



CIRCULAR HRM

Aligning Circular Economy with Human Resources Management

Employee Training for Circular Human Resource Management

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Circular HRM

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Introduction

The most important trends defining life, and work, in the 21st century relate to the search for sustainability and are informed by the principles of the circular economy. Understanding these principles and practicing to live and work sustainably, by responsibly managing resources, has become the new norm. As human beings and as members of organisations we want to ensure resources are not depleted and/or wasted. The current paradigm describing the solution for sustainability through the circular economy is focused only on the flow of materials. We can approach this challenge from a singular perspective by effectively and efficiently using the required resources in the production of material goods, and/ or delivery of services, extending the useful life of products, reusing materials, using renewable alternatives to fossil materials and consuming everything we need in the most efficient way possible. Therefore, when we talk about the Circular Economy, we are referring to the terms of natural capital (better management of resources/ reduction in their use), physical or technical capital (processing, production, recycling). However, managing the circularity of how materials flow in the development of value is only one dimension of the circular economy. Dimensions such as human resources, skills and knowledge are also under threat. The transition to a circular economy will not be complete if the human dimension is forgotten. In addition to physical resources, and depending on the economic model in question (neoliberal or new economy) the human capital is direct or indirect input in the production of goods and services. Thus, at a level of principles, a truly sustainable economy will also make the best possible use of human resources. The latter has become increasingly significant in recent years due to several influential trends which shape the workplace: rapidly aging population; new technology and work automation; strong wave of redundancy of skills and knowledge related to traditional professions; and rapid growth of new professions coupled with demand for new skills and knowledge. Change at personal and organisational level has become normal practice resulting in a need for our understanding of circularity to become more holistic and incorporate the management of human resources. As a result, we have the Circular HRM model.

The Circular HRM model which was developed as an output of the Circular HRM project by a consortium of eight project partners, led by POUR LA SOLIDARITE ASBL, aims at supporting the transition of European SMEs of the eco-industry sector from a traditional, linear HRM model, to a circular HRM model that enhances the regeneration of skills and competences in the workplace and favours circular and sustainable businesses as well as organisational models. The Circular HRM model strengthens the circular economy enabling its participants to adequately respond to the social problems that the linear economy produces (unemployment, skills mismatch, stress and depression in the workplace, work of ageing populations, etc.). It provides an opportunity for durable and sustainable management of people in organisations in contrast with the current linear model of hiring, using, and dismissing employees.

The Circular HRM model provides a novel and practical approach in understanding how employees could be approached as a circular resource in organisations. Employees however, should also be aware of the process, its role and responsibilities in it, and the personal and societal benefits. Any organisational change which could potentially reap the benefits from the Circular HRM Model cannot be introduced without awareness and employee participation in it. As a result, the training programme for employees in Circular HRM principles envisioned as one of the two training programmes with the Circular HRM project, aims at providing a tool for HR Managers for raising awareness among employees on the principles of Circularity when it comes to human resources, emphasising the personal and societal benefits from the same, and strengthening the role of employees as agents of change within their organisations.



Seven Principles of Circular Management of Human Resources

Despite small changes in the paradigm of how we perceive the labour market, led by the technology savvy youth, in general the majority of people still perceive labour markets as linear. This implies that people enter the labour markets with expectations for incremental professional career growth – once formal education is finished, with expectations of ever-increasing responsibilities and ever-increasing higher pay. The expectation is also that these perceived opportunities are followed by retirement and exit from the labour market. This is an unsustainable perspective and an excellent example of the 'take-do-discard' linear model. In this linear model people who no longer fit in, or can no longer keep up, are considered surplus to requirements, often dependent on social security support. This system is kept alive to some extent by makeshift provisions: a little recycling here and an additional course there. However, the dominant pattern remains that people are seen primarily as units of production, whose productivity should be used as efficiently as possible. In essence, this model supports the view that once the worker productivity no longer meets organisational needs, s/he should be removed from employment.

Within such a process, responsibility for managing this rests with the organisation, economy and the society to provide the aforementioned expected job security, professional and career growth. Enterprises and organisations, similar to national economies, however, cannot keep this promise anymore within a linear paradigm. Political, economic, and organisational systems are no longer operating within stable environments. Change is the new status quo. Organisations need to adapt fast, even lead change, in order to survive and prosper, and in this environment two key factors make a significant impact: how efficient is the organisation in managing its material resources and flow, and how fast its human resources can develop and apply new knowledge and competences. Both are the core principles of the holistic Circular Economy. While we have seen remarkable changes in developing a circular flow of material resources, a circular flow of people will not be easy to develop, while a circular economy with people who think exclusively in terms of linear professional and career paths is not going to work either. Therefore, it is important to expand the principles of circular economy and develop an awareness of how the same applies to each of us as human resource professionals within organisations regardless of the form of our engagement – employment, contract, freelancers etc.

Figure 1 provides a visual presentation of the seven principles of circularity applied to human resources, while each of the principles is described in the sections which follow. These principles are grouped into two categories: principles which ensure focus on the employees, their needs and requirements, and principles that focus on the company as an active provider of opportunities which link the employee with the larger labour market opportunities. These 7 principles constitute the new Circular HRM Model. Given changes and new trends in our working environment it is now the most important model for managing human resources of the near future, perhaps today.



7 CONCEPTS OF CIRCULAR HRM



Principle 1: ECO-CONCEPTION

At the heart of the Circular HRM model is the first principle of circularity of human resources, or Eco-conception. In the circular economy, it describes the need to solve challenges to sustainability by minimising the environmental impact of a product's life cycle during its design phase. In simple words, eco-conception is about minimising product footprint in the world through anticipating its impact on the environment at design phase. When the principle of “eco-conception” is applied to human resources its purpose is similar. It consists of deliberate design of workspaces and work practices that have a maximum positive impact on the employee throughout his/her experience within the company and beyond. Initial steps can involve minimising, where possible, potential negative impacts of the workplace and the work procedures and practices on employees at organisational and individual level. Open-plan offices and flexible working hours are examples of some of organisational practices that emerge from the introduction of the principle of “eco-conception” in the workspace.

An open-plan office is a workspace that takes advantage of open space, rather than closing off employees in cubicles or offices. In an open-plan office, the employees are likely to be situated at long rows of desks with little or nothing dividing them. Open offices also tend to have spaces where employees can congregate, or change their environments, such as lounges with couches, or open kitchen areas with plenty of seating. The main advantage of open-plan is the increased collaboration and unity among employees, as well as the added benefit of a more informal working environment for everyone involved. Another advantage to the open-plan office is the financial aspect, demonstrated by savings on office setup costs, that can later be invested into employee training, team-building activities, or even reward bonuses. **Office culture transparency** is also a major advantage to the open-plan offices. Employee interactions become a lot more transparent when the company moves into an open-concept office space. Everyone can hear everything in an open office, which means there’s a lot less space for secretiveness. It can also bring a sense of equity and unity when employees are situated next to managers. This can create more comfort and trust between employees and their managers, as everyone appears to be at the same level in an open office. Finally, the last advantage of open-plan offices is that there is a lot of flexibility with the use of the space. If things aren’t working, and productivity is falling, the concept and layout can be changed or a team moved to a new area of the office to encourage cross-collaboration with other groups they rarely interact with. The open-office plan is a blank slate, and employees can reimagine it whenever or however they want due to the freedom provided.

Flexible working hours refer to the schedule which allows employees to start and finish their workday when they want. Essentially, having flexible work hours means employees can begin their work earlier in the day, or later than the originally set time. There are many forms of flexible work hours. Some of them are included in Table 1.

Table 1. Forms of Flexible Work Arrangements

<p>Compressed workweek - Rather than a standard five-day workweek, this alternative schedule reduces the number of days an employee works per week. Employers allow this flexibility so long as the employee gets their work done.</p>	<p>Daily flexible schedule - With a daily flexible schedule, employees can start work early and end their shift early. They can also stay late and start late, or take extra time during their lunch break to make up time.</p>	<p>Remote work is a working style that allows professionals to work outside of a traditional office environment. It is based on the concept that work does not need to be done in a specific place to be executed successfully.</p>
<p>For example, employees can take Sunday, Monday and Tuesday off, or any other set of three days that best meets their needs or preferences.</p>		<p>Instead of commuting to an office each day to work from a designated desk, remote employees can execute their projects and surpass their goals wherever they please.</p>

Remote work has especially been on the rise during the COVID-19 pandemic which proved that many jobs don't have to be performed in-person. There are a variety of ways in which people can work remotely. That's the beauty of remote work - people can choose to work in a way that makes the most sense for their lives. For example, some people have the opportunity to work remotely for the majority of the working week, but have to commute to in-person meetings at the office one day a week. On a typical day, these remote employees work from their home offices or nearby cafés and can work from their company's office when it's necessary. Others rely on co-working spaces to be the spots where they can get the job done. Co-working spaces act as hubs of productivity, community, and technology, offering great network connectivity and opportunities to meet others who work in a multitude of industries. They can be utilized by people with full-time jobs, freelance careers and even entrepreneurs who want to rent out an office space for themselves or their small staff. Furthermore, remote work, or hybrid work, are exceptionally important from a sustainability point of view, as this is aligned with sustainable use of energy and reduction of CO2 emissions (associated with work mobility). Therefore, this work design not only supports the wellbeing of employees; it also supports green organisational practices.

There are numerous benefits for employees, who have the opportunity to work flexible work hours including: flexible lifestyle, better health and wellness, and renewed passion for their job. The most obvious reason why people want to have a flexible schedule is because it offers them a more flexible lifestyle. When they aren't required to be in an office during a set time frame, remote employees can focus on the things that matter to them outside of the office. If a remote worker is also a parent, he or she has the ability to start work earlier in the day so that he or she can be present when the children get home from school, or take time off during the day for a doctor's appointment. Another scenario could be a remote employee who wants to attain further education in their field. This becomes possible as they aren't subject to a strict schedule in a permanent workplace, a remote employee could pursue a Master's degree or continuing education course during the day and double down on their work in the evening, or vice versa.

By focussing on the deliberate design of workspaces and work practices that have a maximum positive impact on the employee throughout his/her experience within the company and beyond, the principle of "eco-conception" builds on developing shared values of circularity among the employees. Ideally, the "eco-conception" should provide a work environment that caters for the employee well-being, health, safety, and work-life balance, ensures diversity and inclusion, provides learning and

growth, and enables employee voices to be heard as stakeholders whose contribution is significant for the larger company's sustainability strategy.

Case Studies on Circular Human Resource Management

Module 2: ECO-CONCEPTION

- [L'Oréal Libramont \(Belgium\)](#) – Everyone, on this production site, from the engineer to the operator, can express themselves and feel that their word is taken into account, with the philosophy that it is by bringing together all ideas that one finds the best solutions. Therefore, on certain subjects, like for example waste reduction, a person was dedicated to collect ideas and to translate them into practical realisations. Another example: two young colleagues were given the task to pilot a project aiming to imagine a new concept of a company restaurant, with brainstorming and co-construction sessions with colleagues from the factory.
- [Prayon \(Belgium\)](#) – The group is working with the University of Liège (Laboratory of Studies on New Forms of Work) on New Ways of Working in the context of the upcoming construction of a new head office at the Liège site. The idea is to modify working practices, not only at the headquarters level, but also across all factories and commercial subsidiaries, by putting people at the heart of the company and by promoting quality of life at the workplace. Hundreds of projects are launched based on the collection of all requests from the field concerning changes in the work environment, on all sites. Two years earlier, Prayon had launched conferences on corporate values, and one of them focused on work life balance.

Module 2: RECYCLE

The first of the principles which focuses on employees is the principle of "Recycle". The same reflects the common organisational culture in the company. In the circular economy, the 3Rs of "reduce, reuse and recycle" are well known to the environmentally conscious people. The term "recycling" includes any recovery operation in which raw materials from waste are reprocessed into products, materials or substances for the purpose of their initial function, or for other purposes. It allows waste to be converted into new raw materials, called recycled raw material or secondary raw material, as opposed to virgin raw material. The Circular HRM model applies the principle of "recycling" to human resources in a similar manner. The principle describes a process of "developing" an understanding of the organisational and individual needs and responding to them by optimising the redistribution of employees within the same company. Once a project has been completed, or a particular job has ceased to exist due to technological advancements in the field, many workers opt to search for a new job, or to retire. Likewise, many companies choose to discard workers whose skills and knowledge are considered "outdated" and instead choose to explore the labor market for replacements. The alternative provided by the Circular HRM model focuses on requalification of the workers for redeployment, training to develop worker mobility within the company, and modelling the job to the image of the worker. This approach allows employees to develop new skills that will enable them to "develop" new roles within the company, providing new dynamics, new jobs, and more job satisfaction. On the other hand, improving and redistributing includes the reconversion of the skills of employees with the aim of using them again within the same company. The process can take several forms.

When the work is adapted and better aligned with the worker's needs and expectations, it is called **job crafting**, or modelling of the job to the image of the worker. By definition, job-crafting is an employee-initiated approach which enables workers to shape their own work environment such that it fits their individual needs by adjusting the prevailing job demands and resources. It is proactive behaviour that employees may use when they feel that changes in their job are necessary. Through

different job crafting techniques employees can redefine, reimagine, and get more meaning out of the work they do. Some examples are described in Table 2.

Table 2. Job Crafting Techniques

Task Crafting: Changing up responsibilities: Task crafting may be the most discussed aspect of the approach, perhaps because job crafting is commonly seen as active ‘shaping’ or ‘molding’ of one’s role. It can involve adding or dropping the responsibilities set out in an employee official job description.

Relationship Crafting: Changing up interactions: Through relationship crafting people reshape the type and nature of the interactions they have with others. In other words, relationship crafting can involve changing up who employees work with on different tasks, who they communicate and engage with on a regular basis. A marketing manager might brainstorm with the firm’s app designer to talk and learn about the user interface, unlocking creativity benefits while crafting relationships.

Cognitive Crafting: Changing up the mindset about the tasks **done**. By changing perspectives on what we’re doing, we can find or create more meaning about what might otherwise be seen as ‘busy work’. Changing hotel bedsheets in this sense might be less about cleaning and more about making travelers’ journeys more comfortable and memorable.

Contrary to job crafting where the focus is placed on modelling the job position to the employee skills and knowledge, when **redeployment** is applied, the focus is placed on restructuring of employee capacities and optimising internal mobility within the company. Internal mobility refers to the movement of employees across different roles within an organisation. It illustrates the potential of a circular economy to generate social benefits. It means that new or open positions are filled by employees who already work for the company and who are qualified for the new role. The benefits of redeployment for the employee include:

- Job security through new professional perspectives;
- Increasing employee’s learning ability and professional development contributing to long-term employability;
- New opportunities for career management. In times of mosaic careers, in which professional change includes not only vertical but also horizontal development, employees have the opportunity to set and achieve new professional goals within the company.

Redeployment on its own does not increase the internal mobility of employees if not followed or supported by **retraining / requalification opportunities**. However, to make an effective transition to circularity, it is important to understand and anticipate these skill requirements and develop them within the company. Job retraining covers developing knowledge in a new subject, for a new job, often in the same company or organisation. It is an opportunity for employees to learn the most in-demand skills and competencies within an industry, and prepare for easy career progression and employment opportunities.



Another practice that supports retraining is mentorship of a worker who is considering leaving the company (due to retirement, or completion of a project) to apply his skill-set in a different role within the company (e.g. proactive use of skill set prior to retirement, or re-orient skill set to a new project). It is a good example of Retraining as part of Circular HRM practices. It allows reshaping of the type of work to be done, who will do it, and how it will change the kinds of skills needed to thrive in the company. However, as highlighted in the previous sections, the nature of employment within the circular economy is diverse, and skills demand will similarly reflect this diversity. Employment opportunities within a circular economy have already been shown to span the entire diversity of the job market, from the low-skilled to the highly educated. As a result, retraining is necessary to achieve different goals:

- In 'normal' times: it can create opportunities for people to undertake other tasks in the company;
- In reorganisation: it will allow for fast growth of new competencies;
- In transformation and restructuring: it can create new career options / directions instead of reducing head count.

As part of this principle, the practice of job crafting, redeployment, and retraining and requalification enables sustainable and active development of the workforce, providing the worker with a new professional move when the old ceases to exist, making him/her feel more valued and giving him/her a new sense of purpose. In simple words, circularity. The principle reflects development of new skills in defining new roles within the company, providing new dynamics, new jobs, and more job satisfaction.

Principle 2: RECYCLE

- [Boston Scientific \(Ireland\)](#) – Leaders hold career conversations with their teams, based on a quarterly coaching mechanism and self-assessment opportunities with 360° feedback. Employees are offered opportunities to undertake job rotation in areas where skills are transferable. Collaboration is set up between the manager, HR Business Partners and employees to respond to reassignment needs, accompanied with training.
- [NFQ Technologies \(Lithuania\)](#) – Each employee has a “training basket” which consists in financial resources allocated to their learning. The implementation of skills upgrading/readaptation is done according to one’s career development plan. Learning is seen as a long term process and not as a specific event or an ad hoc programme. It consists of learning from colleagues, learning new stimulating tasks, function development, internal training, external training, the e-learning platforms, etc.

Principle 3: REPAIR

The principle of “repair”, or reintegration is the second of Circular HRM principles which focuses on the employee. Within the circular economy, the term "repair" implies a return to function of a product, allowing it to regain a second life without the user being separated from it (or after they have separated from it). It involves repairing a damaged resource to reuse it in its original version, or for a new task. Circular HRM model applies the principle of "repair" to human resources in a similar manner.



When it comes to people and employees, the principle covers solutions and practices for decreased productivity, inefficiency or idle resources once they have already been generated, carrying out reintegration projects in (extreme) situations that may occur in the workplace, problems of absenteeism, stress, the reintegration of a long absence without giving up the employment relationship, reconnecting with workers, or giving a second working life to those workers who need it. Therefore, the concept of “repair” when applied to employees covers:

- Positive management of absenteeism;
- Reintegration process after a long leave (illness, accident, maternity...);
- Prevention and management of stress and professional exhaustion (burn-out);
- Prevention and management of addictions in the workplace (alcohol, medication, drugs, energy drink, technology) in order to preserve the employment relationship.

Periods of leave for employees are one of the most common occurrences in the professional world. They can take place for a litany of reasons, including mental or physical health issues, pregnancy, burnout syndrome, and many others. Everyone has a role to play in reintegrating a worker after an absence from the workplace. There may have been issues prior to the absence that impacted the employee, the team and/or the leader. Often things are brought up during the absence by team members that a leader may not have been aware of. Many behaviours or dynamics that may have been at play that could affect the success of a returning employee for everyone. A leave of absence may be due primarily to a mental health condition, such as depression or anxiety, but could also include any other type of medical condition that has caused absence. Sometimes, anxiety, or stress, may be symptoms of workplace dynamics that may have contributed to the departure of the employee and to the apprehension of the team and/or leader regarding the return of an employee.

There are certain steps that an employee can take to ensure a smooth, effective and efficient reintegration.

- **Staying in contact** - After the employee has had to leave his workplace, it is essential that s/he stays in contact with the manager and the peers from the company. The contact reduces possible fears from the unknown when returning to the office.
- **Communication is a key factor** - it is crucial that the employee makes sure his communication with all peers and managers is transparent and structured in order to prevent misunderstandings and frustration.
- **Agreeing and following procedures plays a pivotal role** - Regardless of the existing procedures, employees should work with the employer and agree on steps for their integration as are appointments for personal planning of reintegration or possible adjustments to the workplace. The better the organisation of the reintegration, the more relaxed and, above all, the smoother the process will be.

After the preparation for the reintegration, the process begins and usually follows the following steps:

- The employee should be **equipped for everyday work** - The same means receiving information about changes and news so that they are on the same level as all other employees is of utmost importance. Clarifying in advance which tasks (still) come into under his job responsibilities etc.



- **Trial and error** - The reintegration should be evaluated at regular intervals so that both parties can make sure it is going to plan, and that there are no unforeseen barriers. To do this, intermediate goals should be set that can be redefined after each interview. The evaluation provides answers to possible questions about changing and adapting the integration.
- **Looking for flexibility** - To prevent the further absences for the same reasons again, it is important that the place, volume and period of work can be designed as flexible as possible. Here, it is important that the employee works with the employers, managers and HR department to differentiate between the reasons for the absence. Was the employee on maternity leave? The employer should be open to working hours that can be agreed with nurseries and other care providers. Has an employee left the company due to a burnout? The employer should consider the amount of work they have expected from the employee up to that point. Does the employee (still) suffer from physical limitations? Home office days may be an option.

In general, most of the organisations have some form of practices in this regard, mainly reflecting legal requirements from the Labour laws of the respective countries. This approach however is linear and reactive. Contrary to it, the circularity provides a continuous, dynamic and adaptable (or personalised) approach, in which the employee is an active participant in shaping his reintegration, not just a passive subject of the process.

Case Studies on Circular Human Resource Management

Module 3: REPAIR

- [RTBF \(Belgium\)](#) – In context of strong corporate transformation, has set up several support platforms, including one on support for workers returning from sickness and having been absent for six months or more. Another of these platforms concerns the support of employee dealing with stress and professional exhaustion.
- [NFQ Technologies \(Lithuania\)](#) – does not have a formal process of reintegration, but gives managers the responsibility of accompanying each worker returning from leave and supporting their return to work. They maintain contact with the worker during their leave and the latter is kept informed of developments in the company, for example through the company's quarterly magazine.

Principle 4: REUSE

The last of the principles which focuses on employees is the principle of “reuse”. Within the Circular economy, the term ‘reuse’ describes an action or practice of using an item, whether for its original purpose (conventional reuse), or to fulfil a different function (creative reuse or repurposing). This reuse principle can extend a product lifetime and can include repair and reuse of products to ensure products reach their optimum lifespan. In simple words, reuse of items can help to save time, money, energy and resources, while in broader economic terms, it can make quality products available to people and organisations with limited means while generating business activities and employment that contribute to the economy.

When the concept of ‘reuse’ is applied to human resources its purpose is similar. It describes the ability of both companies and employees to know how to reinvent themselves and improve their skills without losing productivity at organisational and individual level. The approach ensures a continuous



flow of information empowering the organisation to identify the best way to organise its employees while strengthening employee job satisfaction. It involves:

- Developing and involving employees in mentoring programmes as Mentees and Mentors;
- Providing coaching or training opportunities to employees for developing skills to perform another function
- Retention and/or training of employees about to retire, to develop their skills for sharing their expertise or skills within the company either as Mentors or Coaches;
- Introduction of an in-placement or employment placement programme or another type of promotion of internal mobility of employees

All of these methods come under the terms of “Reskilling” and “Upskilling”.

Reskilling means looking for people with ‘adjacent skills’, that are close to the new skills the company requires. It provides a lateral learning experience. It is the process of learning new skills by employees to move onto a new role within their current company. Reskilling might be a good alternative to firing current employees and hiring new ones with a different skill set. It’s also a good way to move a person who fits better for another role, but for some reason ended up working in a totally different one. Reskilling allows the company to keep the same loyal employees in the organisation, but there are more reasons than that alone that make it important.

Upskilling is a workplace trend that facilitates continuous learning by providing training programs and development opportunities that expand an employee's abilities and minimize skill gaps. Upskilling focuses on improving current employees' skill sets, usually through training, so they can advance in their jobs and find different roles and opportunities within the company.

There are many benefits of reskilling and upskilling of the employees, covering:

- **Keeping stable employment (and benefits).** Understandably, the largest benefit for employees is maintaining a stable job with a company that cares, and being able to manage the expenses of daily life. Company benefits are the second reason employees choose to stay with an organisation. Reskilling allows employees to maintain the same benefits of their jobs, without interruption because they’ve changed employers.
- **Having upward mobility (role diversity).** Knowing there’s a chance for a promotion within the company can be a significant motivator. Rather than being forced to accept the same mundane tasks and pay rate indefinitely, upward mobility within a company allows the employees to rise in the ranks. There are certainly more responsibilities expected within that role as a reasonable consequence of any promotion. The increased responsibility is followed by learning new skills - which is at the core of reskilling and upskilling. It’s important to realize that not all skill learning will result into a promotion, although that may be a benefit in the future. A promotion isn’t the main goal of reskilling- retaining a job within the company, reskilling also offer employees a better chance of staying with the company when there’s economic uncertainty.
- **Personal growth.** People try to conquer new skills, do DIY projects, and have hobbies because it brings personal satisfaction. That sense of accomplishment also extends to the workplace. Employees get a good feeling knowing that they’re improving themselves, regardless of whether reskilling involves learning a vastly different role, or one with only a few differences.



As employees gain new skills, they increase their value within the company, which in turn helps strengthen their job security, although it can also create opportunities to find jobs in another company should they choose to.

- **Establishing lifelong learning as a process.** Lifelong learning is a crucial habit in everyone's lives, whether they are at the workplace or not. Being a lifelong learner enhances a person's life in general, and it makes them more attractive to employers. When employers look to promote someone within the company, they take lifelong learning into consideration as a core trait because it shows initiative.

Case Studies on Circular Human Resource Management

Module 4: REUSE

- [Boston Scientific \(Ireland\)](#) – An Informal Mentoring Toolkit is freely accessible to all employees, providing an opportunity for employees to avail of a mentor if desired. An online coaching programme provides access to a selection of coaches around the world. Within the company there is a network of young professionals and, during an annual event, they are able to discuss their career pathway with experienced colleagues. Workers' approaching retirement are encouraged to pro-actively contribute to nurturing this network.
- [Nextsense \(North Macedonia\)](#) – A three-month programme must be followed by all new hires, and the relationship with the mentor can carry on thereafter. Mentoring is also aimed at transferring skills, particularly upon the retirement of a worker with specific skills or for the preparation of successions. For each skill, a "champion" of the skill is appointed, the one who masters it best in the company. Whenever a colleague needs to progress in the field, he knows he can turn to the champion.

Principle 5: INDUSTRIAL ECOLOGY

Within the Circular economy, the term "industrial ecology" describes the set of practices intended to optimise local resources, whether in terms of energies, water, materials, waste but also equipment, and expertise, through a systemic approach inspired by the functioning of natural ecosystems. When the concept of "industrial ecology" is applied to human resources its purpose is similar. It involves categorising the skill set of employees, for planning and implementation of employee-centred strategies to optimise these skills within a business ecosystem. In simple words it covers recognition, development, and management of talent, diversity management for ensuring all employees get a fair opportunity to contribute, develop, and grow, and proactive management of employee skills, knowledge and competences. The focus of this principle in Circular HRM is on the company. It covers the following organisational practices:

1. **Talent management** - In a linear economy, talent is approached as a rarity, sought and recruited at the external labour market, used and dismissed once its value is no longer required. The circular values sustained in the principle of Industrial Ecology define talent with a different vision – an employee-centred vision. Talent exists inside of the organisation as it can be found outside of it. It is a natural predisposition which needs to be developed and trained with a focus on cultivating, training and developing it for maximising its value and endurance.
2. **Diversity management** - Circularity approaches diversity management as an important set of core values going beyond the linear compliance with the legislation on non-discrimination. It involves the recognition, effective deployment and harmonisation of individual employee idiosyncrasies. Diversity management is crucial in order to maximise employee's knowledge

and expertise and create workplaces which maximise the positive impact on the employee as described in the first principle of eco-conception.

Workplace diversity consists of respecting and valuing the skills and differences that each staff member brings into the workspace. A diverse workplace is an inclusive environment that prioritizes equal rights and opportunities for all workers, regardless of gender, color, age, ethnicity, physical ability, sexual orientation or religious beliefs.

Diversity management requires a dedicated strategy to ensure the management team is continuously improving its diversity and inclusion efforts. It's one thing to hire diverse candidates, it's another thing to build a culture that is welcoming and inclusive to everyone. The best way for the management to engage the team of employees is to bring them together in-person and spend time doing activities that aren't necessarily work related.

Benefits of diversity management for employees include:

- **Increased productivity:** A diverse workplace allows for more ideas and processes. This diversity of talent means a broader range of skills among employees, as well as a diversity of experiences and perspectives which increases the potential for skills development and knowledge expansion among the employees.
- **Increased creativity:** As various cultures and backgrounds work together, the opportunity for increased creativity exists. Since there are more people with differing perspectives and solutions to problems, it allows for a greater chance of a workable solution to a workplace problem.
- **Improved cultural awareness:** A diverse range of cultures within the workplace allows companies to deal with the different nuances within a global marketplace, while at the same time providing an opportunity for the employees to grow on a personal and professional level.

However, it should be noted that it is possible that not everyone in the company will be on board with the idea of diversity in the workplace.

- **Skills management** – Management is important for successful circularity of a resource. Skills management is a process that involves promotion of opportunities based on expertise. It consists of creating a foundation of trust between the employee and the employer, allowing the joint establishment of long-term goals, and ensuring that the employee feels committed to the various projects of the company. With skills management, the employer creates profiles made up of an employee's full range of skills, knowledge, qualifications, and experience. Those profiles then determine whether someone is expert or qualified enough to perform a certain task or fulfil a given role. It also paints a clearer picture of employees' proficiency levels both individually and collectively.

Sound skills management helps the employees make the most of their talents and abilities. It not only showcases employee abilities, but also pinpoints particular areas for professional development. This constructive dialog enables the employee to have an active role in his/her growth while the training and learning opportunities enable more efficient career management.

Case Studies on Circular Human Resource Management

Module 5 – INDUSTRIAL ECOLOGY

- [Prayon \(Belgium\)](#) – One of Wallonia’s problems lies in under-qualification: many people on the job market lack qualifications. Rather than having an assessment after six months of a young recruit in the post only to find that it is ultimately not suitable, the Prayon group changed this selection to an earlier stage, and even before recruitment. With two companies in the temporary work sector, an analysis of the capacities of job seekers was carried out on some basic elements. They are then enrolled in a training programme prior to recruitment. The approach was applied at the Lyon site (France) with role-playing on a chemical operator position and training before recruitment.
- [Boston Scientific \(Ireland\)](#) – The company strives to detect the “hidden talents” of its employees as part of a Development Assignment Programme which offers the opportunity of an “Act Up”, namely taking a more senior position on a temporary basis, for example as part of a replacement for maternity or parental leave. Employees also have the opportunity to carry-out a self-assessment and a 360° on the ‘Boston Scientific’ skills, resulting in a report and access to a coach for debriefing and development.

Principle 6: FUNCTIONAL ECONOMY

Within the Circular economy, the term “functional economy” describes use over possession and tends to sell services linked to products rather than the products themselves. It is based on the idea that the value of a product lies in the benefits obtained from its use (value in use), not in its ownership. A classic example is the tire manufacturer who retains ownership of their products instead of selling them. They take care of their re-treading and maintenance; the user is billed per kilometre.

Circular HRM model applies the principle of “functional economy” to human resources in a similar manner. The concept involves the prioritisation of human centred optimisation over contractual obligation. The preeminent method for the application of this principle is “Design thinking”. Design Thinking is a non-linear iterative process of finding the most human-centric solution for any kind of query or problem. It works by evaluating and understanding the needs of the stakeholders and finally answering those needs. The concept is especially important for human resources because all the principles of Design Thinking (**Empathy, Definition, Ideation, Prototype & Testing**) in essence, are human-centric. Since HR primarily handles the recruitment, employment experience and the exit of employees and represents the company, understanding human needs and executing accordingly becomes crucial.

Human-centered design for employees can free talent from rigid structures and job functions. Sometimes, traditional titles become a list of rote tedious, with little room for expansive thinking. Employees focus on optimizing their own system for accomplishing these tasks. As they progress through their career, employees define and cherish the system they’ve built—it’s what they know and they can sometimes be resistant to change. But they are being valued the wrong way. By placing the person at the center, we can better view their value as the experiences they create and the perspectives they bring, rather than the tasks they complete. The best talent looks for such opportunities. Organisations which value this thinking find new ways to deliver on a more aspirational brand promise.

Case Studies on Circular Human Resource Management

Module 6 – FUNCTIONAL ECONOMY

- [Peikko Lietuva \(Lithuania\)](#) – When a project on which an employee is working on ends, the company has the following process: analyse whether they can integrate another project, offer



the person the learning opportunities and then take on another role, and engage in a dialogue to discuss with the person concerned other future prospects for collaboration.

Principle 7: SECOND HAND AND SHARING ECONOMY

The term “second hand and sharing economy”, with the circular economy, describes the re-use of products that no longer meet the needs of the initial consumer. Often the extension of the lifespan of such products occurs through gifting or the second-hand sale of products. When the concept of “second hand and sharing economy” is applied to human resources its interpretation is similar. The concept describes a process that supports the transition of a worker into the external job market where an employee no longer meets the requirements of their current contract obligations or when the needs of the company change.

It involves development of employee pathways to the external job market (outplacement, training or development of skills not directly of use to the employer, coaching...). In other instances, it includes the provision of support for the employment of senior workers and those working beyond the age of fifty. Finally, the termination of the employment contract ‘on good terms’ (exit interview, letter of recommendation, maintenance of the link for other business relationships...) is also worthy of consideration as it empowers the employee to seek other employment by strengthening his/her positive image for potential new employers.

Outplacement is any service that assists a departing employee with obtaining a new job or transitioning to a new career. Access to outplacement services is offered by some employers as an employee benefit for their staff. Such services can be beneficial for all parties monetarily, professionally, and emotionally, offering an amicable termination of a working relationship. The importance of outplacement can be regarded through several different lenses. “Outplacement” is a way for the employer to show that they care about the success of their employees even though they have gone through an involuntary termination, maintaining the company’s reputation amongst its employees, potential employees, and the general public.

On the other hand, outplacement provides a focus and assistance for employees who are to be laid-off or who simply want to transition into the labor market. There are numerous benefits from the outplacement concept for employees, some of which are:

- Laid-off employees are empowered by the outplacement services to move on faster to the next stage in their professional lives. They are provided with the tools to define their passions, their next steps are directed, and they become hired again typically sooner than if outplacement was not provided.
- Importance of the outplacement services for workers who had been out of the labor market for a long period of time. The services assist them with the adjustment to the changes in the playing field.
- Outplacement services make the job search effective and efficient. Changing companies or industries can be difficult and time consuming, so it is in the best interest of all involved parties for the process to be sped up as much as possible.
- No cost to employees. Whether their departure from the company is voluntary or involuntary, it still represents a loss of income, thus it is of great help that the company covers the costs of the outplacement services.

- **Structured job search.** The transition into the job market can be a long, tedious and daunting process, but it can be made easier with the help of a structure provided by the outplacement services.
- **Resume and profile coaching.** As a part of the services, outplacement coaches can help create documents that highlight the appropriate skills in a modern, professional format and speak directly to the opportunities.
- **Interview preparation.** Outplacement coaches help people prepare by going over answers to common and difficult questions and software can help them sound more focused and professional.
- **Career insight.** Should the employees want to shift focus, outplacement services are able to help them learn more about their talents and passions so they can confidently choose the right career path.
- **Networking advice.** It is a well-known fact that networking is a key component of getting a new job. Outplacement services offer guidance, embracing the most effective networking strategies.
- **Positive reinforcement.** A job search that lasts longer can make workers feel anxious and uncertain. Outplacement services provide an objective sounding board to help people express their concerns and then give them a boost of positive feedback so they can maintain their focus on the primary goal.

Employee sharing is a new form of employment that has been defined as ‘an employment form in which a group of employers hire workers jointly and are jointly responsible for them’. Benefits of the employee sharing concept include: involvement in the design of the employee sharing plan by all parties, the obligations for employers can be divided however they choose, the agreement the sharing plan is based on cuts through the bureaucracy.

There are two types of employee sharing:

- **Strategic employee sharing:** a network formed by a group of employers that hires one or several workers to be sent on individual work assignments with the participating companies. The structure is similar to temporary agency work, the difference being the workers rotate regularly among the participating employers and work exclusively for these employers, and the network itself does not aim to make a profit.
- **Ad hoc employee sharing:** where an employer that temporarily cannot provide work for its staff sends them to work at another company. The employment contract between the initial employer and the worker is maintained while the worker is incorporated into the work organisation of the receiving employer. Again, the structure is similar to temporary agency work, with the difference that the initial employer is not in the business of placing people in work, and the intention is that the placement is temporary and the worker will return to work with the first employer.

Ad hoc employee sharing is mainly driven by a wish to maintain an employment relationship with a workforce in spite of a temporary lack of workload. Strategic employee sharing was established out of an economic and social necessity to create a sustainable relationship between companies and workers, even if an individual employer could not provide sustainable work. While the intention initially was to give contractual security to involuntarily mobile

workers (such as seasonal workers), it has come to be considered as a model that can offer voluntary flexible work and also retain employees.

In order for strategic employee sharing to be successful, the legal framework in a country must allow for its establishment. Furthermore, there must be a regular demand for such employees in participating companies, the human resources demand and strategies of the participating companies must be compatible, and the participating companies should not be too far apart so as to enable commuting. If collective agreements are applicable, the core workers and the shared employees should have similar wages and working conditions in order to avoid social dumping.

In conclusion, the second-hand economy principle, as applied in the Circular HRM Model, can be very beneficial in helping employees transition into the labour market, while maintaining the employer's public reputation, and the good working relationship between the two.

Case Studies on Circular Human Resource Management

Module 7 – SECOND HAND AND SHARING ECONOMY

- [Peikko Lietuva \(Lithuania\)](#) – If an employee is brought to leave the organisation, the latter helps them to improve their CV and, eventually, makes recommendations. The company also sees this process as an opportunity of improvement, by asking the worker to share their thought on their situation, on what they consider positive or negative in the organisation.
- [Boston Scientific \(Ireland\)](#) – The off-boarding process – consisting of taking care of a worker until their last day of work and serenely organising their departure – is considered to be as qualitative an experience as the on-boarding – welcoming and integrating a new colleague. An exit interview is scheduled, as well as a moment of celebration with the team (outing or lunch), for example.



Employee Benefits of the Circularity in Managing Human Resources

Employees at every position in the company are an important organisational stakeholder. Introducing the seven principles of circularity in the management of human resources aims to transform the vision and mission of organisations by introducing holistic people-centred values in a way that companies can understand their value in relation to the society they serve. This circular approach in organisations, one which will be concerned with the human flow as the 'material flow', requires changes. Every specific change, especially organisational change should be related to clear and well communicated benefits for the ones involved in the process. Providing information and education, ensuring two-way communication, and listening to employee concerns is the most effective way for overcoming potential change resistance. While the introduction of the seven principles might push organisations and employees beyond the comfort zone of perceived simplicity of the linear model of management, the benefits from introducing circularity for the employees are substantial. They involve increased job satisfaction, stronger motivation at work, and improved work performance, new meaning for the job security and revival of the psychological contract, proactive career and professional management, and improved work-life balance.

Job Satisfaction, Motivation and Work performance

Job satisfaction is the pleasurable affective response which all of us experience when we match the preferences for job rewards with our values, and personal goals. It is still debatable whether job satisfaction affects motivation, or motivation affects job satisfaction; however, what is important is that it affects the work performance of employees. The first principle of eco-conception, which covers the inclusion of circularity in the design of the workplace and the work procedures and policies, is an important factor in this regard. While the same can remove potential job dissatisfaction, it is not a factor which increases employee job satisfaction. The most important factors which increase job satisfaction at the workplace are related to fair and objective performance management which involves the participation of employees, training and re-skilling opportunities, provision of opportunities for advancement and professional growth.

Job security and reliable psychological contract

A psychological contract is a contract which governs the unwritten expectations of the employee and the employer from the employment relationship. It is the base of all assumptions defining the linear model of management of human resources and it no longer works. The perceived insecurity related to the employment contract nowadays downplays the effort and motivation of employees, while organisations faced with rapid changes in the external context in which they operate, seem unable to provide a long-term commitment. The introduction of the circular principles for managing the human resources provides substantial benefits to employees in this regard. It revitalizes the promise of the psychological contract by assigning an active role to the employee in the process, by recognising that organisations are artificial forms which serve people, not forms to be served by the people, enabling the movement from company-centred to people-centred management approach. This is achieved through the introduction of an objective and transparent performance management system, tailor-made mentoring, coaching and training opportunities which enables reuse, recycle and restore of employees, their skills and knowledge in organisations.



Efficient professional and career development

Circularity strengthens the job satisfaction and revitalizes the psychological contract by providing employees with efficient professional and career development which is not always linear. Circularity in managing human resources is based on the principle of adequate use of resources and deployment of the same to tasks and activities where the flow can be managed most efficiently without dissipation of effort, loss of skills and knowledge – human waste. Thus, circularity does not provide a solution for advancement, promotion and growth in a hierarchical organisation, rather a promise of efficient work contribution through the life time of the individual in a team-based organisation reflecting family values. This is achieved through the principles of industrial ecology, reuse, recycle and repair, through active management of the employment relationship and undertaking an active role in the development of the employee career and professional mastery as an employee. It implies undertaking roles of Mentee or the Mentor, the Coach or the Coachee in the organisation, and going through these roles several times through the working life, but in smaller time loops, compared to only one long linear advancement system which no longer exists.

Work-life balance (work from home, digital and hybrid workplaces, and etc)

A significant benefit for the employee from the introduction of the circular model in managing human resources, comes from the inclusion of the new technology in the workplace and its use in creating a more efficient base for work-life balance. In particular, the design of the workplace no longer implies design of the actual workplace at the premises of the employer. It also covers digital and hybrid workplaces with work procedures that enable employees to work from their home and balance their work-life more efficiently. The same does not only provide specific personal benefits to employees, it also strengthens the circularity values in the organisations as it communicates working without abusing resources and polluting the environment, aka avoidance of driving or other modes of transportation which increase the CO2 emissions to work, or similar activities.



Conclusions

In conclusion, employees can greatly benefit from the implementation of the Circular HRM model and its principles. The principles in question are: eco-conception, recycle, repair, reuse, industrial ecology, functional economy, and second hand and sharing economy. The application of the seven principles, however, is pointless without the input and involvement from the employees at every step in the process. Organisational changes cannot be introduced in an effective and fruitful manner without employee awareness and participation.

The seven principles that comprise the Circular HRM Model are divided into two categories. A category of principles which establish focus on the employees, their needs and requirements, and a category of principles that focus on the company as an active provider of opportunities which link the employee with the larger labour market opportunities.

When properly applied all those principles lead to increased productivity, improved well-being, new skills, as well as new career opportunities.

Due to the fact that employees are a crucial stakeholder in every organization the goal of the seven principles is to transform the vision and mission of organisations by introducing holistic people-centred values. All the organisational changes instigated by the application of the Circular HRM model should be related to clear and well communicated benefits for the ones involved in the process. Providing information and education along with maintaining an open channel of communication is of paramount importance.

Those benefits include: job satisfaction, motivation and work performance, job security and reliable psychological contracts, along with efficient professional and career development and proper work-life balance.

Regardless of whether the Circular HRM model is regarded through flexible working hours, upskilling, reskilling, job crafting or one of the other numerous benefits it is abundantly clear that it is becoming the future of human resources, and the sooner all parties involved embrace the changes, the better it will be for everyone involved, including employers, employees, and society as a whole.



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