

# Circular Economy: a Viable Model for Associations?

With non-profit associations focused on advancing different fields, the idea of a circular economy sounds abstract, at the very least, however, if the “process starts at the very beginning of a product’s lifecycle: smart product design and production processes can help save resources, avoid inefficient waste management and create new business opportunities.” Can associations use the concept, and how, as their primary resources and outputs are, in fact, not physical products?

An often-cited challenge with circular economy comes from the fact that it is overwhelming for companies, who have to completely redesign their processes, to only achieve at best 70% success rate, as on average 30% of products used in the cycle would be retired at some point, due to their limited amount of recycling options or because they lose quality and quantity of the given substance. This, in turn, fuels the other challenge with the concept – that of desirability. There are limited economic incentives, a lack of standardisation and guidelines, and most of all – a weakness in how to include the social dimension.

The outputs of associations come in the form of the development of new guidelines, knowledge, and ideas, or other educational materials and formats striving to alleviate society of global issues. To arrive at this end product, non-profit organisations use as resources the work of passionate (mostly) volunteers, as well as the support of commercial companies that have a vested interest in the topic.

If we are to apply the circular economy concept to associations, the resources that would need to be optimised would be the contents produced. This is now a tactic often

employed, known as content recycling – re-using one piece of content in various shapes and forms, with the aim to satisfy different learning styles, or to attract new potential members. While content recycling is truly a smart concept in today's fast-paced world, the issue with it is newness. If we look at the challenges of circular economy, associations will face the same 70/30 issue, where they are to lose 30% of the content in this recycling process. There will be the issue of desirability coming from learners, supporting organisations and the content producers, who are committed to novelties, sharing new information and not reusing old information for too long. Thus, even if we apply the process to associations whose outcomes are not physical products, the challenges remain.

While the concept is well-meaning, its usual issues prevent it from being a practical model for associations. While content recycling is already in circulation, content upcycling may provide another opportunity to give associations, by allowing them to ethically build on old knowledge. The circular economy as a broader concept may prove valuable if the social dimension problem is cracked and then applied to non-profit organisations, as they are human-centred and revolve around humanity's better living experience.

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