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Implementing an Effective Circular Economy Strategy in your Organisation

Most organisations acknowledge the need to transition toward circular models — yet few redesign their operations to achieve it, largely because leaders assume circularity comes at the expense of margins. In reality, well-implemented circular strategies can strengthen resilience, reduce resource dependency, and unlock new sources of value. A practical Pod for managers who want to embed circularity into strategy, KPIs, and day-to-day decisions, from Pierre-Emmanuel Saint-Esprit, Circular Economy Officer at Manutan Group and Executive Director of the Global Circular Economy Chair at ESSEC Business School.

Related research: From an interview by Anshuman Sisodia, Sustainability professional, MSc Sustainability, ESSEC Business School.



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THE 3 Ps IN A CoBS POD



PERCEIVE

with a set of key takeaways



PROJECT

with food for thought: on yourself, your organisation and the wider context



PERFORM

by putting it all into practice using action tips



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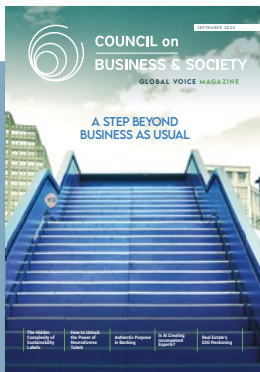
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PERCEIVE

with a set of key takeaways

- The circular economy uniquely aligns profit with environmental and social impact. Every euro earned in a well-designed circular model reduces emissions, conserves resources, and can create social value.
- Many companies misunderstand circularity – focusing too much on recycling or using it as greenwashing. True circularity requires reducing resource consumption, designing out waste, and integrating social impact.
- The goal isn't just about balancing profit and purpose, but redesigning systems so responsible production is the path to business success. Even shifting 1–2% of operations toward circularity can have an outsized impact.
- For large organisations, making circularity work means aligning it with each stakeholder's goals: cost saving for operations, differentiation for marketing, resilience for risk managers, and compliance for finance.
- Many circular initiatives fail because organisations never translate circular ambition into Profit & Loss ownership. Unless business unit leaders are accountable for resource productivity alongside financial performance, circularity remains a side initiative rather than an operating model.
- For circular strategies to be meaningful, they should also address social issues – for example, creating local jobs or supporting disadvantaged communities – making sustainability more inclusive and impactful.
- Within corporations, bottom-up innovation ("intrapreneurship") helps embed circular models. Executive support is essential, but grassroots efforts tied to KPIs drive adoption across departments.
- Just as digital transformation has reshaped business, climate resilience and sustainability will too. Companies unprepared for ecological risks and resource volatility will struggle or disappear in the coming decade.



Read a full interview with
Pierre-Emmanuel Saint-
Esprit in Global Voice
magazine #33



PROJECT with food for thought



- Where in your organisation do you see the greatest waste or value loss today (materials, energy, time, data), and what patterns or root causes seem to be driving it? In what ways could you redesign products, processes, or incentives to “design out” that waste at the source?
- How does your current business model rely on virgin resource extraction and/or increasing sales volumes, and where is that dependency most visible in your value chain? What options could help you reduce resource use while maintaining—or even increasing—customer value and profitability?
- Which parts of your value chain (procurement, packaging, product design, logistics, after-sales, end-of-life) offer the strongest opportunities for an initial 1–2% circular shift, and why? What would be the most meaningful “first move” in those areas, and what constraints would you need to address?
- How might your circular initiative be understood differently by (a) operations, (b) marketing/sales, (c) finance, and (d) risk/compliance—and what would each group care about most? Which metrics, evidence, or success stories would build credibility with each stakeholder?
- What forms of “circular washing” could realistically occur in your context (e.g., rebound effects, shifting impacts elsewhere, increased consumption), and where are you most exposed? How could you design measurement, testing, and monitoring so you can demonstrate that your initiative reduces total resource use over time?
- Beyond environmental outcomes, what kinds of social value could your circular strategy generate (jobs, inclusion, skills development, stronger local ecosystems), and what trade-offs might emerge? Which partners—suppliers, local authorities, NGOs, social enterprises, customers—would you need to involve, and how would you structure those collaborations to make the impact real?

Thoughts



● **PERFORM**

by putting it all into practice

CHECKLIST

- ☐ Map your "linear hotspots": identify top 3 sources of waste, emissions, and resource dependency across the value chain.
- ☐ Choose one pilot that targets a hotspot (repair, refurbishment, reuse, reverse logistics, product-as-a-service, rental, take-back).
- ☐ Define 3–5 KPIs for the pilot (resource use reduction, waste avoided, CO₂ avoided, margin impact, customer retention).
- ☐ Assign a dedicated capital envelope for circular experimentation — for example, ring-fencing 1–3% of the innovation or transformation budget
- ☐ Align incentives: link at least one circularity KPI to performance reviews or bonuses for the pilot team.
- ☐ Build stakeholder narratives: prepare a one-page pitch for operations (cost), marketing (differentiation), finance (risk/ROI), and risk (resilience/compliance).
- ☐ Set up reverse logistics: specify collection points, sorting rules, and partnerships needed for reuse/repair.
- ☐ Prioritize "R-strategies" before recycling: refuse/reduce → reuse → repair → refurbish/remanufacture → recycle.
- ☐ Run a rebound-effect test: track whether circular offers increase total consumption; adjust pricing and messaging to prevent over-buying.
- ☐ Add a social value component to your circular strategy: decide how the initiative will create local jobs or support disadvantaged communities; and partner with NGOs where relevant.
- ☐ Create a 90-day execution plan with project owners, milestones, budget, and decision gates; review progress on a bi-weekly basis.



Getting involved


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