

## Creativity and innovation management to pursue circular economy

### *Special Issue Guest Editors*

Dr Benito Mignacca<sup>a</sup>, Dr Marco Greco<sup>a</sup>, Dr Serena Strazzullo<sup>b</sup>, Dr Anne Velenturf<sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Department of Civil and Mechanical Engineering, University of Cassino and Southern Lazio, Via G. Di Biasio 43, 03043 Cassino, Italy.

<sup>b</sup> Department of Industrial Engineering, University of Naples Federico II, P.le Tecchio 80, 80125 Naples, Italy.

<sup>c</sup> School of Civil Engineering, University of Leeds, Woodhouse Lane, LS29DY, Leeds, United Kingdom.

### **Purpose**

This special issue calls for papers investigating how instruments, processes, and structures in the area of creativity and innovation management can support the transition from a linear economy to a circular economy, with a particular focus on the role of inter-organisational collaboration.

In the last decades, economic growth has been pushed and sustained by technological innovations. However, these technological innovations often neglected the constraints imposed by our planet (i.e., its finite resources) and the impact of human activities on the environment (e.g., emission of greenhouse gasses). According to the IEA (2021), CO<sub>2</sub> emissions reached the highest ever average annual concentration in the atmosphere in 2020 (i.e. 421.5 parts per million), 50% higher than at the beginning of the industrial revolution. Currently, the technological and organisational trends are heading towards novel approaches that consider the constraints imposed by our planet and reduce the impact of human activities on the environment. A much-discussed one is “circular economy”. The circular economy approach aims to reduce resource use, prevent waste and optimise the environmental, social and economic value of products, components and materials through initiatives such as reuse, repair, refurbishment and, ultimately, recycling (Centobelli et al., 2021; Mignacca et al., 2020; Mignacca & Locatelli, 2021; Velenturf et al., 2019; Velenturf & Purnell, 2021).

Surprisingly, progress in implementing circular economy initiatives has been slow so far, with the global economy becoming less rather than more “circular” (Circle Economy, 2021). The transition from a linear economy to a circular economy requires substantial innovation efforts. Multiple strategic initiatives could be implemented to make these innovation efforts more effective. Inter-organisational collaboration (e.g., open innovation initiatives) proved to be very effective in enhancing innovation performance (Aalbers & Whelan, 2021; Ollila & Yström, 2016). Recent studies investigated the link between the implementation of circular economy initiatives and inter-organisational collaborations. Eisenreicht et al. (2021) stressed how a closed innovation approach often hinders the development of circular economy solutions, whilst an open innovation network approach (including collaborations with stakeholder groups, customers, suppliers, and academia) can favour the development of “circular solutions”. Cricelli et al. (2021) analysed the effect of inter-organisational collaboration on reverse logistics, which is a relevant component of a

circular economy (Bernon et al., 2018). Cricelli et al. discussed a positive impact of horizontal and vertical collaboration, along with collaboration with research institutions, on the likelihood of introducing reverse logistics innovation. In contrast, collaboration breadth can have a negative impact. Similarly, increasing the diversity of actors can harm innovation performance, although this could be mitigated through leadership and the facilitation of innovation processes (Korhonen et al., 2004; Walter & Scholz, 2006). Furthermore, Bocken and Ritala (2021) introduced the concept of open innovation strategy in the context of circular business models, i.e. *“connecting with external partners or customer and user communities to boost the circularity of the business model”* (Page 5). The authors stressed how such open innovation strategy could provide a rapid scale-up of the reuse initiatives, along with new solutions to excess resources in other organisations.

However, the evidence about the relationship between inter-organisational collaboration and circular economy initiatives is still scarce. There is a need for research focusing on how inter-organisational collaboration can influence the implementation of circular economy initiatives and how circular economy initiatives can favour or hinder inter-organisational collaboration. Understanding the dynamics underlying the link between circular economy and inter-organisation collaboration is crucial. On the one hand, inter-organisational collaboration could be a cornerstone for implementing circular economy initiatives, potentially speeding up circular economy implementation. On the other hand, circular economy initiatives could trigger inter-organisational collaboration and open innovation projects, ultimately representing an opportunity to harness the related advantages, such as faster time-to-market, reduced development risks, and organisational learning (Bagherzadeh et al., 2021; Bengtsson et al., 2015; Chesbrough, 2003; Greco et al., 2019; Rass et al., 2013; Vanhaverbeke et al., 2008).

Moreover, the positive effect of inter-organisational collaboration on circular economy could be moderated by the creation of an open environment to favour creativity (Gallagher et al., 2018), and by further harnessing the potential contribution of non-governmental organisations and universities in the innovation system (Wolf et al., 2021).

Remarkably, despite the growing interest in both circular economy initiatives and inter-organisational collaboration, the research on their relationship is still in its early stages. As also pointed out by the recent review by Jesus and Jugend (2021), there is a lack of both empirical and theoretical research. More generally, there is a lack of research about how instruments, processes, and structures in the area of creativity and innovation management can favour the implementation of circular economy initiatives.

Therefore, this call invites manuscripts investigating how instruments, processes, and structures in the area of creativity and innovation management can support the transition from a linear economy to a circular economy, with a particular focus on the role of inter-organisational collaboration. The scope of this call is left open intentionally to promote comprehensive and diversified research tackling such an exciting stream of research.

Both qualitative and quantitative studies are strongly encouraged for this Special Issue, whereas literature reviews are not recommended. Conceptual frameworks are welcome but should be validated by the involvement of experts or leveraging case studies.

## Research focus

Research questions of particular attention are:

- Which are the most relevant creativity and innovation management practices supporting circular economy initiatives?
- To what extent does a different context (e.g., size, industry, policy) influence the role of such practices in supporting circular economy initiatives?
- Which factors influence the relationship between creativity and innovation management practices and circular economy initiatives?
- How can inter-organisational collaboration facilitate circular economy initiatives?
- How do circular economy initiatives change according to the innovation approach (open vs closed)?
- Under which circumstances might open innovation stem from circular economy initiatives?
- Which are the advantages and disadvantages of adopting an open innovation approach while implementing circular economy initiatives?
- How can the benefits of diverse stakeholders be harnessed through the management of innovation processes?
- How does the role of inter-organisational collaborations change between circular economy initiatives in mass-produced goods and complex products and systems?
- Do circular economy initiatives triggered by open innovation perform better than other circular economy initiatives, such as those that are entirely developed internally?
- How do innovation ecosystems intertwine with circular economy initiatives?
- Which are the micro-foundations triggering collaboratively developed circular economy initiatives?

This call for papers remains open to any other related research questions as long as they shed light on the relationship between circular economy initiatives and inter-organisational collaborations.

## Submission Deadline & Review process

Full paper submission will be open from **30/1/2023** to **30/9/2023**.

The submission must be made on CIM website. All submissions will undergo the regular double-blind peer-review process at CIM, which will be handled by the guest editors. Please refer to the author guidelines provided at: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/page/journal/14678691/homepage/forauthors.html>

If you have any questions, please feel free contact one of the guest editors.

Benito Mignacca - [benito.mignacca@unicas.it](mailto:benito.mignacca@unicas.it)

Marco Greco - [marco.greco@unicas.it](mailto:marco.greco@unicas.it)

Serena Strazzullo - [serena.strazzullo@unina.it](mailto:serena.strazzullo@unina.it)

Anne Velenturf - [a.velenturf@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:a.velenturf@leeds.ac.uk)

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