

10 lessons from practice, after 10 years of Circular Economy Connect.

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Lessons from ten years of practical experience with circular business models

The circular economy is often presented as a design issue. Develop products that last longer. Use fewer materials. Make repair and recycling easier.

These are important principles, but anyone looking at the experiences of companies that have been experimenting with circular business models for years will notice something else. It turns out that the biggest obstacles for all these companies are rarely technical in nature. They're about winning over customers. Establishing new partnerships. Maintaining control over products that remain in use for many years. Collecting data. Developing other revenue models. Adapting internal processes.

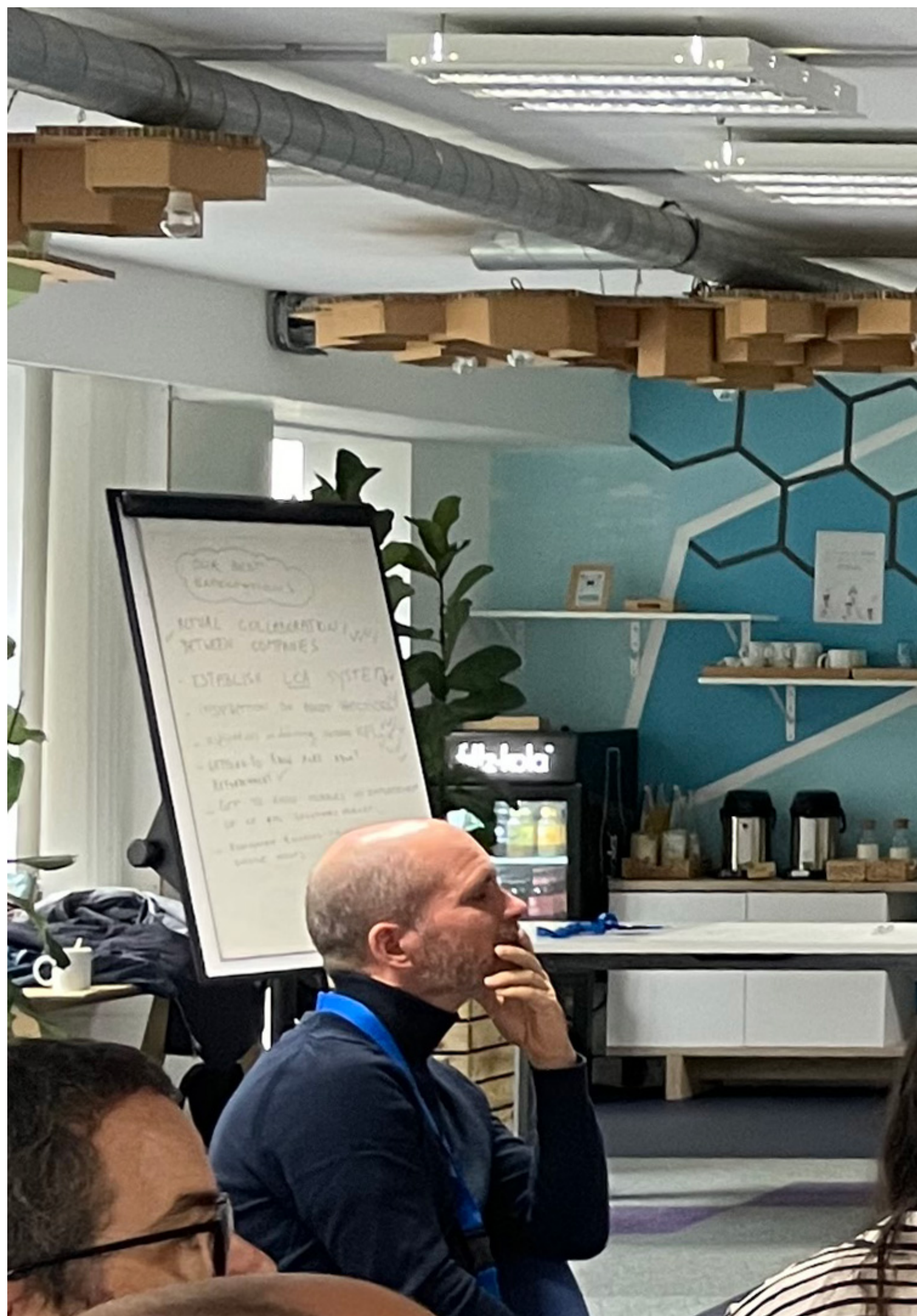
And above all: **about learning to think differently.**

That is one of the most striking conclusions to emerge from **10 years of Circular Economy Connect**, the learning network run by Sirris and Agoria. For ten years, companies from a wide range of sectors have been sharing their experiences of circularity.

Their products are fundamentally different. Their markets likewise. Yet they seem to end up asking the same questions remarkably often.

We have brought these insights together in a whitepaper: [Your guide to the circular economy: 10 forward-looking insights for technology companies](#). The publication brings together ten lessons from more than twenty real-world case studies on circular business models. In this blog, we highlight a few notable patterns drawn from ten years of practical experience.

[Guide to the circular economy_](#)



Circular economy: different products, the same challenges

Atlas Copco develops industrial compressors. Samsonite sells suitcases. Proximus manages telecoms equipment. Signify supplies lighting. Daikin manufactures heat pumps and cooling systems. At first glance, these companies have little in common. Yet they encounter the same challenges with striking frequency during their circular processes.

- How do you stay in touch with customers after a product has been sold?
- How do you organise repairs, maintenance and returns?
- How do you determine the value of a product after five or ten years' use?
- What partners do you need to put materials and products back into circulation?
- How do you organise all of this without disrupting your existing business?

What stands out is that these questions relate to business models, customer contact, collaboration and organisation. Precisely for this reason, circularity is evolving for many companies from an innovation project into a strategic issue.

Circularity starts from a business challenge, not from sustainability

It sounds surprising, yet at the same time it seems obvious. Many companies embark on their circular journey not for the sake of sustainability, but because of a specific business problem:

- How can we build a customer relationship that lasts beyond a single sale?
- How can we create new and/or stable revenue streams?
- How can we reduce our dependence on raw materials, whether scarce or abundant?
- How can we extend the lifespan of products without compromising on quality?

These questions and issues are not unique to the circular economy. In recent years, companies have faced mounting challenges. Supply chains have proved to be more vulnerable than expected. Raw materials have become more expensive and less reliably available. Customers expect greater flexibility, better service and more guarantees. At the same time, there is growing pressure to produce in a more sustainable way. In this context, the circular economy takes on a different meaning: it's not just a response to environmental challenges, but a strategy for staying competitive and resilient.

Circular economy calls for a different kind of leadership

Another lesson from ten years of practical experience concerns leadership.

Many companies launch a circular project within innovation, engineering or sustainability. But as soon as a project like this grows, other departments become involved as well. Sales, purchasing, logistics, service, finance and management need to evolve too and that requires clear decisions.

Do you invest in products that last longer? Do you expand your services alongside product sales? Do you take products back for reuse or remanufacturing? These things will also change revenue

streams, investments and ways of measuring success.

The companies that are furthest ahead share a second lesson. **Circularity requires a long-term vision.**

The benefits don't always lie in quick profits, but in stronger customer relationships, greater control over materials, new revenue models and greater resilience in the face of future challenges.

Discover 10 lessons from practice

[Guide to the circular economy](#)

In this whitepaper, Sirris and Agoria bring together 10 key insights from more than twenty real-world business cases involving companies such as Atlas Copco, Signify, Proximus and Daikin. Discover the choices made by circular pioneers, the challenges they encountered, and the lessons they learned along the way.

[Download the whitepaper](#)

Ready to take the next step?

Join the [Learning Network – Circular Economy Connect 2026-2027](#) and collaborate with other technology companies to tackle real-world circular challenges, share experiences and learn from experts.

[Discover the learning network](#)

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