4th International Conference on Circular Economy, Business Strategy & Management

'How can management sciences leverage the circular economy theoretical framing?'

Organized by EM Normandie Business School & the College of Management University of Massachusetts Boston

5th and 6th October 2026

Split hybrid format (online and on site in Caen, France)

Introduction

The rise of the circular economy (CE) as a strategic response to environmental pressures, social tensions, and the structural limits of linear growth models has led many organizations to reconsider their fundamental approaches to value creation, resource management, innovation and governance. This shift no longer concerns only technical optimization or end-of-pipe solutions. Instead, it implies a reconfiguration of business models, production systems and institutional frameworks, with consequences across all functions of the firm and within broader territorial dynamics (Schaltegger et al. 2016; Geissdoerfer et al., 2017).

In this context, circularity no longer appears as a marginal concern delegated to sustainability departments. Senior executives, innovation managers, marketers, HR directors and operations leaders now increasingly engage with circularity as a strategic and operational matter. Several firms have begun to redefine their competitive positioning, their products and services offerings, and their performance evaluation KPIs and tools considering environmental regeneration, resource preservation, and long-term resilience (Lüdeke-Freund et al., 2019; Pieroni et al., 2021). This transformation requires a deep understanding of how internal capabilities, routines and structures evolve when organizations commit to models that privilege

durability, repairability, shared use and systemic collaboration (Urbinati et al., 2020; Bocken et al., 2023).

This evolution extends beyond corporate boundaries. Numerous cities, regions and public institutions have initiated transitions toward circularity through local experimentation, public procurement frameworks, infrastructure planning and support for circular entrepreneurship. These efforts often result in the formation of territorial circular ecosystems, where firms, public authorities, civil society actors and service providers interact through shared infrastructures, platforms, and institutional arrangements to effectively deploy circular projects (Bourdin & Torre, 2024). These ecosystems illustrate the importance of spatial proximity, socio-technical coordination and institutional embedding in the deployment of circular strategies.

Although circularity now appears as a promising avenue for corporate and public transformation, the contribution of management sciences to this field remains fragmented and under-theorized. Empirical studies continue to focus on emblematic case studies without necessarily clarifying the theoretical implications for organizational behavior, decision-making processes, or inter-organizational dynamics (Franco, 2017; Kumar et al., 2019). Questions related to trade-offs between environmental goals and economic performance still lack coherent analytical frameworks (Kristoffersen et al., 2021), and the articulation between firm-level practices and broader systemic transitions remains conceptually fragile (Pieroni et al., 2021; Bocken et al., 2023).

Efforts to assess the outcomes of circular strategies also face limitations. Existing indicators often favor technical or environmental dimensions, but neglect social and economic consequences, especially in multi-actor and multi-level governance settings (Elia et al., 2017; Ranta et al., 2021). Moreover, few studies offer robust approaches to evaluate the transformative depth of circular initiatives, particularly in terms of their organizational, behavioral and institutional implications. Theoretical contributions in accounting and finance still rarely address the integration of circularity into performance systems, investment evaluation or risk modelling.

For these reasons, a more ambitious research agenda appears necessary. Management sciences hold the potential to produce original knowledge on circular transitions if they address key issues related to the coordination of actors, the evolution of managerial logics, the diffusion of innovation, and the transformation of value paradigms across space and time. The circular

economy calls for reframing the management itself, which cannot be reduced to operational optimization but must incorporate complexity, long-term thinking, and attention to spatial and societal embeddedness.

Topics of Interest

The conference welcomes diverse theoretical, empirical, and methodological contributions that critically engage with circular economy practices and principles.

We encourage authors to approach the circular economy from a wide range of theoretical perspectives, such as stakeholder theory, resource-based view, institutional logics, complexity theory, or systems thinking. Any methodological approach is welcome, from qualitative to quantitative or mixed methods approaches, as well as case studies, exploratory studies, or action research.

Potential topics and research themes include but are not limited to:

1) Strategy: What do holistic circular business models look like? What are the dynamic capabilities of such models? How can circular economy strategies generate a competitive advantage?
2) Marketing: What is the impact of circularity on consumption models? How can businesses communicate their circular economy practices through sustainable branding? What are the potential and challenges of customer engagement?
3) Human Resource Management: How can employees be involved in circular economy practices? What learning and training processes are needed to implement circular economy practices inside the firm? What does an effective change management approach look like?
4) Operations and Supply Chain: How can a business (and its partners) organize their reverse logistics? What role can public procurement play in diffusing circular economy practices in different sectors? How can we measure the performance of a circular economy across the supply chain?
5) Innovation and Entrepreneurship: How do businesses implement eco-design in their products? What are the drivers and barriers to successful circular startups? What role can open innovation play in diffusing circular economy practices?
6) Accounting and Finance: What new measurement systems can firms adopt to account for the impact of their circular economy practices? How are circular economy practices

included in ESG reporting, and to what effect? In turn, to what extent is impact investing boosting circular economy practices?

7) Public Management: How are circular economy approaches implemented in the public sector? What are the dynamics of inter-organizational collaboration (within and across sectors) to develop the circular economy at scale? What is the impact of public policies on the circular economy?
8) Territorial Management: How are business ecosystems coordinated to foster circular partnerships? How can businesses develop regional strategies to transform their industrial ecology? How can businesses scale up and diffuse best practices from local experiments?

These suggestions do not provide a comprehensive list of research themes. We actively encourage any submission that delves into the contexts, mechanisms, processes, and impacts of managing the circular economy

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Submission guidelines

Authors are invited to submit either a long abstract (1,000 to 1,500 words) or a full paper. Submissions should be written in English and clearly outline the research question, theoretical positioning, methodology, and key contributions—whether conceptual, empirical, or methodological. Both completed studies and high-quality work-in-progress will be considered for presentation.

Each submission must include two PDF files:

(i) A blind version with no identifying information, for peer review.

(ii) A full version including the name(s), institutional affiliation(s), and email address(es) of the author(s).

(iii) A mention of whether the author(s) will participate at the conference in Caen or online.

All submissions should be sent to: research@em-normandie.fr

Accepted contributions will be presented at the conference.

A Best Paper Award will be granted during the closing session. To be eligible for the award, authors must submit a full paper by the submission deadline.

Working Papers Development Session

Selected papers may also be invited to a "Working Papers Development" session, where editor(s) and associate editor(s) from leading journals, including the *Journal of Knowledge Management*, will provide feedback to authors.

Important dates

Submission Deadline: July 31, 2026

Notification of Acceptance: August 31, 2026

Conference Dates: October 5-6, 2026

Venue: EM Normandie, Caen (France)

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