

VALUES IN A CIRCULAR ECONOMY

WHAT DOES THE NOTION OF A 'CIRCULAR ECONOMY' MEAN TO YOU? AND WHY?

CONTEXT FOR THE ACTIVITY

The emergence of the circular economy and the opportunities it presents have captured the interest of business leaders motivated by profit and business resilience, closely followed by policy makers, academics and educational leaders. The circular economy appears to offer a positive systemic model or framework for addressing some of the serious global and local economic and wider societal challenges confronting us in the 21st century - in ways that make sense. But, in reality, everybody understands and deals with a circular economy in a different way. The roots of these differences often lie in our personal values. In turn, personal values are influenced by 'worldview,' how we think the world works, how society is idealised and how we see our place in it. This, according to George Lakoff (2004), gives our basic framing or framework for thinking. In addition, since almost all abstract thought is metaphorical, a 'worldview' reveals many of the roots of thought and action. This activity helps to clarify differing personal interpretations of a circular economy.

RESOURCES AVAILABLE

- 7:R1a Intro PPT slide
- 7:R1 Ten discussion cards
- 7:R2 One interpretation of a circular economy

ORGANISATION

- Plenary for introduction and briefing
- Small groups (6-8) around card prompts
- Plenary debrief

TASK(S) AND RUNNING ORDER

1) Plenary briefing by the facilitator and split up in groups of ideally 6-8 participants

2) Discussion using the cards. Take about 15 minutes per card. Pick a new card when the discussion could

benefit from new input again. In the wrap up, ask the groups to write down three main 'takeaways' from their discussion and bring these statements to plenary

3) In a plenary debrief, cluster and elaborate on the group feedback

TIMINGS

Overall approximately 60 minutes. Task 1: 5 mins; Task 2: 40 mins; Task 3: 15 mins.

AIM OF THE ACTIVITY

To use a series of discussion cards to explore the values and worldviews that underpin different people's perceptions/interpretations of a circular economy.



Pre-set up all the tables and divide the card sets over the tables, preferably one card set per 6-8 participants. Prepare small stacks of large post-its and pens for the debrief session. Use the Context section above to brief the participants and split up in groups of ideally 6-8 participants to discuss the card sets.



When the participants are comfortable and settled in, the facilitator should explain that multiple cards will be discussed during the workshop. To set an example, take out one card, read it out loud and start answering it. It is important to indicate that there is no right or wrong answer, the card is a prompt for a discussion. After the facilitator sets the scene with the first card, the participants can react to this and the discussion in small groups can start.

Groups should take about 15 minutes for the discussions around each card, but keep a sense about how the discussion is progressing. Pick a new card when the discussion starts to flag. Return the existing card to the pack. Make sure that the participants appreciate that while there is no right or wrong answer it is important to stay within the scope of the discussion cards since comparing and contrasting is part of the plenary debrief. The discussion should flow in the direction the participants feel comfortable with and remember that not all discussion cards have to be discussed - it is all about the quality of the discussion. In the dialogue and facilitation work with the participants try to identify tension fields/topics or disagreement in the discussion.

Indicate to groups at the start of this task that they need to write down three main 'takeaways' from their discussion and bring these statements to plenary.

Note that in this activity it is not about the facilitator (or participants) having in-depth knowledge around the issues and topics identified on the cards. It is more about values clarification amongst the participants using the card issues as prompts for this process. However, the short briefing notes below might be useful for clarification and discussion amongst the groups and in the plenary debrief work:

'A CIRCULAR ECONOMY AS PART OF A WORLDVIEW' CARD

This card was authored to prompt the groups to focus on the idea of 'shifting worldviews'The Enlightenment brought a scientific worldview, one which emphasised rationality. It modelled the world as a mechanism, with the laws of Nature echoed in the economic and social world. It led to the specialisation and reductive approaches which still shape our attitudes and expectations and often keeps apart the disciplines. It also reinforces a mechanistic view of the economy driven by the circular flow of income but using a linear approach to resources and waste, and where efficiency (productivity) is the key to wealth. Feedback outside the monetary flow is, by definition, an externality.

More recently, science has moved on and the model of the 'machine world' has been superceded by a different worldview in which there is feedback everywhere and relationships are primarily non-linear. This means that they are not proportionate - small changes can have big effects and big changes small effects as the system iterates. The world is therefore much more dynamic and interconnected than we ever imagined and this more sophisticated systems view demands a different approach to knowledge and to the aims of any intervention: efficiency is traded off for more resilience (less risk) and optimisation is within the system as a whole rather than one component. There are no externalities because it is not possible to answer the question "external to what?" (all flows matter and are therefore accounted for). Energy of course dissipates during this process. The metaphors associated with these complex adaptive systems are typically inspired by living systems: gardens; forests; murmurations (flocks of starlings); the human body; or, more prosaically, weather and ocean systems.



Murmuration

IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK.

'ACCESS OVER OWNERSHIP' CARD

Use this card to try to get groups to reflect on what might be needed to allow people to be comfortable and secure around giving up 'ownership' for 'access' in various forms. What would it take to make the consumer become a user, and especially consider the notion of 'user protection'? Rights as a property owner – e.g. owning a house - are much better than the rights accorded to people renting/paying for access on demand. What will the enabling conditions look like for an economy, a society where 'usership' is much more predominant?

'PLANNED OBSOLESCENCE' CARD

Note that planned obsolescence means that a product is designed with a limited useful lifespan. The idea of planned obsolescence could be nicely explained through the example of the history of lightbulbs - see References and Further Reading section for the video entitled *The lightbulb conspiracy: the untold story of planned obsolescence.*



Focus the debriefing on being able to share and expand the discussion via the three 'take away' statements provided by each group. Use the statements to ask further questions which elucidate and expand. Why was that important? Can you say more? Does this look like a pattern is building up? Is this about the same as ...? This statement is unique, we need to find out more... (or addressing plenary) What is the grouping here? Why similarities/differences? What difference does it make to action or being practical? What is this perhaps telling us about ourselves? Use R2 as a stimulus if the time is right.

POSSIBLE EXTENSION ACTIVITY

Extend the discussion from personal to organisational interpretations of the circular economy. Invite participants to research/comment on different organisational perspectives e.g. Ellen MacArthur Foundation, European Union and business organisation such as Unilever, Danone, Philips

and Renault.

SUPPLEMENTARY RESOURCES

R2 could be a useful resource as a handout during the task 3 debrief or at the end of the activity.
R2 provides just one interpretation of a circular economy. Ask participants to suggest what might be the predominant worldview/values underlying this particular interpretation of a circular economy.

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Clancy, F. (2017) One of our favourite words: Usership. Riversimple website. Article available at: http://www.riversimple.com/category/ sustainability/

The Riversimple perspective on 'Usership'

Ellen MacArthur Foundation and IDEO (2016) *The circular design guide.* Available at: https://www.circulardesignguide.com

Lakoff, G. (2004) *Don't Think of an Elephant: Know Your Values and Frame the Debate.*Chelsea Green

Ellen MacArthur Foundation (2017) How to Think Like a 21st Century Economist. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch? v=dR1Wy7ZAgY0 Interview with Kate Raworth, author of Doughnut

Interview with Kate Raworth, author of Doughnut Economics.

The lightbulb conspiracy: the untold story of planned obsolescence. 3 minute video.

Available at: http://www.videoproject.com/Light-Bulb-Conspiracy-The.html

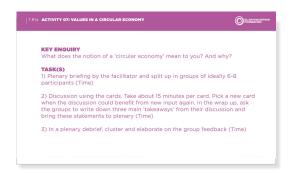
Webster, K. (2017) *The Circular Economy - a wealth of flows.* 2nd edition. Ellen MacArthur Foundation

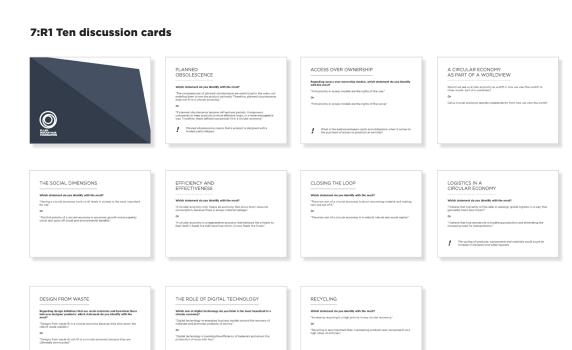
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Economics

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7:R1a Intro PPT slide





7:R2 One interpretation of a circular economy

