

Mapping where standards can make a difference

The BSI Waste Prevention and Circular Economy Forum focused on how standards could help mainstream waste prevention and support the transition to a circular economy (CE). The event comprised a series of highly interactive, participant-led discussions that brought out a wide range of insights, views and perspectives. These were fed into a concluding session that sought to identify some practical 'next steps'.

Gallery Walk

Laura Lewin, Facilitator from Future Considerations, began by inviting attendees to read and comment on a number of posters which précised a BSI draft research report on waste prevention and the circular economy. The posters summarized: the key standards (published and in development); the potential role of standards; stakeholder issues and needs; and some possible recommendations and next steps for BSI as the National Standards Body.

One delegate noted, "These posters reflect the old language of 'waste management', we need a step-change and a new circular economy vocabulary." Other commentators asked for a definition of CE, for systems thinking, and for more help in determining the linkages between the 200 standards identified as part of the research report.

World Café

In the next session, attendees formed into groups for three rounds of discussions. The **first round** focused on the blockers and enablers to mainstreaming waste prevention and the CE. Blockers, it was thought, include some legislative frameworks and concerns about material security, cost and performance. Today's consumptive lifestyles were also thought to create a big barrier. Enablers however could also include legislation and the right tax regimes, and, in the future, gaining a CE-friendly reputation might be a driver for organizations.

In the **second round**, attendees were asked about the role standards could play in helping mainstream the CE. Delegates felt that standards could play a role in defining the vocabulary for the circular economy and that the right standards for circularity (that went beyond recycling and operate at a systems level) would drive adoption. They also thought that standards should tackle performance and durability, but not be product or industry specific. Importantly, there was the opinion that standards should provide proof where otherwise there would be a lack of trust.

In the **third round**, participants were asked what needs to happen for standards to support and advance the CE debate, and what role should BSI play? It was felt that wide, active consultation was critical; and that the role of standards is to show people what they should be trying to achieve and how to measure it (waste minimization is only one of the issues that needs to be tackled). It was thought that BSI should provide standards that can give people confidence in claims and products, that they should meet the needs of small businesses as much as larger ones. The circular economy was seen as a topic for international action and that BSI should push for standards at both a national and international level.

Burning issues

The post-lunch session handed the conversation entirely over to the attendees, by asking them to frame the burning questions they wanted to discuss.

The following questions were posed by the delegates in two rounds:

Round 1

1. What is the CE?
2. Who will own and manage the concept called the CE?
3. What would be a clear government action to promote a more CE?
4. Waste prevention seems to dominate the CE conversation; shouldn't we be focusing on finite resources instead?
5. Do households/consumers need to 'get' the CE, and can standards help?
6. Who needs to be involved in discussions regarding the definition of the CE?
7. What are the challenges that businesses need help with in respect of the CE?

Round 2

1. You have 15 PhD students available to you, what would you have them focus on / solve?
2. What are the business models and processes needed to support a CE?
3. What is the role of systems thinking in the CE?
4. Can we measure circularity and if so how, and would it be useful?

Attendees then chose the discussion they wanted to join. In round 1, question 3 attracted the highest number of participants and in round 2 question 3 also had the highest number of participants and question 4 the lowest.

Next steps

The plenary session saw stakeholders map the ideas that had emerged from the preceding discussions on a feasibility versus impact graph.

The areas of highest impact and feasibility identified were:

- Further engagement with practitioners
- Investigate the role of systems thinking and whether a standard is needed
- Develop a framework standard, including definitions, principles and the business case for the CE

Metrics were also identified as an area where standards could be developed to support the circular economy concept, but would require more effort than the actions above.

David Fatscher, Head of Market Development for Sustainability, summarized the day as a single, but important step in the journey towards consolidated effort to prevent waste and move towards a more circular economy, and with everyone's help and participation, that this important stakeholder dialogue would continue.

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