

Foreword

In bringing the Foundation's first report to the World Economic Forum in 2012, we attempted to paint the circular economy as an agent of transformative change. As a system solutions framework for an economy that is restorative and regenerative by design: one that recognises planetary boundaries and helps to tackle the global emergencies of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution.

This book not only presents a sound academic view of the circular economy but balances this with input from thought leaders from across the globe and case studies from a range of different business types. Bringing together academics, thought leaders, business and government has been at the core of the Foundation's ability to move the thinking on the circular economy forward over the last twelve years.

This thinking was based on, and continues to be shaped by, ideas presented in the first two parts of this volume: biomimicry, products-service systems and regenerative economics, to name a few prominent examples. As circular economy has taken root in academia, business and policymaking, a deeper understanding of the core concept – with an insistence that it represents much more than recycling bolted on to a linear economy – has gone hand in hand with taking action to prove its potential.

In academia, a decade ago circular economy thinking was largely concentrated in the faculties of business, engineering and design. As well as now being found in disciplines including law, life sciences and environmental economics, it has expanded beyond teaching and research into the management of university estates and businesses. In policymaking, a necessary but limited focus on restricting end-of-pipe options, like landfilling and incineration, has shifted to placing circular economy at the heart of strategies to increase competitiveness, create jobs and tackle climate change, and to funding new circular economy enterprises on the ground.

As amply demonstrated in the third part of this book, business is also on a journey of transition. All the companies featured have displayed extraordinary levels of innovation to put themselves on a path to a regenerative and circular economic future. But that path is not always smooth or without sharp bends. That they are succeeding nonetheless is testament to their foresight and perseverance. To scale their efforts, and others like them, collaboration is crucial. Much as a multidisciplinary approach in academia yields valuable insights – the whole being greater than the sum of its parts – so collaboration between businesses along value chains, and with policymakers at all levels, brings about system-level change.

To write a handbook on circular economy might be to invite comparisons to a manual for a car or a new electrical gadget. But this book is not a set of instructions, rather it is a guide and inspiration to fellow travellers on the road to a circular economy – a road to a world in which, by design, we regenerate nature as a by-product

of economic activity and restore finite materials to the economy, fully utilising and using them instead of wasting them. A world in which we thrive.

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