

Special Issue Call for Papers

Unpacking Circular Economy Capabilities for a Pathway to Net Zero

Paper submission deadline: 10 January 2024

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Call for Papers

We invite papers to be considered for a special issue of the *British Journal of Management* that advances management research by shedding light on firm circular economy capabilities firms require to enable a net zero and climate-resilient economy.

The circular economy (CE) is an economic model that aims to reconcile economic and environmental goals through a systematic approach of “closing the loop” on material and energy flows in production and consumption (Ghisellini, *et al.*, 2016; Bocken *et al.*, 2017; Zucchela and Previtali, 2018; Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2021). This circular model requires a fundamental change to the current linear model through initiatives such as the restorative and regenerative

design of products, systems, and manufacturing processes as well as the creation of business models for circular flows within firms and through broader industrial ecosystems (Bocken *et al.*, 2016; Hazen *et al.*, 2017; Perey *et al.*, 2018; Esposito *et al.*, 2017; Demirel and Danisman, 2019). Developing a circular economy is also an important component for addressing the climate emergency. That is, for firms to contribute to achieving a net-zero economy, their behaviour and decisions need to align with the three CE principles: (1) eliminating waste and pollution, (2) circulating resources at their highest value, and (3) regenerating natural capital (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2021). Yet, alarmingly, only 8.6% of production and consumption is currently circular, requiring a major step up in circular initiatives in firms (Circle Economy, 2021; Panwar and Niesten, 2022). The development of CE practices involves major challenges for firms, which range from the complexity of designing and manufacturing CE-compatible products and processes to the management of closed-loop supply chains (Bressanelli *et al.*, 2019; Scarpellini *et al.*, 2020). Previous research has highlighted the role of market complexity, process uncertainty, and the management of firm resources for innovation as barriers for the implementation of CE business models (De Jesus and Mendonça, 2018; Demirel and Kesidou, 2019; Scarpellini *et al.*, 2020).

In this special issue, we aim to unpack the required firm capabilities for transitioning to CE with the aim to achieve the net-zero ambitions, and the management implications of doing so, across different contexts and industries. The issue's main objective is to develop new theoretical and conceptual approaches to launching, managing and growing the CE for organisations and managers. The importance of environmental sustainability is extensively documented in the management literature across different areas of specialisation and journals, under the themes of business ethics, environmental management, eco-innovation and, more broadly, sustainable management (e.g., Villena and Gioia, 2018; Agrawal *et al.*, 2021; Juntunen *et al.*, 2019; Stern and Valero, 2021; Ambos and Tatarinov, 2022). Accordingly, the *British Journal of Management* has contributed to this literature with various recent papers (e.g. Adomako *et al.*, 2022; Akhtar *et al.*, 2018; Dey *et al.*, 2020; Haque and Ntim, 2020; Ortiz-de-Mandojana, 2019; Tatoglu *et al.*, 2020) and three special issues: *Scaling Sustainability: Regulation and Resilience in Managerial Responses to Climate Change* (Goworek *et al.*, 2018), which focused on the responsibilities of the firm in tackling climate change; *Reshoring and Sustainable Development Goals* (Gupta *et al.*, forthcoming); and *Reimagining Business and Management as a Force For Good* (McPhail *et al.*,

2022) which centre on firms addressing climate change within the UN Sustainable Development Goals. The proposed special issue focuses on the environmental sustainability obligations of firms and extends the existing conversation in the *British Journal of Management* to the context of the dual challenge of creating a net-zero and circular economy (Bocken et al, 2017; Chatzidakis and Shawn, 2018; Esposito et al, 2018; Demirel and Kesidou, 2019; Dentoni *et al.*, 2021; Arranz *et al.*, 2019; de Arroyabe *et al.*, 2021; Panwar, 2023).

With this special issue, we recognise the great need for understanding the nature of capabilities, innovations and decisions required by firms in order to transition to net zero through circularity and the barriers they face while trying. First, in line with Evans *et al.* (2017), this special issue does not only consider firms' managerial capabilities as a driver of CE implementation but also considers the important and complex interactions within the broader institutional frameworks, stakeholders, and partners during this process (Juntunen *et al.*, 2019; Arranz *et al.*, 2022). CE, to its full extent, is only feasible in well-functioning and symbiotic business ecosystems with engaged stakeholders and clear coordination. Second, this special issue approaches CE implementation in firms from a systematic perspective, encompassing different levels of the organisation and different functional areas (Bocken *et al.*, 2016; Zucchella and Previtali, 2019).

Topics of interest in this special issue include, but are not limited to, the following:

1. Submissions that provide a better theoretical understanding of the CE capabilities that enable firms to establish credible and feasible roadmaps to achieving net zero, through addressing questions such as:
 - a. Which types of capabilities and skills (i.e., technical, managerial and organisational) boost the implementation of CE innovations in different business contexts, sectors, and markets?
 - b. What are the major challenges to adopting, growing and maintaining these skills and capabilities in hard-to-decarbonise sectors such as heavy industry? How can CE capabilities help firms address their legal net zero obligations and what are the limits to the ability of CE capabilities in bringing them to the net-zero state?

- c. How do different institutional and market conditions (i.e., regulatory and policy frameworks, technological and market uncertainties etc.) affect firms' efforts and ability to effectively absorb CE skills and capabilities through different sources (e.g., corporate training, CE curriculum in higher education, inter-organisational learning)?
 - d. How can firms effectively introduce and embed “circular thinking” into their internal processes and systems of decision-making? Which types of managerial capabilities and leadership capabilities can most effectively help firms grow their CE capabilities?
 - e. What are the implications of increasing levels of CE capabilities and skills for other existing managerial structures and processes within the firm?
2. Submissions that examine the contextual issues that shape the CE capabilities and skills to achieve net zero and contribute to theoretical debates through addressing questions such as:
- a. How does the transition of global supply chains towards less impactful production and consumption paradigms affect the CE capabilities of individual supply-chain actors? How can supply-chain cooperation and collaboration help firms to build robust CE capabilities?
 - b. How does (1) the level of the supply-chain integration and (2) the position of certain actors within the supply chain, facilitate or hinder the development of CE capabilities across the supply chain? How do these differ across industries that face different levels of pressure with respect to the net-zero transition?
 - c. What is the role of the institutional framework in shaping firms' CE capabilities and skills for achieving net zero? How can governments and NGOs drive the development of CE capabilities and skills in businesses?

The special issue welcomes empirical studies that employ a variety of methodological approaches and disciplinary, interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary conceptualisations to unpack, explain and account for the complex nature of CE initiatives and capabilities in firms.

Submission Guidelines and Deadlines

The deadline for submissions to this Special Issue is **10 January 2024**. Authors should ensure they adhere to the journal author guidelines which are available at:

[http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/10.1111/\(ISSN\)1467-8551/homepage/ForAuthors.html](http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/10.1111/(ISSN)1467-8551/homepage/ForAuthors.html).

Submissions should be uploaded to the *British Journal of Management* ScholarOne Manuscripts site at <http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/bjm>. Authors should select ‘special issue paper’ as the paper type, ensure they answer ‘yes’ to the question ‘Is this submission for a special issue?’ and enter the title of the special issue in the box provided.

To help authors prepare their manuscripts for submission, the guest editors will organise a dedicated online workshop on 29 September 2023 with presentations and discussion of selected papers. Presentation of a paper at the workshop is not a precondition for submission to the Special Issue. Authors interested in taking part in the workshop should submit an extended abstract of a maximum 3,000 words by 1 September 2023. The submission should include a title page indicating the title of the manuscript, author names, institutional affiliations and an email address for each author. Submissions should be uploaded to:

https://essex.eu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_bge8G2fxMxunFgW

More information on the special issue or the workshop can be obtained from the guest editors:

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