

BEYOND THE WORKPLACE:

Circular Economy Principles In Everyday Life

Concepts such as the circular economy can sometimes seem remote from our everyday experience. It can appear to be reserved for organisations and activities within the workplace. However, the circular economy presents important principles we can aim to implement in our everyday life.

The circular economy operates on 3 major principles:

- Keep products and materials in use
- Design out waste and pollution
- Regenerate natural systems

While it may be easy to see how we can apply the second principle in our personal lives, the other two are not as obvious.

Let's begin by exploring the first principle:

1. Keep Products And Materials In Use

At its core, this principle encourages us to find ways to extend the lives of products that enter our lives. A useful way to approach this is by focusing on the R's- Reduce, Reuse, Repair, Recycle. It is important to remember that we ought to treat 'Recycle' as a last resort, it's the last R for reason. The Ellen MacArthur Foundation and McKinsey & Co. demonstrated in their 2015 report that we can obtain greater value by focusing on interventions besides recycling [1]. We should direct our energy towards finding ways to reduce what we consume repair and reuse items as much as possible.

The good news is most of us already do this without realising; every time we save food jars to use for something else, every time we repurpose the cardboard boxes our products get delivered in, every time we convert our old clothes to cleaning rags, every time we take bags we already own to the store instead of buying a new one, we are keeping products and materials in use.

There are a lot of examples of this principle in action on the internet. It's amazing what we can accomplish with a bit of time, effort, and creativity. Look around you, what new uses can you find for the items you already own?



* Pictured:
- Nutella jars as juice glasses
- Broken clock as a bird bath
- Washing machine drum fire pit

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2. Design Out Waste & Pollution

How can we design out waste when we are not responsible for deciding what materials products are made of? How do we design out waste when we are not designers or engineers or have any control over the things that are produced?

We can approach this principle by looking at design from a different lens. We can try to design out waste in the systems and processes we implement in our lives.

An easy example is in the area of food waste. Implementing a system where we only buy food we can consume before it goes bad enables us to design out food waste from our kitchen.



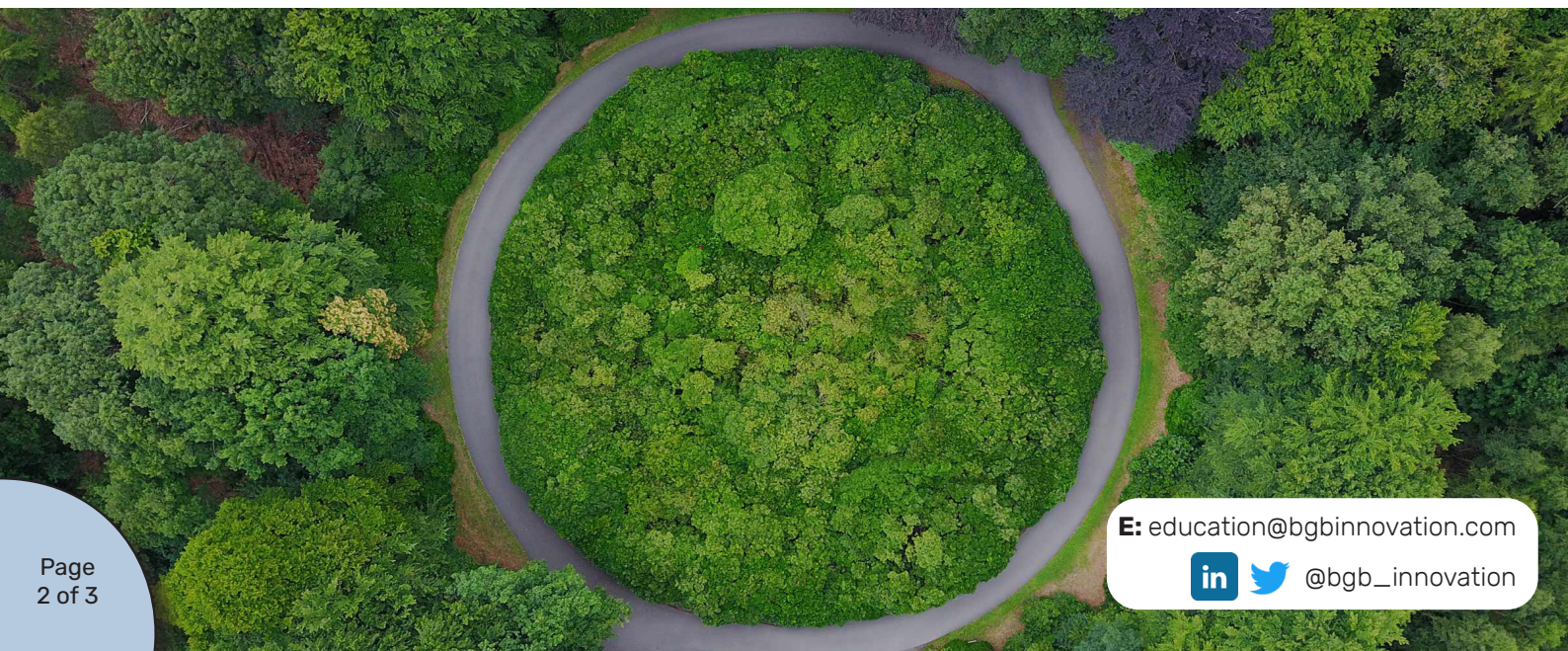
Similarly, we can strive to:

- Eat what we have before we buy more
- Consume cooked food before it goes bad
- Incorporate as much of the fruit/vegetables we buy in our meals
- Clear out our fridge frequently to ensure nothing gets forgotten

Another area where we can design out waste is reducing how much we use our cars by lumping errands together or carpooling with neighbours or friends. By simply planning our activities better, we can be more efficient. For example, we can aim to complete all errands in the city centre in one trip.

The steps we can potentially take to design out waste will differ for everyone. Examine your daily activities to discover areas where you can make a change.

Remember to think like a designer!



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3. Regenerate Natural Systems

Nature perfectly embodies this principle. When plants die, they decompose and provide nutrients to the soil that allows new life to grow. How can we model our activities after nature?

The most obvious example is composting. Instead of sending organic matter to landfill where they release methane, we can opt to compost them, so they decompose and provide nutrients to the soil, thereby creating a closed loop system.

Other ways we can regenerate natural systems include using a water butt to collect rainwater we can use for tasks around the house and starting a garden filled with as many species of plants as possible. In addition to the benefits of growing your own food (in the case of edible plants), the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) [2] believes gardens create a diverse ecosystem that enables plants, insects and animals to thrive.



It is often easier than we think to make more environmentally sustainable choices:

- Every time we reuse and repurpose items
- Every time we design systems and processes that enable us to eliminate waste in our homes and our daily activities
- Every time we model our activities after processes observed in nature

We are applying circular economy principles in our everyday life.

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References:

[1] Ellen MacArthur Foundation; SUN; McKinsey Centre for Business and Environment. Growth Within: A Circular Economy Vision for a Competitive Europe; Ellen MacArthur Foundation: Cowes, UK, 2015.

[2] RHS [Online]. Available: <https://www.rhs.org.uk/science/conservation-biodiversity/wildlife/encourage-wildlife-to-your-garden>

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