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Extended Abstract

Circular Economy Teaching in Business & Management Education: Experience from a Public Value Business School

Keywords: circular economy, education, public value.

Background

The circular economy (CE) – an economy that is “restorative and regenerative by intention and design” (EMF & McKinsey, 2012, p.7) – has become the subject of increasing attention across different quarters recently for its potential to address multiple sustainability challenges, thereby contributing to the achievement of several of the 2015’s UN SDGs goals (Bansal, 2019; Schröder *et al.*, 2019). Academically, CE studies have been growing substantially since 2015 with Dominko *et al.* (2022) highlighting that the number of published articles rose by 4255% between 2015 and 2021. However, the literature exploring the subject of the CE from an education perspective within the context of higher education institutions (HEIs) is limited (Giannoccaro *et al.*, 2021; Kirchherr & Piscicelli, 2019; Mendoza *et al.*, 2019) even though education and higher education institutions play a strategic role in supporting the transition towards the CE not only with research but also with teaching (Bugallo-Rodríguez & Vega-Marcote, 2020). In fact, while the engagement of the corporate sector alongside enablers and favourable system conditions are pivotal to steer the transition towards the CE, it is also higher education provision that is fundamental to equip those that will shape tomorrow’s world with the skill base necessary to drive circular innovation.

Aims

The purpose of this paper is to contribute to the literature on education for a CE by sharing this author’s experience in incorporating CE thinking and practice in the teaching for Master level students (MSc Marketing) at Cardiff University Business School (UK), the first public value Business School, whose strategy is ‘*to make a positive impact on the world*’. In the first stage of teaching, students analysed and evaluated the multiple forms of value resulting from the implementation of circular business models drawing on the lecturer’s choice of a case study, thereby applying systems thinking lenses to an understanding of the implications of doing business from a much wider perspective. In the second stage of teaching involving a ‘flipped learning’ approach, students chose their own case of CE implementation illustrating why they

believed it was a case of CE implementation and why it was innovative. The lecturer chose the best two presentations which groups then presented to the whole module cohort. With this exercise, students further learnt from each other. Overall, with this approach students attained the learning outcomes of *knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation* in Bloom's taxonomy (1956).

Theoretical advances

This paper contributes to the nascent literature on CE in higher education teaching. Furthermore, this study is in line with Giannoccaro *et al.* (2021), who suggest that education for CE should be based on case-study-based approaches and “innovative active learning approaches such as problem-based, project-based, challenge-based, situated, and technology-enhanced learning (...) [as] they are proven to better fit the CE features of multi-disciplinary and critical and system thinking” (p. 4).

Recommendations

Education for a CE would benefit from the inclusion of approaches enabling understanding and applications of systems thinking given that the CE draws substantially on systems thinking and that as argued by De Angelis *et al.* (2023) “the engagement with any form of circular innovation requires first and foremost the development of what can be termed as a “first-order” strategic orientation, pertaining to how organisations view themselves in relation to the wider socio-ecological system within which they operate (p. 7).

Relevance to conference theme

This paper is aligned with this year Conference Track 02: Circular Economy to Create Societal Impact – Innovative Teaching Methods and Approaches in Management Education.

Relevant UN SDGs

Goal number 12: Responsible Production and Consumption.

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