

Management, organizations, and the circular economy

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Scope of the special issue:

Circular economy (CE) can be defined as “a new model that aims to break the link between economic growth, on the one hand, and natural resource depletion and environmental impacts on the other... The circular economy is driven by two key mechanisms:

1. Rethinking our production methods and consumption habits to use fewer resources and protect the ecosystems that generate them.
2. Optimizing the resources that are already in use in our societies.”¹

Since its introduction in the late 1980s (Pearce & Turner, 1989), the CE has become increasingly popular. In the 2000s, many governments began adopting CE concepts into policies and regulations - including China, Japan, the EU (European Union), Colombia, and Brazil, among others. Following a seminal report by the Ellen MacArthur Foundation (The Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2013), the CE began to gain traction in the private sector, leading to dedicated studies by renowned consulting firms such as Accenture, Deloitte, EY, McKinsey, and to the adoption of CE business policies by high-profile companies like Google, Michelin or Heineken (see Reike, Vermeulen, and Witjes (2018) for a history of the concept).

The reason for this popularity lies in the fact that CE opens potential pathways to radically transform the world economic system, from our local economies to the complex international supply chains that provide most of our current consumption. Hence, the CE is considered a promising approach for one of our most pressing management - transitioning towards a sustainable economy. Accordingly, the CE has been endorsed by the United Nations (see UNEA 4. Resolution 1 (UNEP, 2019) as a model to reach its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for 2030, and in particular SDG 12 “Sustainable consumption and production.”

Motivation of the special issue:

However, while the CE has garnered considerable interest in the wider scientific community (Merli, Preziosi, & Acampora, 2018), management scholars have paid relatively little attention to it thus far. As a result, the managerial dimension of the CE remains under-studied (Calisto Friant, Vermeulen, & Salomone, 2020; Kirchherr, Reike, & Hekkert, 2017). We believe this is a serious issue both for the management of sustainability in organizations and for the global transition towards a sustainable economy.

First, at an operational level, organizations are a loci of collective action, hence generally regarded as a fundamental level of analysis to understand the implementation of the CE (Kirchherr et al., 2017; Merli et al., 2018). Empirically, organizations, and in particular corporations, have been described as a fundamental driving force that needs to be harnessed to make the CE happen (Desing et al., 2020; Henry, Bauwens, Hekkert, & Kirchherr, 2020). Management scholars play an important role here in the creation and diffusion of managerial practices (Abrahamson & Eisenman, 2001), and their involvement is key for the widespread adoption of the CE.

Second, at the societal level, many authors stress the importance of linking local CE initiatives to broader societal change, and of thinking in terms of circular society rather than simply of circular economy (Arnsperger & Bourg, 2017; Bauwens, Hekkert, & Kirchherr, 2020; Calisto Friant et al., 2020). They invite us to explore the broader social and economic consequences of CE initiatives.

An interesting point here is that research in management and the literature on the CE draws on different theories of society (Bellemare et al., 2022). “Nature-inspired” theories such as ecology (Naess, 1990 [1976]; Rockström et al., 2009) or system theory (Boulding, 1966; Von Bertalanffy, 1950) provide a strong theoretical foundation for understanding how economic systems interact, or should interact, with the biosphere within the

¹ <https://rrecq.ca/en/the-circular-economy/the-circular-economy-in-short/>

context of the CE. However, those theories are less relevant to address the social and institutional dimensions of the circular society (Bauwens et al., 2020; Blomsma, Bauwens, Weissbrod, & Kirchherr, 2023; Calisto Friant et al., 2020).

Drawing from social sciences such as sociology, anthropology or psychology (Hatch, 2018; Rouleau, 2007), management research provides complementary insights on how to transform the economy, especially regarding social issues such as social justice (Delannon & Raufflet, 2021; Jaffee, 2010) and emancipation (Battilana & Lee, 2014; Parker, 2019). Furthermore, the subject of institutional change has been central in management research over the past 30 years (Friedland & Alford, 1991; Lawrence, Suddaby, & Leca, 2009).

Management scholars have been grappling with sustainability issues for years through ideas such as “grand challenges” (Ferraro, Etzion, & Gehman, 2015; Howard-Grenville & Spengler, 2022), “organizational sustainability” (Bansal, 2002; Hoffman & Ventresca, 2002), or corporate social responsibility (Bowen, 1953; Marti & Gond, 2019). However, despite repeated calls for a more eco-centric paradigm in management studies (Purser, Park, & Montuori, 1995; Shrivastava, 1994), organizations, institutions and society remain largely explored from an anthropocentric perspective within the field of management (Ergene, Banerjee, & Hoffman, 2021). CE, through circular thinking, offers an opportunity to shift the dominant anthropocentric perspective in management towards a more eco-centric understanding of organizations, institutions, and societies.

Possible research questions and themes:

The goal of this special issue of *Management International* is to strengthen the dialog between management research and the CE. We believe the two streams of research have a strong complementarity. Indeed, organizational research and research on the CE both complement each other at the operational level by focusing on different constructs and levels of analysis and provide complementary lenses on society and societal change through their different perspectives. Together, these two research domains have the potential to unleash the full potential of the CE to make organizations and economies more sustainable. Therefore, in this special issue we are interested in research that explores the CE from managerial, organizational, and interorganizational perspectives. We anticipate articles that address, but are not limited to, the following themes and questions:

Tools and methods for managing CE

What are the major challenges associated with implementing, scaling, and monitoring the CE? What are the indicators, tools, methods, and best practices for successfully managing the CE internally within organizations and externally with partners across supply chains and industry sectors?

The human side of CE

What challenges lie ahead when the CE starts to challenge established organizational routines and actions? How can managers tackle those challenges? What are the psychological, interpersonal, and emotional components at play in CE initiatives? What is the relationship between humans and their natural environment in the CE? How does circular thinking influence business practices and the daily management of organizations? What are the broader social consequences of the CE in terms jobs, social justice, or inclusion?

Power in CE

The CE potentially creates strong interorganizational interdependencies on a large scale while creating environmental constraints on organizational actions: How does the adoption of the CE reshuffle power and power dynamics within and across organizations? For instance, how does the CE transform the relationship



between the different sectors of society such as the private industry, regulatory authorities, civil society, etc.? What are the implications of the CE in terms of social and environmental justice?

CE and the organizing outside (and between) organizations

How can we manage in “loops” of material and informational flux rather than in conventional organizations? As the CE pushes us to focus more on trans-organizational flux and natural boundaries, how can we manage outside and beyond organizations? How can we effectively manage circularity across supply chains, industry sectors or geographical regions? Within the context of the CE, what is the meaning of organizational boundaries, property rights, collaboration, or competition?

Towards a Circular Society from a Social and Institutional Perspective

How can local CE initiatives be effectively mainstreamed to trigger a broader societal change? Conversely, how can the widespread adoption of CE trigger a fundamental shift from a predominantly anthropocentric understanding of organizations, institutions, and societal justice towards a more eco-centric way of thinking?

Manuscript submission process and key deadlines:

Authors	Dates
Submission of complete articles (between 3,000 and 6,000 words, including references)	6 January 2025
Publication	Fall 2026

Submissions will be accepted in French, English, and Spanish

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Email for submissions : info@rrecq.ca

Biographies of scholars:

Professor Luc Brès, Luc.Bres@fsa.ulaval.ca

Luc Brès is a full professor at the Faculty of Business Administration at Laval University, Québec (Canada), co-director of the Interdisciplinary Research Laboratory on Corporate Social Responsibility (LIRSE), and a life member of the Clare Hall College at Cambridge University (UK).

Interested in the interrelated socio-political dynamics at play in the socialization of markets, he studies sustainability and corporate social responsibility (CSR) with a particular emphasis on market transformations towards a more responsible, and a more circular economy. Luc has published in leading journals in the field of business and administration such as *Human Relations*, *Organization Studies* and the *Journal of Cleaner Production*, earned grants by the Canadian federal (SSHRC) and provincial (FRQSC) governments, and received awards from organizations such as *the Academy of Management*, *the Administrative Sciences Association of Canada* and the Forum francophone des affaires.

Luc is also committed to using scientific knowledge to transform actual markets and enable economic actors to transition towards a sustainable economy. To do so, he co-founded the LIRSE in 2018 with like-minded colleagues. One defining feature of the LIRSE is to host large-scale CSR initiatives, particularly in relation sustainable supply chain and responsible procurement, and circular economy. The LIRSE's



contribution to sustainability includes co-developing the 2020 ECPAR Canadian barometer on sustainable procurement (SP) which provides an assessment of Canadian organizations' performance regarding their SP practices; conducting the UNEP Global Review on SP worldwide for the private organizations' chapter; working with a coalition of African and Canadian partners to foster the co-construction of sustainable business practices between large Canadian firms and local partners in Western Africa in the mining industry.

Professor Raymond Paquin raymond.paquin@concordia.ca

Raymond Paquin (DBA, Boston University) is a Professor of Management at the John Molson School of Business-Concordia University. His research explores strategic and organizational issues around sustainability-oriented innovation and low-carbon industrial transformation. He has co-authored more than two-dozen publications in leading academic, practitioner and pedagogical journals. His publications have garnered several awards including *Web of Science* top 1% of articles cited for the 2016 article on the Triple Layered Business Model Canvas, 2016 Research with Impact for Practice Award by the *Academy of Management-Organizations and Natural Environment Division*; 2012 *Project Management Journal* paper of the year, and several teaching case awards.

Raymond is the Director of the Case Publications Initiative at John Molson, a fellow and former Interim Director of Loyola Sustainability Research Centre at Concordia University, and an affiliate professor with Indian Institute of Management-Shillong (IIMS).

Thomas Bauwens bauwens@rsm.nl

Dr. Thomas Bauwens is an Assistant Professor researching collective action for sustainability at Rotterdam School of Management, Erasmus University. Previously, he was a researcher at the Utrecht University, the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Lausanne, and Oxford University.

He specializes in sustainability and energy issues with a pronounced interest in multi-disciplinarity. His research concerns the conditions conducive to the creation of effective collective solutions to the social, economic, or environmental grand challenges of our times. Through his work on renewable energy communities, circular economy start-ups, and other bottom-up sustainability initiatives, he has advanced the understanding of their upscaling processes and their roles in fostering societal support for sustainable innovations.

He was recently awarded a €1.5m Starting Grant from the European Research Council for the ambitious, five-year research project *Scaling the Societal Impact of Community Enterprises for Sustainability (SCENSUS)*.

His scholarly work has been published in academic journals such as *Nature Energy*, *World Development*, *Energy Policy*, *Business Strategy and the Environment*, *Organization & Environment*, among others.

Professor Emmanuel Raufflet emmanuel.raufflet@hec.ca

Emmanuel Raufflet (Ph.D. Management, is a Professor of Management at HEC Montréal. His research focuses on social innovation, sustainable development and circular economy. He has led research projects related to energy, sustainability and social acceptability, and circular economy with public, private and non-profit organisations.

Professeur Raufflet is the co-director of the RRECQ (Réseau de recherche en économie circulaire du Québec/ Quebec Research Network in Circular Economy, rrecq.ca), an interdisciplinary network of 250 + researchers



Professor Adriane MacDonald adriane.macdonald@concordia.ca

Adriane MacDonald, Ph.D., is an academic and researcher with expertise in collaborative governance, sustainable development, and municipal climate action policy. She is an Associate Professor of Management and holds the Canada Research Chair in Governance and Sustainability at the John Molson School of Business (JMSB), Concordia University.

Dr. MacDonald is actively involved in groundbreaking initiatives, notably she is currently the academic co-chair of a core [working group](#) within the [municipal net-zero action research partnership](#) (N-ZAP). This [innovative project](#) is at the forefront of guiding Canadian cities through the complex transition to net zero, showcasing her commitment to actionable research that addresses real-world challenges.

Her research spans multiple disciplines, focusing on the intricate dynamics of collaborations between business, government, and non-profit organizations in addressing sustainability issues. She is also interested in broader questions concerning business and sustainability, carbon governance, and municipal climate action policy.

Dr. MacDonald's research has been awarded over \$4.7 million from national and international granting agencies, including the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), the Climate Action and Awareness Fund (CAAF), and Agence Nationale de la Recherche (ANR).

Her scholarly work has been published in several reputable academic journals, including the *Journal of Business Ethics*, *Business & Society*, *Journal of Management Studies*, and *Journal of Business Research*. For more details, see her [Google Scholar](#) profile.

Professor Bart van Hoof bvan@uniandes.edu.co

Bart van Hoof is an Associate Professor at the School of Management, Universidad de los Andes in Bogotá, Colombia. He holds a Ph.D. in Industrial Ecology from Erasmus University in Rotterdam.

His transdisciplinary research and teaching interests are focused on scaling environmental sustainability in organizations, including dissemination of environmental management practices in industrial and agro-food systems in emerging markets, sustainable supply chains, circular economy in agro-food chains.

He has published in academic journals as the *Journal of Cleaner Production and Policy Development*, has published eight books, and numerous chapters in academic and practitioner-oriented books.

He has served as Senior Advisor of the National Strategies on Circular Economy of national governments of Colombian, Peru, and Uruguay, as the Environmental Director of Eco-Petrol and worked as a consultant in the design and implementation of diffusion mechanisms for environmental management in Colombia, Peru, Paraguay, Panama, and Mexico.

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