

A photograph of a modern office interior. In the foreground, there are two large, black, dome-shaped pendant lights hanging from a track. Below them, a white desk is set up with two computer monitors and office chairs. In the background, there is a large white shelving unit filled with colorful binders or books. The office has a bright, open feel with large windows and a high ceiling.

# REVOLUTION VERSUS EVOLUTION

A guide to adopting circular economy  
principles in your workplace

*Inspiring places and performance*  
[crownworkspace.com](https://crownworkspace.com)



“

ADOPTION OF CIRCULAR ECONOMY PRINCIPLES IN EUROPE WILL NOT ONLY BENEFIT THE REGION ENVIRONMENTALLY AND SOCIALLY; IT COULD ALSO GENERATE A NET ECONOMIC BENEFIT OF £1.8 TRILLION BY 2030.

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**- McKinsey, 2015**

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# 1. THE CIRCULAR ECONOMY

# A business imperative

To environmentally and socially aware individuals, the principles of the circular economy make perfect sense. Use less, share more, and make sure that what you do use has the potential to be reused, repurposed or recycled, rather than simply becoming waste. The UN says that to avoid a climate change disaster, the world needs to cut harmful emissions by 45% by 2030, reach carbon neutrality by 2050, and limit temperature rise to 1.5 degrees by the end of the century.

Putting in place a circular economy is a key part of achieving these carbon emission and climate change targets. The Ellen MacArthur Foundation has found that 45% of carbon emissions come from the production of the goods we use every day. If we can change the way we use resources, we can not only help deliver net-zero carbon emissions but increase resilience against the effects of climate change.

Businesses have a lot to gain from applying the principles of the circular economy to the workplace. The office environment is a natural place to start because so many resources are used in their design and operation. This puts the onus on Facilities Managers (FMs) to get to grips with this concept, perhaps before many of their colleagues.

“Do we really need it?”

“What is this made of?”

“What happens to it when we’re done with it?”

These are just some of the key questions that should be a standard part of conversations about the workplace.

By focusing on eliminating waste and retaining the value of existing resources as long as possible, FMs can move towards a ‘circular office’ which sees circular economy principles applied to every aspect of the workspace - from the fabric, fixtures and fittings of the building to the furnishings and consumables used on a daily basis.

Applying circular economy principles requires deep rooted change of systems and mindset combined with collaboration with the supply chain – a revolution rather than an evolution. Whilst that may sound challenging, significant financial, environmental and social outcomes can be achieved even with small steps so any FM can start their journey towards a circular office.

## How to start your circular economy journey

This guide will help your business adopt circular economy principles and realise it’s many benefits by:

- Knowing what the circular economy entails and the benefits it brings
- Putting circularity into practice
- Realising what approaches should change to make circularity last
- Finding where to start

## What is the economic benefit?

There are significant costs savings and efficiencies to be had by eliminating waste and retaining the value of existing resources in the workplace. According to the Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP), a business can save between £400 and £1,000 per employee annually by reducing waste. And according to the Prince's Responsible Business Network, the difference in waste costs between well and badly managed offices is between 1% and 4% of turnover.

## Reducing environmental impacts

Applying circular economy principles in the workplace can have huge impacts on the environment through reduced resource use, waste disposal, energy and water usage and of course, carbon emissions. FMs are well placed to support businesses that are either looking to take small steps to reduce their environmental impacts or those that have set net-zero emission targets.

### FACT:

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“TAKE HEED FROM THE FACT THAT MAJOR GLOBAL BRANDS, NOT JUST SOCIALLY AWARE START-UPS, ARE ADOPTING CIRCULAR PRINCIPLES IN THEIR BUSINESS MODELS. APPLE, NIKE, UNILEVER, LEVI STRAUSS AND DELL TO NAME A FEW.”

**Circularity is going mainstream**

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## Delivering social value


Whilst it may be more difficult to quantify the social value delivered, there are huge positives from applying circular economy principles. These benefits can apply to the workforce through increased employment, higher skilled roles and more engaged employees. They can also be felt by the wider community and particularly those that are more vulnerable in our society through donations of unwanted resources.

## What the circular economy is not

The circular economy requires a change of mindset and a change in the way the business delivers what it does. The circular economy is not:

- **A gesture** – something a business says its “committed to” but doesn't practice
- **A short-term measure or trend** – something to adopt tactically but ignore strategically
- **A compromise** – something which requires a quality and performance trade-off

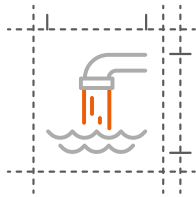
While circularity requires some significant alterations to the way a business operates, those changes can start small and build over time. It's important to 'begin doing something' while defining a long-term plan for business change.



## 2. WHAT DOES THE CIRCULAR ECONOMY MEAN?

# A quick overview

The Ellen MacArthur Foundation defines the circular economy as a framework for an economy that is restorative and renovative by design. In other words, it seeks to replace the traditional 'take-make-waste' linear industrial model. In a circular society, economic activity is decoupled from the consumption of finite resources and recoupled with three principles:



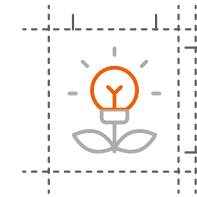
## Designing out waste and pollution

**Example:** Reducing the waste by-products created during a manufacturing process, by redesigning the service or product so that waste is no longer generated.



## Keeping products and materials in use

**Example:** Maintaining, reusing and refurbishing existing equipment to give it a second (and third, fourth...) life; rather than throwing it away and buying a new replacement.



## Regenerating natural systems

**Example:** Feeding back into nature to restore it and prevent the depletion of natural resources through processes such as composting that returns goodness to the soil

Undoubtedly, the human and capital cost of not changing is being seen more frequently through natural disasters and unsettled extreme weather patterns.



## Three opportunities to adopt circular principles in the workplace:

### 1. Everyday operations

FMs have many opportunities to introduce the concept of a circular office without having to undertake major projects. This includes looking at procurement, resource usage and disposal of everyday products and services, not just those used by the FM team but by the whole organisation. It requires engagement with employees to communicate, enable and reward behaviour change.

### 2. Refurbishment projects

Renovation and refurbishment gives FMs the chance to revolutionise their thinking with so many decisions to be made around products and materials - from the way an existing office is cleared to how the new workplace is designed and fitted out as well as how space is utilised.

### 3. Relocation

While decisions relating to existing buildings may have their limitations, moving office provides a unique opportunity to implement circular office principles, from the choice of office space, what to put in it and how you approach the relocation itself. This particularly applies if building from new which brings the biggest opportunity to design out waste, keep resources in use and regenerate natural systems.





## FACT:

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“IN A RECENT SURVEY BY DELOITTE, 87% OF EXECUTIVES SAID THEY BELIEVED COMPANIES PERFORM BEST IF THEIR ‘PURPOSE’ GOES BEYOND PROFIT.”

**While profit remains critical, business performance can be improved by addressing wider societal needs.**

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## FACT:

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“ACCORDING TO CIRCLE ECONOMY’S CIRCULARITY GAP REPORT, THE WORLD IS ONLY 9% CIRCULAR AND THE TREND IS NEGATIVE. THE CIRCULARITY GAP IS CURRENTLY WIDENING, NOT SHRINKING.”

**More ‘walk’ and less ‘talk’ is needed urgently.**

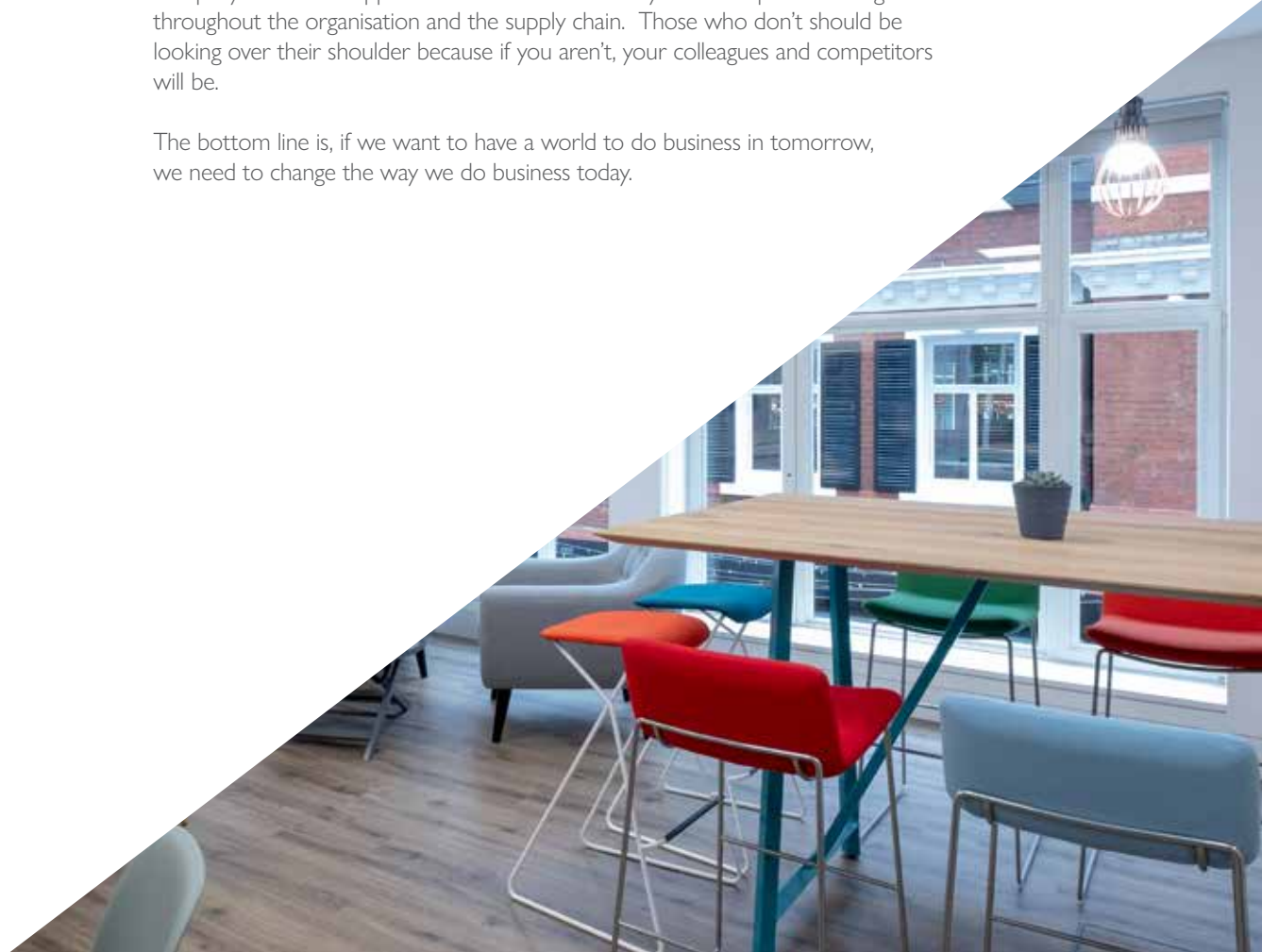
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## Do you really need to act?

In one word, yes! Unless you really don’t believe the science, the motivations for adopting a circular business model get stronger every day. Natural resources are finite and cannot be relied upon indefinitely. Equally, man-made resources such as plastics and concrete may have infinite possibilities but are over-produced, underutilised and as a result cause damage to the environment.

It’s easy to think we can leave our governing powers to change the tide, but in fact, to have any chance of turning things around, every individual needs to change their mindset. Those designing and managing the workplace won’t achieve the financial, environmental and social outcomes alone - it requires the engagement of the whole company as well as suppliers and contractors – but you can help drive change throughout the organisation and the supply chain. Those who don’t should be looking over their shoulder because if you aren’t, your colleagues and competitors will be.

The bottom line is, if we want to have a world to do business in tomorrow, we need to change the way we do business today.





### 3. ACTING TODAY

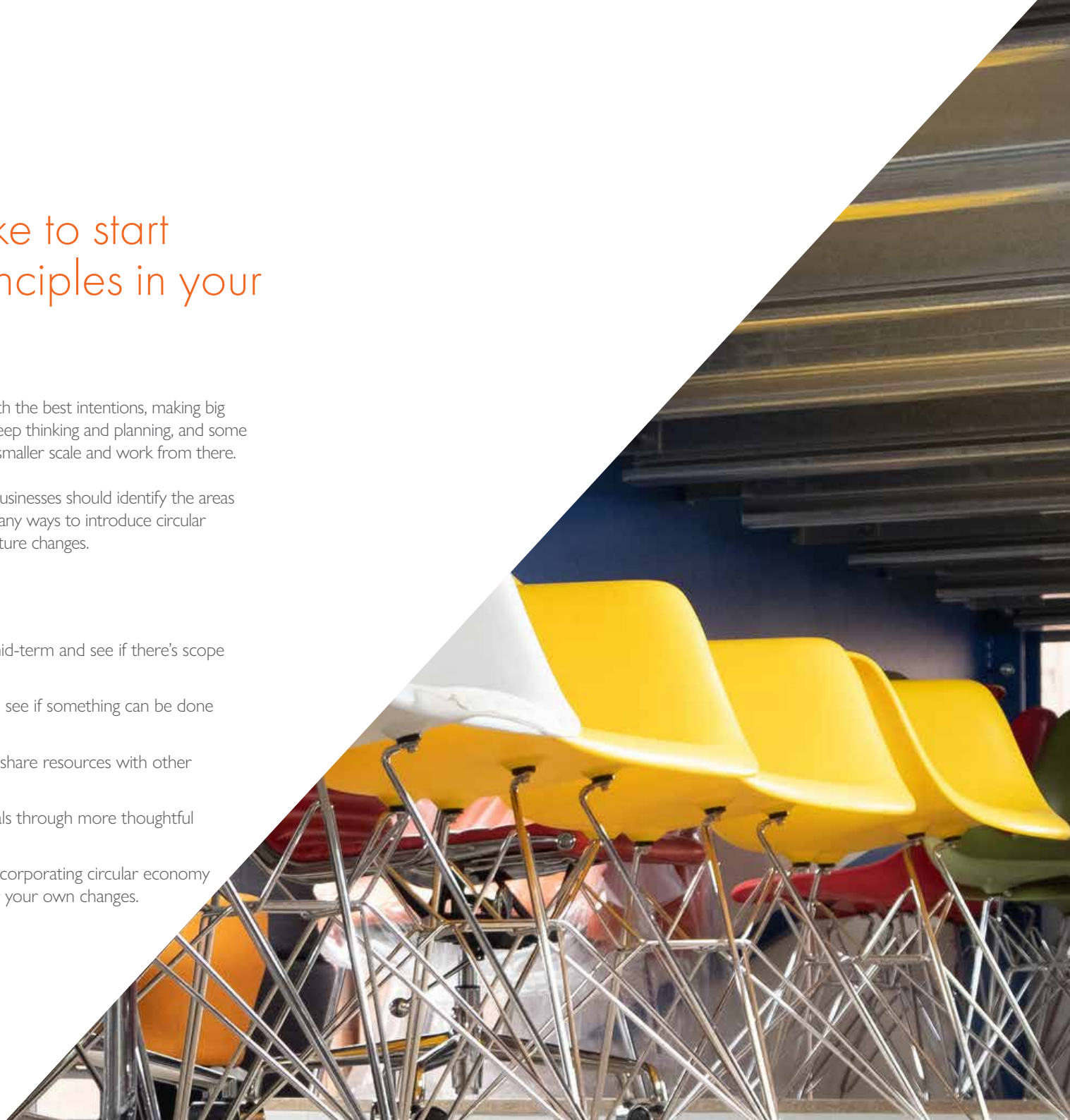
# Small steps you can take to start adopting circularity principles in your office immediately

You undoubtedly have a busy department to manage. Even with the best intentions, making big changes to adopt circularity holistically will take time, require deep thinking and planning, and some professional advice and support. However, you can start on a smaller scale and work from there.

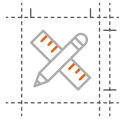
There's no one-size-fits-all when it comes to circular offices. Businesses should identify the areas where they could most benefit from efficiencies. There are many ways to introduce circular principles into your existing workplace while planning bigger future changes.

## To make quick gains, you can:

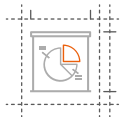
- Look at what purchases you are planning in the short to mid-term and see if there's scope to make your choices more 'circular'.
- Review what you are throwing away on a regular basis and see if something can be done to eliminate, save, reuse or repurpose some of this waste.
- Look at what your business needs and whether you could share resources with other organisations also in need.
- See if there is scope to reduce the consumption of materials through more thoughtful business practices.
- Build your knowledge and awareness of FMs successfully incorporating circular economy principles in their workplace to help provide a platform for your own changes.



# 12 ways to quickly adopt circularity in your everyday operations – buy less, buy better, use longer



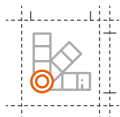
**Repair** rather than dispose of broken furniture and extend their lifespan whether it's a missing chair arm or caster, torn fabric on seats, broken table leg or damaged desk.



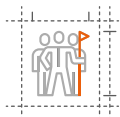
Improve auditing and stock control to **enable redeployment internally** of existing underused items therefore reducing the purchase of new.



Rather than buying brand new products and equipment, consider **buying used** for example refurbished IT equipment or remanufactured furniture.



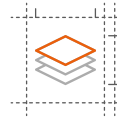
Rather than getting rid of redundant office furniture, get it **refurbished and remodelled** to meet your future need or new look and feel.



**Equip the workforce** and office space in ways that 'encourage' circularity. This could include providing all staff with reusable coffee cups, or better food preparation areas to reduce take-away packaging.



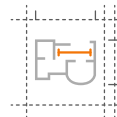
**Repurpose waste** for example send coffee beans and cooking oil for biofuels, food waste for compost, and non-recyclable waste to generate heat and power.



**Reuse fixtures** such as old carpet tiles and give them a new lease of life. They may no longer be the right look for the customer-facing areas but could easily be re-laid in storage areas or IT rooms.



Put **service and maintenance contracts** in place, for example on electrical equipment, to optimise energy efficiency and increase lifespan.



Consider **partial replacement** rather than complete renewal of fixtures and fittings in the business. For example, rather than removing an entire ceiling of tiles, replace the ones that are damaged or discoloured.



The things you need to dispose of could live new lives elsewhere for example you could **sell or donate older office equipment**, a smaller business or charity might welcome the opportunity to use it.



**Buy sustainably sourced** for example local seasonal food and FSC certified paper for printing, introduce refillables with natural cleaning products and look for products with high recycled content.



**Consider buying higher quality** to help ensure longevity, enable repair and even if you don't want the items any more, retain value allowing them to be sold on for others to reuse.

## 4. PLANNING FOR THE LONG-TERM





# Rethinking your workplace to become a truly circular office

It's surprising how many of these small steps can quickly add up to a significant shift towards circular principles within your own workplace. While these are being implemented, the organisation can also start thinking strategically about bigger picture changes:

- Designing the office with the future in mind
- Only using products and materials in construction and refurbishment that are sustainably sourced
- Maximising the recovery of resources in disassembly so these can be repurposed or reused
- Thinking of the lifecycle of products and materials at all times and maintaining their highest possible value at the end of their use
- Minimising the demand for resources and using those resources that are required as efficiently as possible
- Meeting resource needs through renewable or reusable solutions

## Key pillars of strategic circularisation

There are many ways of approaching this strategic process. We think these key pillars cover much of the essential thinking that needs to happen. One thing is clear:

To make impactful changes and adopt circularity as the new way of life, those responsible must ensure full commitment and buy-in from the top. A change on this scale requires vision and leadership as much as new policies and processes. Changing attitudes is as crucial as ensuring compliance.



“

WORKSPACE OCCUPANCY STUDIES FROM OVER THE PAST DECADE AND MORE HAVE CONSISTENTLY FOUND THAT DESKS ARE OCCUPIED ON AVERAGE AROUND 40 TO 50% THROUGH THE CORE WORKING DAY

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**- British Council for Offices: Office Occupancy: Density and Utilisation (2018)**

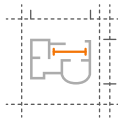
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EVEN IF THIS [ZERO EMISSIONS BY 2050] TARGET IS MET, COSTS TO THE GLOBAL ECONOMY RELATING TO CLIMATE CHANGE ARE PROJECTED TO REACH USD 54 TRILLION BY 2100 AND RISE STEEPLY WITH EVERY FURTHER TEMPERATURE INCREASE. THE INCENTIVE TO MEET THE CHALLENGE IS UNQUESTIONABLE

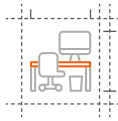
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**- Ellen MacArthur Foundation, Completing the Picture: How the Circular Economy Tackles Climate Change (2019)**

# 12 ways to address longer term circularity in the workplace



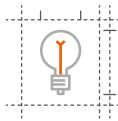
Use only the amount of **office space** required to cut back on real estate costs, utility bills and interiors. Measures include rethinking your office design and subletting excess space.



Design and create a **flexible workplace** that can be adapted for future use for example using modular components.



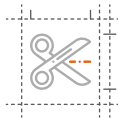
Buy **products as a service** for example lighting, air conditioning, lifts, coffee machines and white goods.



Introduce **energy efficient measures** such as LEDs, smart lighting and heating.



Switch to **renewable energy sources** or, if possible, generate your own energy through solar panels.



Make end of life criteria a **key procurement criteria** for any products and materials.



**Harvest rainwater** for non-potable purposes such as flushing toilets and watering plants, not just reducing water usage but flood risk as well.



Use outdoor space and roof gardens to **create habitats for wildlife**, focusing on at risk species.



When refurbishing, use products that **close the loop** such as reengineered or recycled waste paint, carpet tiles and worktops.



Pass on products you no longer require, **share or lease** items that you use less often.



**Involve suppliers** and challenge them to suggest ways they can help you become a circular office.



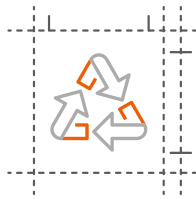
**Share your best practice** with other FMs so others can learn from your successes and failures.

## 5. CONCLUSION



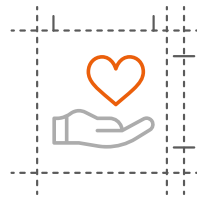
# So, now you're equipped with lots of ways to adopt circular principles in your business.

At Crown Workspace, we continue to work with our clients and suppliers to achieve circularity in their workplaces. Our services enables businesses to:



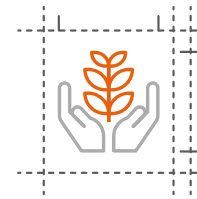
## Achieve cost savings

Whether we are helping you prevent waste with more effective stock control, repair your existing furniture, or maximise the value of and minimise waste on redundant assets, we can help you achieve significant cost savings on furnishing or clearing your office.



## Deliver social value

Our award-winning donation initiative, the Giving Back Project, enables our clients to support local schools, social enterprises and charities with redundant furniture, IT and electrical equipment. Our sustainable solutions deliver many wider social benefits including increased employment, higher skilled and more rewarding roles, and a reduction in furniture poverty.



## Reduce your impact on the environment

In line with the waste hierarchy we focus on prevention, minimisation, reuse and 100% diversion from landfill for your resources. Whether we are supplying you with additional assets, helping you make the most of existing assets, or managing your redundant assets, we provide measurable results in terms of carbon savings, reduced water usage and waste.



## Here's a quick reminder of 5 key points:

1. **Think small, and then build** – you can make quick, tactical changes now while you plan for the longer-term.
2. **Think big too** – while you're making changes, plan longer-term around the whole system impact of your business decisions and the materials and equipment you use.
3. **Think externally and internally** – remember that the actions of your external partners have as much impact on your circular progress as your internal actions do.
4. **Think lifetime** – don't make purchasing decisions purely on a 'now' basis. Consider the total lifespan and impact of everything you use and the fabric of your built environment.
5. **Think 'everyone'** – circularity should be a positive and rewarded movement by the whole organisation, not just a top-down, enforced edict.

To find out more about how Crown Workspace can help your organisation adopt the principles and take the next step on your journey, contact us at [crownworkspace@crowneww.com](mailto:crownworkspace@crowneww.com) or call us on **0208 976 2100**

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