

FINAL CONFERENCE « CIRCULAR HRM »

Auditorium of Brussels Environment

[\(Programme\)](#)



 **CIRCULAR HRM**

SEMINAR
THINKING HUMAN RESOURCES IN A CIRCULAR WAY
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As part of the Erasmus + project, « [Circular HRM](#) » funded by the European Commission, **POUR LA SOLIDARITÉ** organised the final conference of the project on March 2, 2022 at the Auditorium of Brussels Environment, in the presence of the European partners of the project and an audience mainly from the world of human resource management (HRM) and interested in the central place of the human within human resource management.

The morning was divided into two parts. First of all, the speakers gave an overview of the current state of training in circular human resources management and the tools developed by the Erasmus+ Circular HRM project partnership. The morning was also an opportunity to listen to numerous testimonies on sustainable human resources management and to discuss the recommendations to be made to public authorities and to be presented soon as an advocacy document.

THINKING ABOUT HUMAN RESOURCES IN A CIRCULAR WAY, EMMANUEL MOSSAY, EXPERT IN CIRCULAR ECONOMY, LECTURER AT LOUVAIN SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT



When it comes to the circular economy, there are over a hundred definitions. In his presentation, Emmanuel Mossay used the definition of the French agency ADEME: "*the circular economy can be defined as an economic system of exchange and production which, at all stages of the product life cycle (goods and services), aims to increase the efficiency of resource use and decrease the impact on the environment*". Emmanuel Mossay then emphasized a twofold challenge that already exists:

1. First, the biocapacity limits are exceeded (emergence of new materials that disrupt all ecosystems)
2. Secondly, we have a crucial issue related to human resources

with people who are increasingly subject to overload (one person in six is in a burn-out situation)

Faced with this double observation, a paradigm shift is necessary. According to E. Mossay, we need to move away from the classical approach to a systemic approach. It is this approach that is applied in the Circular HRM project. An approach that is at the centre of the three P's, which often define the circular economy: People, Planet and Prosperity.

To come back to the systemic approach, it allows us to identify the interrelation and the different interactions between elements and people. It is an approach that is complementary to the analytical approach, which is too often favoured. This requires the identification and understanding of the links and interactions between the elements of the same system (or thematic fields) and between the themes. Through valorising these dynamics and this perspective, it also allows us to better address the complexity of our civilisation, as well as to increase our agility in the face of uncertainties.

The speaker finally presented three major frames of reference that require a systemic vision of flows, storage capacities and evolution:

1. **The rules of nature:** according to these rules developed by Janine Benyus, nature follows a series of rules. For example, nature only works with natural energy and only uses the energy it needs, etc. If we apply these rules to the economy, we can ensure a transition that respects nature and humans.

2. **Human sphere:** In companies we see that the focus is on the financial and material balance sheet and the process balance sheet. This is important, but these are not the only elements to take into account for the development of a company (what about impacts and externalities?). There are 7 levels of values, 5 of which are immaterial and 2 material: *common good, knowledge, communication, emotions, process, financial & material and earth*.

3. **Lansink's scale:** This scale of circularity represents a good reading grid. The higher you are on this scale, the more important is the impact on the three P's. Taking the example of the

furniture industry, there is still a lot of room for innovation. The 11 levels of this scale are: **1. Refuse 2. ReThink 3. Reduce 4. Re-Use 5. RePair 6. ReFurbish 7. ReManufacture 8. ReCycle 9. (co) Produce Energy 10. Incinerate 11. Landfill**

The redeployment of resources internally is the very symbol of resources within a company. Working at the local level of the company, managing resources, rethinking them differently. It is also about being able to capitalize on resources. Remanufacturing resources, i.e. reorienting the functions of certain people towards functions that are not original or reintegrating people into another position after an absence. What next? Transforming human resources to have an impact on the overall ecological transition.

To conclude, the major and global issue that we must start to think about is how to reinvent/resolve the current economic equation in which we have decided to evolve for several decades. We have delocalised production, employment, but also our externalities. We must therefore move from a situation where we have good purchasing power to one where we will have to relocate to our territories, to our cities. We have two possibilities here: either we make the political choice to go there or the choice is imposed on us, because we have exhausted material resources.

PRESENTATION OF THE SEVEN PRINCIPLES OF A «CIRCULAR HRM »

Presentation of the project by Salima Chitalia, POUR LA SOLIDARITÉ-PLS (Belgium)

This project brought together a consortium of 8 European partners from Belgium, Spain, Italy, Ireland, Lithuania and Northern Macedonia, around the Circular HRM project, implemented from September 2019 to March 2022. The project is currently in its final phase of implementation. It is situated in the precursor context of the Circular Economy Action Plan adopted by the European Commission in 2015 and whose 54 measures were successfully evaluated in 2019. A major observation that has been made, however, is the lack of consideration of the human dimension or capital in this circular economy. POUR LA SOLIDARITÉ has therefore considered this issue and has begun a reflection on the application of the principles of the circular economy to HRM through a first study ([link](#)). Indeed, it was also necessary for the circular economy to respond to the social problems generated by the linear economy (unemployment, skills mismatch, stress and depression in the workplace, work for aging populations, etc.). This new approach to HRM therefore laid the foundation for the Circular HRM project and a desire to support the transition of European SMEs from a traditional, linear HRM model to a circular HRM model that enhances the regeneration of skills and competencies in the workplace and promotes circular and sustainable businesses and organisational models.

In February 2021, a publication was produced ([link](#)) to introduce a circular HRM model, presenting a definition of the 7 principles of the circular economy that can be applied to HRM. The publication is supported by case studies from companies in the six partner countries, which sometimes applied, without realising it, circular practices within their company. On this basis, a training course in the form of 7 modules related to the 7 principles was developed as well as training guides. This training, which is aimed at HR managers and team leaders, is a certification course, based on the *European Qualification Framework (EQF)* and is available free of charge on an online platform in 6 languages.

The training was presented to trainers from a "Train the Trainer" perspective during a European webinar. The circular HRM model and the training path were also presented in the

framework of multiple dissemination events, mostly online, in all partner countries to raise awareness of the audiences working in HRM and which gathered around 235 people. Pilot trainings were also conducted in all six countries, training at least 140 HR professionals in the principles of circular HRM. This allowed for a test of the training, at the end of which, upon achieving a 60% score, the "students" are awarded a certificate of completion.

Although the work is still in progress with regard to advocacy, it is already possible to provide the following recommendations:

Recommendations to HR managers:

- Consider the application of the 7 principles in the broadest sense possible
- Identify areas of practice where the 7 principles are already being addressed.
- Implement a review of areas where existing practices can be adapted or adopted
- Pay attention to communication channels and use of language when implementing the circular HR principles with employees.

Recommendations to policy makers:

- Support the creation of conditions at the organisational level (upskilling, reskilling).
- Support the sustainable development of specific networks to promote the implementation of circular HRM principles.
- Policy makers need to explicitly align the principles of circular HRM with the outcomes of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

A Data-Driven Approach to Innovation in Human Resource Management, Dr. Paul Flynn, Researcher in Education, University of NUIG Galway (Ireland)

The project faced a difficulty of developing a circular HR model. To this end, the partnership was faced with a challenge: what could be the definition of circular HRM practices? In this context, the partners decided to use collective intelligence by adapting the "*Delphi*" method. The Delphi method is based on consensus, through an iterative process conducted with a group of experts from both the HRM and the academic world. The process involved 40 HR directors and HRM professors and benefited from in-depth interviews with 6 international experts (ISO, HEC Montreal, EM Normandie Business School...) and meetings with 16 HR directors & experts in circular economy.

This led to a sector-wide consensus on a model of circularity in HRM practices. Specifically, this model brought together seven concepts of the circular economy in a format suitable for dealing with HR in their specificity.

More precisely, a three-step process was followed. A first face-to-face consultation was carried out on the basis of an inspiration board and a conceptual sheet. It allowed us to gather the opinions of the stakeholders on the proposed concepts and their interpretation in the context of human resources. This first consultation was followed by two other phases conducted through online questionnaires.

This allowed us to refine the concepts and their definitions in the context of work with human resources. Indeed, when working with the human factor, it is not possible, for example, to directly transfer the key concept of the circular economy, namely "repair". This concept has gradually evolved to refer more to the concept of "reintegration". The latter was considered less cutting edge and much more appropriate in the human resources context.

Finally, in the last phase of consultation, participants were asked to re-evaluate the importance of each interpretation of the concepts in the human resources context. The circular HRM model was widely approved with a 70% favourable consensus.

It remains now to ensure the appropriation of this model and these concepts. In this context, Dr. Paul Flynn emphasized that this model is available so that it can be adapted and adopted according to the respective interpretations and cultures. Indeed, when working on human resources issues, there is a certain normal sensitivity and therefore a clear need for adaptability.

PRESENTATION OF THE E-LEARNING PLATFORM, ANDRIJANA BOGDANOVSKA, DIRECTOR, CENTER FOR KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT (NORTH MACEDONIA)

Andrijana Bogdanovska presented the moodle platform that has been developed in the framework of the project and that gathers the seven modules of the training ([available here](#)), with one module per principle of the circular economy. Each module is linked to a field situation that illustrates the application of the principle in concrete cases. The training developed is mainly aimed at human resources managers.

Each module follows the same structure and is built around a self-learning and self-assessment principle. The training is available directly on the moodle platform set up by the project, but the interactive format is also available in PDF format and can be downloaded via the platform. Each module also includes a manual that allows to go deeper into the subject. The entire training is available in the six languages of the project and is fully interactive.

ROUNDTABLE AND DEBATE : HAS COVID-19 ACCELERATED THE NEED FOR A CIRCULAR HRM ?



1. **Stephan Heymans**, General Manager, CSD Bruxelles
2. **Sylvie Vanderstrichelen**, HR Project Manager, IDEA INTERCOMMUNALE DE DÉVELOPPEMENT ÉCONOMIQUE ET D'AMÉNAGEMENT DU COEUR DU HAINAUT
3. **Benjamin Renaville**, Human Resources Director, Brussels Environment

Debate moderated by Andrijana Bogdanovska, Director of the Center for Knowledge Management (CKM)

1) Would you say that your organisation was/is already implementing some of the Circular HR approaches identified with the Circular HRM model? What do you see as the added value of this integrated model of circular HRM at a time when sustainability issues are climbing on the agenda?

Sylvie Vanderstrichelen explains that the health crisis accelerated structural changes in terms of HR that had already been initiated within IDEA (an inter-municipality structure for economic development and planning of the Hainaut Province in Belgium). The organisation had embarked on internal reforms through a strategic management transition plan, to which the workers contributed to. Thematic "socio-critical meetings" were set up, in which everyone could participate and debate as equals, whether the person was a worker, an employee, a department manager or a director. Topics such as the right to disconnect, flexible working hours, internal conviviality, etc. were discussed. The system was so successful that the employees spontaneously began to propose the creation of other thematic working groups, such as groups devoted to health (under the slogan "A healthy mind in a healthy body") or to thinking about ways of contributing to the UN's Sustainable Development Goals.

Benjamin Renaville explains that his organisation was already experimenting with telecommuting when the health crisis emerged. Indeed, by 2019 they had started a global reflection aimed at improving the performance and well-being of workers. Among the six strategic axes was that of flexibility, and workers were experimenting with the possibility of teleworking one day a week a few months before the first lockdown.

Stephan Heymans says that the HR department of CSD Brussels (Home care and services) had just been created four years ago, which is ironic when you consider that their core business is human resources, since it consists of sending caregivers to people lacking autonomy. This new department is relevant since their workers, mostly women between the ages of 40 and 50, are beginning to experience health concerns and feel worn out after careers of twenty years or so in what is considered a strenuous profession. As the CSD is a relatively young organization (born in 1989), these questions had not yet been dealt with. He emphasises that the added value of Circular HRM could be in the opportunity that the project offers to think of human resources as sustainable resources, and therefore to think about the issues of internal mobility, hardship, and the transfer of workers between different departments. It is also interesting to think about "breaking down silos", and to value differently the skills of people who are physically exhausted.

2) We all witnessed how the pandemic changed the workplace. It seems that many companies and organisations saw benefits from the work in hybrid and virtual environments, and we are still not seeing a return to the pre-pandemic normal. In your opinion, how the acceleration of a new world of work (eco-conception) could be inspired by the Circular HRM approach?

All panellists agree that the post-pandemic world of work is undergoing profound changes and that one of the major adaptations companies will have to make is to take into account the well-being of workers. Each of the speakers presented different strategies:

Benjamin Renaville believes that the labour market will dictate to companies, which will be forced to adapt their management methods if they want to recruit and retain young talent. More and more, it is no longer the employer who chooses the employee, but the other way around.

Sylvie Vanderstrichelen, for her part, insists on the fact that the pandemic has forced managers to learn to trust their employees, since they could no longer monitor their productivity in person. She believes that encouraging employee empowerment and improving their sense of belonging to the company through internal branding strategies is important.

Stephan Heymans mentions the idea, which he sees as promising, of working on internal "repair mechanisms". Many personal care workers felt abandoned by their superiors during the pandemic. While they were on the front line and had to deal with increasingly heavy situations, they received less and less support from the rest of the team who were forced to telework to minimize health risks. This situation leads to internal tensions that need to be resolved by working on increasing convivial moments within the team.

3) Given the way organizations adapted to the digital and hybrid work, it seems that employees rapidly developed the required digital skills for the same. How has this crisis changed the challenge of skills development and employability for both employers and workers? Do you see any new trends in this area?

The speakers' responses were mixed. For **Stephan Heymans**, it is undeniable that workers have learned to use tools that they were not used to using before, but for **Benjamin Renaville** it is exaggerated to talk about a "leap" in digital skills. Successive lockdowns have certainly pushed some reluctant people to start using digital tools, but that doesn't mean they have improved their technical skills. Even after two years of Covid, tools such as Teams can remain complicated to use. So he feels it's important to continue working on agility and empowering workers about these tools.

In addition to pure technical skills, panellists also stressed the importance of developing the soft skills required by the new work context created by the pandemic. CSD workers, for example, have had to deal with an increase in depressive disorders or suicidal tendencies among their public. At the management level, managers had to work on their ability to trust and let go of their employees, whom they could no longer supervise directly.

4) COVID 19 pandemic also showed that it could be difficult to recruit, or rely on fast and easy recruitment, in the post-pandemic world. Can the application of the Circular HRM model ensure employees are capable and versatile enough to ensure fast transfer to new positions in the organizations as required? Does the pandemic further encourage employers to no longer view workers as resources to be acquired, consumed and discarded, but rather as assets to be invested in and redeployed when business needs change?

Rather than recruitment difficulties, the speakers explained the difficulties that some organisations may have in retaining their workers and keeping them from leaving the company.

Several measures have been put in place in this regard: burnout prevention strategies through the creation of discussion and psychological support groups (CSD), reorganisation of working hours by proposing a 4/5 that would be paid the equivalent of a full-time job (IDEA), reflections around the possibility of allowing workers to create their own job according to their skills and interests (job crafting, IDEA), Encouraging training in order to be able to access other positions within the same structure (CSD), or paying particular attention to the integration of new workers into the teams, since distance work could undermine internal cohesion, adherence and loyalty to the company (Bruxelles Environnement).

5) Would you suggest any recommendations to HR managers, on one hand, and to policy makers, at national or at European level, on the other hand, to encourage the deployment of Circular HR Management?

Sylvie Vanderstrichelen indicates that they have realised that it is effective to put the employee back at the centre of management, to make him/her more active in the definition of his/her work and in his/her possibilities to make decisions related to the functioning of the company. This movement can take the form of an anonymous suggestion box or the opportunity to create thematic, democratic and participative working groups within companies.

Benjamin Renaville insists on the financial arguments: how much would it cost to introduce circular management methods? And, above all, how much would it cost not to do so? What is the cost of not doing it, and what would be the return on investment?

Stephan Heymans, finally, advocates putting forward the concrete situations experienced by the workers. People working in the home care sector, for example, are getting older, and this is something that has not been taken into account until now. The questions of re-employment or re-use of workers' skills in other jobs therefore deserves to be asked so as not to exhaust the human resources of this sector. This consideration of the well-being of these workers should go hand in hand with a valuation (financial, in particular) of the hospital sector as a whole, which has been badly damaged during the health crisis.

Questions from the audience

1. How can we avoid having to discuss these circular HR principles individually, in each company or association, and instead have a national discussion at the federal level?

These questions will be addressed in the white paper to be published next month by the Circular HRM project partners.

2. We see phenomena like the "great shift" in the United States, with a wave of people who have decided to change companies, sometimes for ideological considerations such as ecology. In your opinion, is this a passing fad or a major trend?

Benjamin Renaville reminds us that this kind of change does not concern 100% of the population and 100% of jobs, but that it mainly concerns a university audience. It does not concern gardeners, for example, but rather people who used to work in business and who accepted to be paid a thousand euros less and not to have a company car in order to work in the public sector.

Stephan Heymans explains that in the hospital sector there is indeed a flight of workers, due to fatigue, loss of meaning and lack of recognition, since they were hardly considered during the two years of the pandemic. Another aspect to consider regarding the difficulty of recruiting home care nurses is the fact that they offer them a salaried contract, while a nurse working as a freelancer could earn much more money.

3. A person from IRFAM¹ who does not have a question, but rather a suggestion:

Their organisation works in Wallonia on the integration into employment of people of foreign origin. There is a 70% access rate to employment for the general population in Wallonia, while it is only 50% for people from non-European countries. The speaker called this a "waste". It is a systemic discrimination phenomenon, including within companies, with the well-known effect of the "glass ceiling" that makes access to higher positions inaccessible to minorities (primarily women, foreigners, etc.).

They recommend encouraging the emergence of small pilot projects that would allow for a global and complete integration of people of foreign origin: putting people to work while giving them French lessons at the same time, for example via company tutoring. This internal tutoring would be a way to value the auxiliary skills of the people, including professional ones.



Summary points

Andrijana Bogdanovska then delivered summary points and concluding words.

In general panellists agree that actions developed spontaneously in companies and organisations in the past 2 years and caused by the COVID 19 could be linked with the practices of the CHRM model.

Main change in HR practices during the pandemic period involved new approach to work by redefining flexibility, among the blue-collar workers and introducing teleworking, among the white-collar workers. Among the essential workers, who could not work from home as for example the employees in the health care sector, the focus on HR practices was placed on improving flexibility and working on the wellbeing of the employees. These two practices strengthened the loyalty and organisational commitment among the employees.

Another HR practice, part of the Circular HRM, which is important to acknowledge is the requirement and retention of talented workers and the focus on the improvement of the digital skills as a factor for improving digital competitiveness of companies by fighting absenteeism;

COVID 19 pandemic also changed how organisations deliver services by introducing the digital components, and it also forced companies to invest in developing the digital skills of their employees. Apart digital skills it is also very important to develop the soft social skills of

¹ Institut de Recherche, Formation et Action sur les Migrations/Institute of Research, Training and Action on Migrations

employees and to address this element of their development too given the strong impact of the digital work on the social life of people;

Organisations also approached the retraining and requalification of employees where there was an opportunity to do so. Trust and loyalty towards the employer were essential in this

regard, especially in the sectors where this requalification takes time as in the health sector. Another approach towards this was to investments in retraining and mentorship, mainly systematic transfer of employees;

Recommendations

- HR managers need to ensure spontaneous introduction of the Circular HR model in organisations approaching it through common organisational forms as are the idea boards, working groups, intersectoral groups and etc, which will enable the best idea for the organisation in this area (Circular HRM) to be easily identified and implemented;
- HR Managers need to quantify the impact of these practices on the organisations in order to ensure top management support;
- Policy makers need to support the introduction of these practices in enterprises especially the SMEs, but also undertake a sectoral approach and support the sectors which face significant labour shortages as is the health sector.