

## Beyond awareness: Unlocking circular procurement with behavioural science

### From awareness to **action**

Knowing about circular options isn't enough. Many procurement professionals still default to traditional choices. Why? Because decisions aren't just about knowledge—they are shaped by:

- **Context** – How choices are presented and structured.
- **Social norms** – The actions and approval of peers, colleagues and managers.
- **Psychology** – The shortcuts our brains take when making decisions under pressure.



If we want real change, we need to redesign procurement systems, incentives and decision environments to make circular choices effortless, visible and the new normal.

### Why people don't act: **3 barriers**

**1. Contextual barriers** – Procurement systems prioritise short-term costs over long-term value.

*e.g. If circular options are buried in procurement systems, they won't be chosen.*

*e.g. If budgets favour upfront cost over lifecycle value, circular solutions lose out.*

**2. Social barriers** – People hesitate to act if they don't see others doing it.

*e.g. If colleagues and leaders aren't prioritising circular procurement, people hesitate.*

*e.g. Procurement officers often fear risk: "Will my boss back me up if this supplier doesn't work out?"*

**3. Psychological barriers** – People default to the familiar and easy.

*e.g. Status quo bias makes traditional procurement feel safer.*

*e.g. Cognitive overload means people opt for quick, familiar choices rather than exploring alternatives.*

The good news? These barriers aren't fixed—we can redesign procurement systems to drive change.

### Making circular procurement the **easy**, expected and rewarded choice

#### Contextual solutions: Reduce friction and simplify access

✓ Use pre-approved supplier lists to remove research burden. *e.g. UK Government's G-Cloud framework.*

✓ Make circular options the default in procurement tools. *e.g. Research showing prioritising eco-friendly products increased selection by 25–30%.*

✓ Auto-approve circular products and require justification for non-circular ones. *e.g. City of Copenhagen: Refurbished laptops auto-approved.*

☞ If circular procurement is **the easiest** option, adoption accelerates.

#### Social solutions: Shift norms and create positive reinforcement

✓ Create peer learning networks to build confidence. *e.g. Interreg ProCirc: Procurer-to-procurer learning sessions.*

✓ Lead by example—ensure executives buy circular. *e.g. City of Copenhagen: Executives committed to only circular office supplies.*

✓ Celebrate procurement champions to inspire others. *e.g. City of Ghent: Internal champions sharing their success.*

☞ People follow what's common and rewarded—let's make circular procurement both.

#### Psychological solutions: Overcome biases and build confidence

✓ Flip the script—show that inaction is the real risk. *e.g. Circular solutions reducing long-term costs.*

✓ Provide hands-on training, not just theory. *e.g. Flanders' Studio D: Real-life circular procurement cases.*

✓ Leverage loss aversion—highlight the risks of NOT adopting circular procurement. *e.g. Missed cost savings, non-compliance with EU regulations.*

☞ People change habits when they feel confident, see clear benefits and experience positive reinforcement.

### Next steps

To change procurement, we must fix the context, social norms and psychology. What does this mean in practice?

☞ **Leaders:** Provide training, remove barriers and empower teams to innovate.

☞ **Procurement pros:** Engage with peers, share best practices and push for change.

☞ **Policy makers:** Build procurement systems that make circular the default.

Struggling with circular procurement challenges? Let's talk!  
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