

Circular Economy Knowledge Swap

Post-event summary



The **Circular Economy Knowledge Swap** was held on March 29 at Coca-Cola Hellenic in Lisburn.

Twenty five delegates from a wide range of industries gathered to find out how their organisations can use the framework of the circular economy to create opportunities for adding value, and to consider the changes in business mind-set which are needed to realise these opportunities.



While the circular economy is often talked about in terms of waste management and supply chains, the presentation by Mat Roberts, Director of Sustainability Strategy at Interserve Plc, focussed on how exponentially increasing datasets from technologies such as the Internet of Things can be used to optimise ‘the bit in the middle’ – the life-phase of products.

Exponential growth is a concept that humans are not naturally able to comprehend, and Mat demonstrated this with a brain teaser:

If a car travelling at 5 miles per hour doubles in speed every minute, how fast will it be travelling after 28 minutes? The answer is 671 million mph.

Businesses can use all of the information they collect to make better decisions about how they use resources, for example, by gaining a greater understanding of customer behaviour, which can be used to change business models. Practical examples of how this could be used include servicing machinery when it is needed rather than following a regular service plan, or by charging customers based on their use of a product rather than requiring them to buy it outright.

The breakout sessions

The two breakout sessions provided an opportunity for delegates to share their views and to consider how these concepts could be applied to their industry.

Mat’s breakout considered **the social side of the circular economy** – how customers and employees need to be brought along on the journey in order to feel comfortable with new business models (when they are used to thinking in a linear way). He had a word of caution: “don’t use the phrase ‘circular economy’ when you’re talking to your customers”!

Elaine Kerr, Deputy Managing Director at International Synergies, facilitated a breakout session that explored **how organisations approach innovation**, emphasising that in reality, the circular economy is not a neat loop but rather a ‘plate of spaghetti’ that is a complex web of interdependencies and relationships. Organisations need to approach the circular economy in a strategic way to benefit from the opportunities it presents, rather than trying to ‘tag it on’ to their existing business model.



Summary of concluding discussion key points

Elaine Kerr

- A difficulty in implementing circular economy is in the complexity of what needs to be done
- There is a willingness to engage, but there is a major requirement for Government and Councils to provide the 'enabling environment', for example, with respect to appropriate regulation (such as End-of-Waste requirement)
- At the same time, business must face the challenge
- The basis of change is in attitude, and it is up to each of us to step up and make the first move

Closing comments

- Elaine – 'It starts with you!'

Mat Roberts

- The 'social' dimensions of CE adoption must be taken into account
 - There is a difference in perspective between older and younger, with the latter being more open to change and the possibilities of CE
 - There is an ambition to understand CE but at the same time uncertainty around the multiple 'threads' that need to be grasped
 - The world of accelerating change is difficult to navigate
 - What if the latest technology rapidly becomes redundant – this raises questions as to how we make investment decisions on the best approach to take to facilitate CE
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- Mat – 'Be frightened!' (ie understand that change is coming and action is required)

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www.bitcni.org.uk**