous implementation-oriented research projects aimed at the scientific investigation and sustainable improvement of working conditions for these groups, among others, because they were close to his heart throughout his life. This was reflected in his entire professional career.

Klaus J. Zink began his studies in Technical Business Administration at the University of Karlsruhe, where he subsequently worked as a research assistant at the Institute for Production Management and Industrial Science. He received the “Fritz Giese Prize” from the German Human Factors and Ergonomics (GfA) for his dissertation (Dr. rer. pol.), which he completed in 1975. In 1978, he completed his postdoctoral qualification at the Faculty of Economics at the University of Karlsruhe (TH). After a substitute professorship in Business Administration/Ergonomics at the University of Kaiserslautern (1979) and a professorship at the University of Wuppertal (1979/80), Klaus J. Zink was until 2012 a full professor at the University of Kaiserslautern (Chair of Industrial Management and Ergonomics), and subsequently Senior Research Professor of Industrial Management and Human Factors until March 2020.

In spring of 1985, Klaus J. Zink and representatives of the Rhineland-Palatinate State Office for Youth and Social Affairs held initial talks that eventually led to a first research project on the “Impact of New Technologies on Sheltered Workshops for People with Disabilities”. The success of this collaboration led to the founding of the Research Center for Technology and Work (FTA) as part of the University Chair in 1989. The aim of the FTA was to support sheltered workshops for disabled people in Rhineland-Palatinate by providing application-oriented research and consulting services in order to maintain “real jobs” for their target groups.

In 1995, Klaus J. Zink initiated the founding / spin-off of the Institute for Technology and Work (ITA) e.V. as a non-university research institution with the recognition as an affiliated institute of today's RPTU Kaiserslautern-Landau, in order to create an institutional framework for the processing of third-party funded research of his chair.

Klaus J. Zink, as he always emphasized, always had two minds dwelling in his breast – one for Human Factors and Ergonomics and one for Business Administration. These two research interests were also reflected in the main areas of research at the ITA: corporate management and the design of work, technology and organization. Numerous research and consulting projects with well-known medium-sized and large companies, but also with countless small and medium-sized companies, have since fundamentally shaped the research and development work in the field of industrial and organizational science at ITA. The close cooperation between the State Office for Youth and Social Affairs and the ITA in cooperation with the State Working Group of Workshops for Disabled People (WfbM) - Rhineland-Palatinate until 2004 led, among other things, to a unique situation in Germany that enabled the workshops for disabled people to access latest research results and scientific support, thus giving them a noticeable advantage in areas such as quality management, the use of new technologies and personality-promoting work design in a national comparison. Klaus J. Zink was the scientific director of the ITA until 2020 and remained actively associated with the institute in the following period.

Klaus J. Zink's commitment was also felt regionally. From its foundation in 2007 until 2013, he was a member of the board of the Science and Innovation Alliance Kaiserslautern e.V., an association of scientific institutes, universities and industry in the Kaiserslautern region. From 2013 to 2016, he was a member of the Council for Technology in Rhineland-Palatinate. By founding the ITA, he created high-quality scientific and professional qualification opportunities for numerous students and graduates in Kaiserslautern. In addition, considerable financial resources have flowed into the region over the many years through the numerous project acquisitions, from which numerous companies and organizations cooperating with the ITA have benefited.

Klaus J. Zink's commitment at the national and international level is also particularly noteworthy. For seven years, he was a member of the executive committee of the German-speaking Society for Human Factors and Ergonomics (GfA), serving as its president for two years (1998-2000). During this time, a new mission statement for the GfA and a memorandum on the future of work research were developed under his leadership and with representative members of the GfA. Internationally, he represented the GfA on the Council of the IEA for many years. The International Ergonomics Association (IEA) is the umbrella organization of national ergonomic societies with approximately 50 member organizations worldwide. Its goal is to promote ergonomics in theory and practice in order to contribute to improving the quality of (working) life. From 2000-2003, he was a member of the IEA Executive Council, where he promoted the topics of "Policy and Strategy". From 2009-2012, he was again a member of the Executive Board as Vice President and during this time he facilitated two lighthouse projects in developing countries: improving working conditions in the coffee harvest in Nicaragua and improving the working conditions of women in Indian agriculture through the use of simple technologies. Together with the then president, Andy Imada (USA), he had initiated an international working group on the "Future of Ergonomics". In 2018, Klaus J. Zink was chairman of the international jury for the IEA Liberty Mutual Award, which is given annually to outstanding research in the field of "Occupational Health and Safety".

His great achievements in the field of work research have already been recognized many times, both nationally and internationally. In 2000, Klaus J. Zink was named a Fellow of the IEA. In 2006, he was honored as a “Distinguished International Colleague” by the US Human Factors and Ergonomics Society. In 2009, he received the very rarely awarded IEA Development Award and in 2018 the IEA President's Award. In 2019, he was honored with an honorary membership in the German Human Factors and Ergonomics Society for his “outstanding contributions to ergonomics and services within the GfA”. Finally, on October 13, 2022, Federal President Steinmeier presented him with the Cross of the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany for his extraordinary commitment to labor research and the improvement of working conditions at the national and international level.

With this award of the Order of Merit, the long-standing and ongoing scientific and personal commitment of Klaus J. Zink was recognized by the Federal Republic of Germany. In the statement, it was emphasized that he had provided “indispensable impetus for the future design of humane and sustainable work” by committing his expertise to inclusion, social participation and humane working conditions over many years, always placing a focus on sustainability.

With Klaus J. Zink, we are not only losing the founder and long-standing director of our institute, but also a remarkable personality who has shaped several generations. One of the many principles that he consistently tried to implement was to practice what he preached, both in lectures and in research and implementation projects. This also applied to social responsibility, which he demanded of companies just as much as he did of himself and his institute. His keen sense for future issues and his ability to recognize the bigger picture – even across disciplinary boundaries – characterized him throughout his working life.

His scientific stimuli and the way he has shaped us as personalities will continue to have an impact even after his death.

The board and staff  
and the scientific steering committee  
of the Institute for Technology and Work (ITA) e.V.

Picture material:



Photo: Presentation of the Cross of the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany on May 22, 2023 in Mainz. (Copyright Staatskanzlei RLP/Sell)