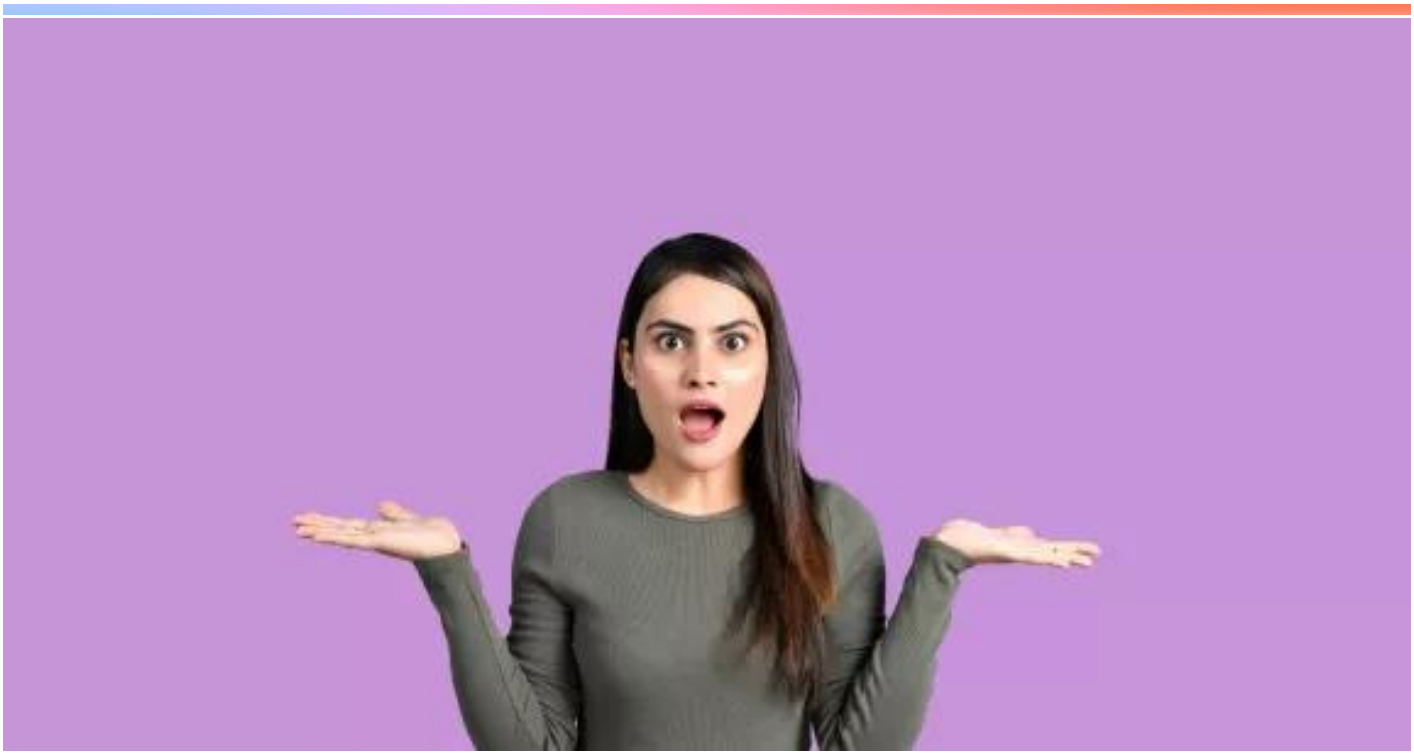


Growing together in ReX: it all begins with listening

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Why are we talking about this?

Change doesn’t start with a big leap, but with an everyday action: a conversation. At a time when sustainability is no longer a buzzword but a course of action that’s necessary, the importance of ReX (repair, reuse, refurbish, remanufacture, retrofit, etc.) is growing. But how do you take that first step towards working with new partners? How does a long-term partnership between a manufacturing company and a sheltered workshop come about? It turns out that it often starts on the sidelines, with a chance encounter, a shared idea or an honest question. This article invites you to look out for these initial connections.

ReX requires collaboration – and collaboration requires trust

No company forms a complete circular value chain on its own. If we really want to work on extending product lives, we have to work together. From initial design to repair and reuse: behind every process are people, expertise and partners.

Yet many employees run into obstacles. Collaboration between manufacturers and sheltered workshops is often still unexplored territory for ReX initiators. There is interest on both sides, but few concrete starting points: the initial phase is vague and undefined, which means that the traditional supply and demand approach doesn't lead to a solution, let alone a watertight business case. There is still too much uncertainty and a lack of knowledge of each other's experiences, access to data, and so on.

What does work is building trust, curiosity and the courage to explore the unknown on the basis of a shared ambition. Start by focusing on each other and understanding the situation or challenge. Don't try to come up with solutions at this stage. People like to talk about their own work and the challenges they face.

Why is ReX also an opportunity for sheltered workshops?

Sheltered workshops are looking for meaningful, future-oriented employment. ReX offers exactly that: stable, process-oriented work that's valuable to society. At the same time, manufacturers are on the look-out for reliable partners to carry out tasks that lie outside their core competence, such as dismantling devices accurately, upgrading components or performing retrofit tasks with precision. There is no ready-made service on offer yet, but a shared process of discovery.

A business developer from a sheltered workshop put it this way:

> "We evaluate together with the manufacturer whether a potential order represents a good fit. The impact on employment, the variety of the work and the complexity of the process are important are important considerations. It's a puzzle that we solve together"

An operations manager from a manufacturing company adds:

> "We start internally by collecting information that we then discuss with our partners. Only when we have a shared understanding of volumes and complexity do we look at how we can work towards solutions."

Far from being weak, this searching mindset is actually the basis for co-creation. From this shared uncertainty, a space for connection emerges.

The attractiveness of a shared ambition

The key to long-term collaboration is rarely a contract: more often than not it's an initial good conversation. Seeking to understand the other party is a sign of respect, and openness elicits trust in return. This is why personal contact is so crucial, especially in the initial phase.
The case of Strygoo and Lidwina is a striking illustration of this. They got to know each other through a local business network. When Strygoo later came up with a concrete idea for a product with a longer lifespan, the connection, the two of them had already clicked. Not by chance, but as a

result of previous contact and shared values.

Who takes the first step?

In every organisation there are people who feel energised by the unknown and who like to build bridges – innovation, product or business managers with an open mindset who are prepared to look beyond the confines of their own sector. They are able to take the first step. Do you recognise yourself in this description? Or do you have colleagues who excel in this respect? If so, then it’s time to let them – or yourself – loose on the network.

A previous article called on readers to:

> “Get out there. Be humble.”

And that remains relevant. The circular future doesn’t start with grandiose plans, but with curiosity.

Where can you find like-minded people?

You don't have to wait for the perfect event. Create your own opportunities. Organize an inspiration session, invite customers and suppliers, and highlight a theme such as product lifetime. This lowers the threshold and increases the chances of meaningful encounters.

Also join existing initiatives, even outside your own sector or region. Think of learning networks and theme groups at Sirris, or company visits and training sessions in other federations. Circular innovation knows no strict boundaries.

Moreover, be visible. Share what you learn, even if it's still in its early stages. In-person meetings remain the most valuable, but digital communication via social media or newsletters can help like-minded people find you.

Where do you find like-minded people?

You don’t have to wait for the perfect event to come along. Create opportunities yourself. Organise an inspiration session, invite customers and suppliers, discuss a theme such as product life. By doing so you will lower the barriers and increase the chances of meaningful encounters.
You can also join existing initiatives – including outside your own sector or area. These might include learning networks and theme groups at Sirris, or company visits and training courses in other federations. Circular innovation has no strict boundaries.

You also need to be visible. Share what you learn, even if it’s still in the early stages. Physical meetings remain the most valuable approach, but digital communication via social media or newsletters can help you to be found by like-minded people.

Start by learning, not by trying to convince. When you meet someone, ask questions. What are they doing in terms of ReX? What role do they play? What have they already tried? People often like to talk about their experiences – and this is where unexpected inspiration frequently lies.
The key is to start every conversation with a desire to learn, not to sell. Genuine interest opens doors. And sometimes the conversation will naturally turn to what you do. Keep track of what you learn. What do you have in common? What question do you want to ask next? In which areas can you see a possible overlap?

After a series of conversations pause for reflection: what worked? What could be better? What lessons will you take with you to your next contact?

Here's a good example:
A sheltered workshop happened to come into contact with a contractor while expanding its own warehouse. A conversation started during the site visit. The subject came up of the installation of spray heads in sprinkler pipes, where precision was crucial. Collaboration followed naturally. A small encounter with a big impact.

Conclusion: every step counts

Collaboration takes time. It starts with listening. With curiosity. With a small step, a conversation, a shared smile.
Every meeting takes you further: either towards a concrete project or towards more insight, a wider network and increased trust.
Never forget: in the world of ReX and circular innovation, energy, enthusiasm and genuine interest are your most powerful tools.

I pport from VLAIO.

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