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Circularity in Action: Recycling Deep-dive

25 March 2026, 15:00 EDT | 20:00 CET
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- No discussions about pricing and other purchasing conditions in contracts.
- No exchange of other commercially sensitive information.
- No agreement not to compete.
- Stay within the limits of the agenda of the session.

This applies at all times, not just during the formal session, but also any time we interact.

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Together, we make sustainable procurement the default! Join the community that gets it done!

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Recycling Deep Dive: Circularity in Action Agenda

Opening and the Challenge

Partnership Solution & Results

Core Takeaways for Procurement

Audience Discussion, Reflections

Closing

Circularity Examples Recycling & Other Industries

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Circularity Through Procurement

- Procurement is being asked to deliver resilience, resource security, cost stability and sustainability outcomes — not just savings.
- Linear models based on ownership, volume thresholds, and short-term KPIs often limit reuse, shared services, and circular flows.
- Circular procurement shifts the focus from buying products to **designing systems** — combining materials, services and partnerships to keep value in use for longer.
- Our session shows how procurement can use access over ownership and ecosystem partnerships to make circularity work in practice.

The Case: The Circularity Ambition – case based in a public real-life example

- The product was already designed for circularity, using recycled content and enabling full recyclability
- Objective: build a genuine closed-loop post-consumer materials model that includes all clients – large projects, small installers and domestic one-offs.
- Constraint: the internal collection fleet is only viable at higher volumes and within a limited geographic radius.
- Resulting gap: small and remote jobs fall outside the loop, undermining the credibility of our circularity commitment.

Procurement's Problem Statement

- How do we offer circular collection solutions to every client segment and secure the feedstock needed to make circularity work — without expanding our own fleet?

- How do we stay within budget when collections involve extremely low-volume, lightweight items (almost transporting air)?

- How do we build partnerships that expand coverage and access to feedstock without losing control over quality, cost, and compliance?

Access Over Ownership: Biffa Partnership Design

- Instead of expanding own fleet, procurement sourced access to an existing reactive fleet from a specialist partner (Biffa)
- Bays were rented in partner transfer stations, turning them into aggregation nodes for partnership flows and other customers.
- This shared infrastructure model allowed smaller and domestic loads to be collected, aggregated and moved as bulk, without own capex.
- This model depends on mutual trust, risk-sharing and operational flexibility from both parties
- Biffa input included existing circularity knowledge & insight beyond just delivery

Access Over Ownership: The Supplier View

- Circular systems have to account for existing customer needs & mitigate possible impacts to BAU service delivery
- Circular systems have to fit around supplier systems and be flexible in their requirements - Perfect is the enemy of good
- Solving specific problems often requires additional insight from across a wide range of stakeholders, internal and external to the project
- Validation of end routes is highly important – Are we really being circular, how do we validate that?
- Each individual project adds to a wider knowledge pool and supports circularity as a whole

Case Pilot Definition

(6-month time-bound pilot)

Pilot characteristics:

- Built on openness around risks and continuous adjustment — **the pilot was a learning phase, not the final solution**
- Limited geographic scope, limited operational coverage
- Continuous learning and adjustments
- Focus on operational feasibility and cost dynamics
- Partner coordination effort
- Used insight & knowledge to help solutioning process

Shared risk management between partners was essential to test, adapt and evolve the model in real conditions

How the Shared System Works

- Internal fleet continues to serve high-volume, efficient routes above the threshold.
- Partner reactive fleet covers small and out-of-area jobs and delivers to rented bays.
- Aggregated material is then transferred for recycling, closing the loop for segments that were previously excluded.

Procurement Outcomes from the Case

- Coverage: small installers and domestic one-offs now have a circular collection route, strengthening the value proposition.
- Cost: no internal fleet expansion; instead, it is paid access and collection, while the partner increases utilisation of their existing infrastructure.
- Economics: at portfolio level, the model stayed within budget even though some individual collections are higher-cost on paper, while retaining control of material flows and avoiding intermediary margins.
- Trial was successful and was expanded to cover additional regions

Procurement Outcomes from the Case

The pilot worked — but not perfectly.

Operational reality included:

- administrative complexity
- compliance coordination
- logistics alignment
- senior management involvement
- The wider the coverage (from pilot to scale), the bigger the challenges.

These were hidden costs and constraints not accounted for in the initial business case.

Financial **system-level results were positive.**

Main Takeaway

Circular outcomes at scale require **system thinking**, **strategic partnerships**, and **procurement models that extend beyond organisational boundaries** — leveraging existing infrastructure and evaluating performance at system level, not in isolation.

Takeaway 1: Circularity Requires Strategic Partnerships

- Most circular solutions depend on **actors beyond your organisation** – logistics providers, recyclers, platforms, public partners.
- You cannot build a full circular systems alone – they require shared effort and shared incentives.
- This requires openness on risks and constraints from both sides
- Success depends on partners sharing values, ambition and circular goals (**trust is critical**)
- Procurement's role is to structure contracts that give **access** to those **shared systems** and **align incentives** across all parties.

Takeaway 2: Portfolio Economics Beats Unit Cost

- Some collections, contracts, materials or routes will look more expensive when you only look at unit cost.
- At system level, you can still be within budget while improving **material security, risk reduction and resilience.**
- Procurement needs **KPIs** that **capture total cost of ownership and system performance,** not just price per trip or per tonne.

Takeaway 3: Circular Systems Are Imperfect

- Circular solutions rarely fit neatly into existing structures.
- Partial coverage, extra coordination, governance effort and admin burden are normal in real circular implementations.
- Progress depends on **trust, open communication and shared risk** management — adapting in real time as the system evolves
- If procurement waits for a frictionless, plug-and-play model, most circular progress will never move beyond pilots.

Pool

Poll Question 1

What most limits circular initiatives in your organisation?

- Unit cost constraints
- Volume or scale thresholds
- Operational complexity
- Lack of strategic partnerships

Pool Question 2

How often do you rely on external partnerships to enable circular solutions?

- Frequently
- Occasionally
- Rarely
- Never

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5-Step Circular Procurement Roadmap

Step 1: Define the circular outcome from the start
Design for durability, repair, reuse, recycled content, recovery and clear end-of-life pathways.

Step 2: Challenge the ownership model
Test whether reuse, rental, leasing, shared assets or service models can deliver better circular and commercial outcomes.

Step 3: Select the right partners and shared capabilities
– source recycled/renewable materials and work with partners that provide the infrastructure, operational flexibility, trust and circular ambition needed to make the model work.

Step 4: Model portfolio economics — judge the system, not each transaction
– including supply chain resilience, material security through circular flows, and reduced exposure to volatile virgin material markets

Step 5: Pilot, adapt and scale
Use pilots to test the model in real conditions, manage trade-offs openly, refine roles and KPIs, and scale what works. But do it!

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Reflections & Closing

What infrastructure already exists in your ecosystem that **procurement could access instead of duplicating**?

When circular proposals are rejected, is it usually due to **financial concerns or implementation complexity?**

Where do **volume thresholds** limit circular ambition in your organisation?

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Thank You

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Procurement-Led Recycling Example

CT & Plastics – Circular Criteria in Tenders

Procurement integrates circular requirements directly into electronics sourcing:

- Suppliers must provide recycled content, take-back schemes and end-of-life management
- Circular outcomes depend on supplier capabilities for repair, refurbishment and recycling
- Requires traceability, reporting and alignment across the value chain

Like our case:

- Circularity is driven through **procurement design**, not ownership of infrastructure
- Relies on **supplier ecosystems** to deliver reverse flows and recovery
- Requires **alignment, trust and ongoing coordination** to make the model work in practice

Procurement-Led Recycling Example

Closed-Loop Paper – Public Procurement (UK Government / Manchester)

A public sector tender redesigned paper procurement as an integrated circular service:

- Supplier provides collection, secure shredding, recycling and supply of recycled paper
- Closed-loop system depends on mill capacity, logistics and traceability beyond the buyer's control
- Requires consistent feedstock and coordination across multiple actors

Like our case:

- Circularity enabled through **access to external infrastructure**, not owned assets
- Requires **alignment, trust and shared responsibility** across the value chain
- The system works at **portfolio level**, despite operational complexity

Cross Industry Example

Fairphone – Circular Electronics Model

- Fairphone designs modular smartphones for repair, reuse and extended life, but circularity depends on a wider ecosystem:
- Partners provide repair networks, spare parts distribution and take-back logistics
- Reverse flows (collection, refurbishment, recycling) rely on external infrastructure
- Volumes are uncertain and economically challenging at scale

Like our case:

- Circularity is enabled through **access to partner capabilities**, not owned systems
- Requires **trust, transparency and shared risk** across the value chain
- The model is **not frictionless** — it evolves through continuous adjustment

Cross-Industry Example: Device-as-a-Service

Organisations procure equipment as a service, bundling hardware, maintenance, upgrades and end-of-life take-back:

- Suppliers retain ownership and provide repair, refurbishment and recycling capabilities
- Circular outcomes depend on supplier networks and reverse logistics beyond the buyer's control
- Requires performance tracking, asset visibility and coordination across the lifecycle

Examples include IT device leasing (Dell, HP, Apple), managed print services (Xerox, Ricoh), lighting-as-a-service (Philips Signify), and industrial equipment leasing and servicing models across manufacturing and construction.

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