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Towards the Implementation of Truly Circular Supply Chains

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The concept of circular economy is rapidly capturing attention as a way of integrating environmental and economic development goals. Supply chains are the key unit of action for the shift from linear to circular economies, but circular supply chains do not exist yet in practice and a theory on circular supply chain is missing in the scientific literature. Researchers addressed some specific issues related to a circular supply chain while focusing on topics such as industrial symbiosis or closed loop supply chain. Although relevant, these studies fail in capturing the specific nature of a circular supply chain, and they do not help researchers and practitioners in fostering the shift from linear to circular supply chain. In the light of these gaps and of the relevance of circular supply chains, this paper has three objectives. First, it proposes a preliminary definition of circular supply chain that underlines its difference with respect to existing supply chains. Second, it provides an empirically validated overview of the barriers and drivers hindering or fostering the shift from linear to circular supply chains. Third, it provides a set of managerial guidelines for the shift from linear to circular supply chains.