

What companies learned from CE Connect learning network

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After four years, we are taking stock of what we and the participating companies, both large companies and SMEs, have learned from the CE Connect learning networks. What is our approach? What is its value? And what did participation in our learning network mean for individual companies?

In this first blog of two, we give some insight into the experience of the participants. The second part elaborates on the lessons learned from four years of CE Connect learning network.

Since 2016, the Agoria-Sirris learning network CE Connect has evolved considerably. There are now even two complete learning networks that we organise every year. Most of the companies that have participated since the beginning are still actively involved and are now part of the learning network 'CE Connect Advanced', which also includes other companies that are already generating turnover with circular products or services.

Last year we launched a learning network 'CE Connect Inspire', targeting companies that have set up or are setting up their first circular projects.

How do we see a learning network?

On the one hand, the pioneers are already working hard on the circular economy, but still come up against obstacles, and on the other hand, companies that wait too long risk being priced out of the market. Small-scale experiments can help them find out what does and does not work at little risk. Despite the recent 'hype' around circular economy, there are no ready-made answers for implementing the principles of circular economy on the shop floor. Sirris and Agoria believe companies can learn from each other's good and more difficult experiences.

In the learning network, a set group of 'like-minded' companies meets four times in a period of one year. We prefer to organise these sessions at participating companies or companies that can present their case and link this to a company visit. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the sessions were organised digitally, and we tried to compensate for the lack of company visits and live interaction with additional sessions and access to the shared digital platform where all the information from the learning network is collected. We certainly want to maintain this digital platform in the coming working year.

We also encourage participants to keep in touch with each other in between sessions. Wherever useful, they can use each other as sounding boards when the need arises. The topics we highlight are, of course, the challenges experienced by the companies themselves.

What do the participants say about the value of the learning networks?

SMEs often struggle with choosing what to do with their limited time and resources. Through a learning network, they can quickly learn from what other companies have tried, what works and what doesn't. Finding the strengths that already exist in your SME is the key here. It helps if you know exactly what to look for. The strength of a learning network is that it quickly exposes the most important preconditions: product design and product quality, service, customer relations, knowledge of specific customer segments, valuable partnerships... Through the examples and lessons learned from other companies about these topics, the priorities, but also the strengths for your company come into view. With this knowledge, you can take further steps quickly and with reasonable certainty of success.

> *“In our company, several circular projects that started as separate initiatives are ongoing. The CE Connect learning network is helping us to get a feel for the good practices that we, too, can use. The testimonials from other companies and expert input give us confidence that we are on the right track. It is surprising how much inspiration you get, also from companies in completely different sectors. Participation in the learning network has given our plans a boost”.*
> **Karl Huylebroeck (CEO Roltex)**

For many (rather larger) companies, it is a challenge to get the circular thinking and approach with all its facets (product design, revenue model, cooperation in the chain, financing, ...) picked up by the right people and roles in the organisation. In larger organisations, it is a major challenge to interconnect the circular strategic business ambitions and the circular pilot projects implemented on the shop floor. The middle management is therefore managed based on linear KPIs that do not necessarily advance the circular goals.

That is why we do not limit the number of participants per company in our learning network and let it vary. In practice, sometimes up to six participants per company take part. These large numbers are usually from the host company where the session of the learning network takes place. These moments are the perfect lever for the host company to pick up on circularity throughout the organisation. This challenge is certainly also a subject that we will be taking up in the coming working year.

> *“The CE Connect learning network is a good mix of theory and practice for us. Experts shed light on the various aspects of the circular economy and testimonies from various companies test it out in practice and show how concrete challenges can be tackled. Moreover, through the learning network we mapped our circular ecosystem and were able to identify circular opportunities.”*
> **Kris Van Bosstraeten - Project Manager Design Process (Atlas Copco Portable Energy)**

In most cases, the learning network is a supporting side-project of the ongoing business projects. The feedback from companies indicates that the learning network, in addition to providing concrete leads and insights, also offers a kind of moral support.

The annual joining time has come...

Interested to participate? Contact us and we will schedule an intake meeting, giving you priority over pre-registration. We are convinced that we will see many breakthroughs in the circular landscape in the coming year. Make sure one of them is with you. *The time is now!*

Not sure if a learning network is the format best suited to your organisation at the moment? Don't worry, there is certainly a format that fits your needs. We will be happy to go over the possibilities offered by Sirris and Agoria, as well as by third parties, with you and find out together how you can make concrete progress as quickly as possible.

Authors



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