

Mission playbook

DDC

A design-led approach
to launching and driving missions

Danish Design Center

Mission definition

Missions are defined impacts for a concrete area or context that are bold, inspirational and widely relevant to society and clearly framed: targeted, measurable and time-bound.

Missions can be powerful frames for achieving significant societal goals, mobilising resources, linking activities across different disciplines and types of research and innovation, driving systemic change and making it easier for citizens to understand the value of investments in research and innovation.*

*Mazzucato, Mariana (2018): Mission-Oriented Research & Innovation in the European Union MISSIONS A problem-solving approach to fuel innovation-led growth. European Commission

A running prototype

The DDC playbook is an ever-changing work in progress.

It is built on years of experience enabling system transformation through the use of the designers' mindset, tools and methods. Experiences that we now link together within the framework of missions to create an operational approach to launching and driving missions.

What you see here is, therefore, a running prototype. A product that is forever in beta since we aim to learn and convey as much as we can from both our international relationships in the missions field, our own experiences of running missions within the green, social and digital area and our continuous development of practical tools and methods.

Thank you!

The framework we present here is adapted from "Three characteristics of mission launch" done by master students from the Institute of Innovation and Public Purpose visiting the Danish Design Centre in the spring of 2021.

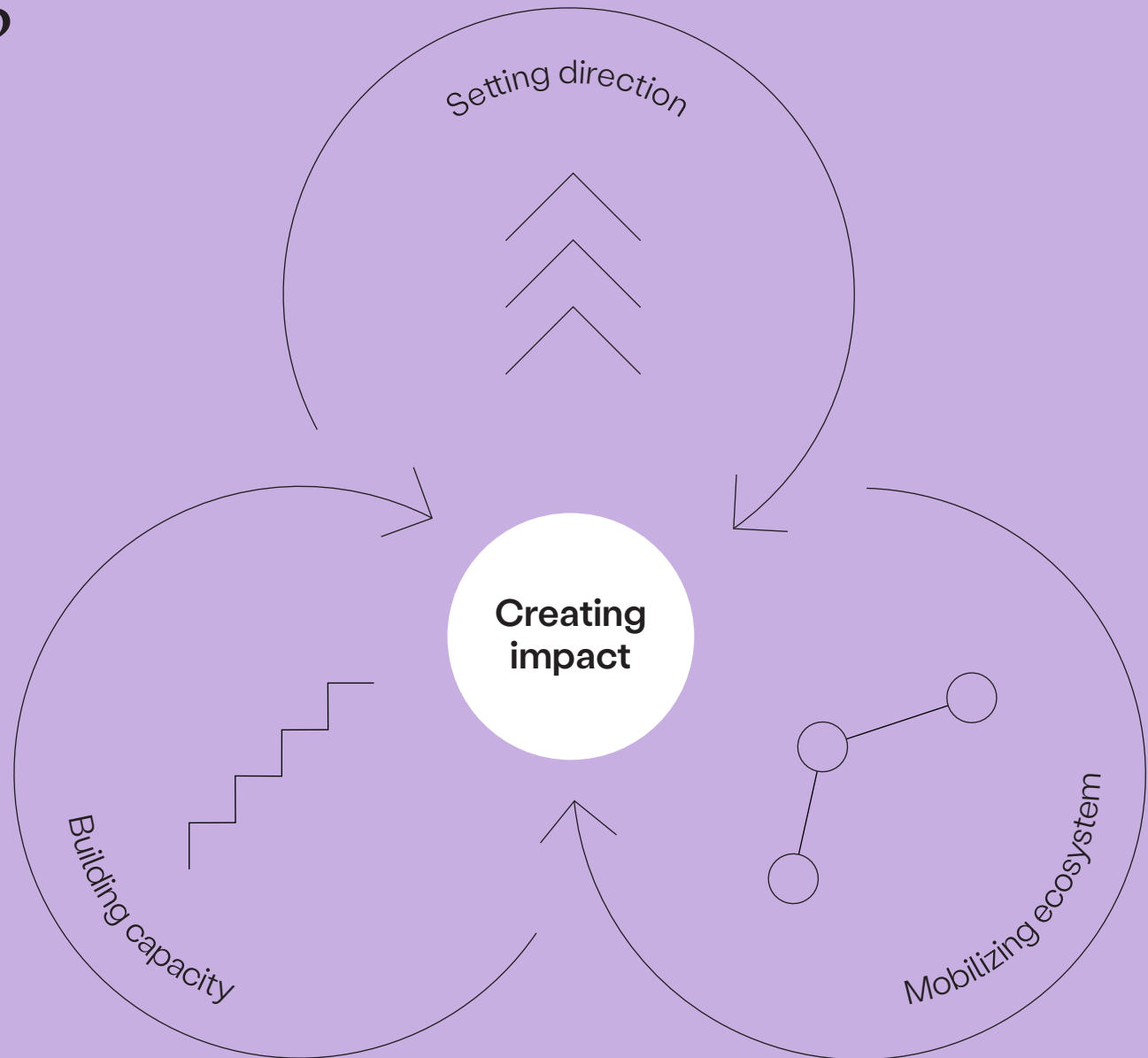
A huge thank you to Eugénie Carton, Nickolas Laport and Rodrigo Echeopar for your substantial contribution in analyzing our practice and for drawing the contours of the Danish Design Center-way of doing missions.

How do you launch and drive missions?

Missions provide a framework to solve complex challenges.

Successful missions can be pursued via three different but interrelated dimensions; **setting direction** (where to go), **mobilizing ecosystems** (with who) and **building capacity** (how to get there).

You must consciously and continuously work with these dimensions as guiding principles towards accelerating systemic change and, thus, achieving long-term impact.



Missions and design - the perfect match

Design and missions are made for each other. Missions are undertaken to provide better answers to grand complex challenges - systemic and wicked problems. Design is an approach suited to tackle exactly those types of problems. In both missions and design, the inherent relationship between problem and solution is that we see the contours of where we are going without knowing exactly how to get there. The thinking, methods, tools and skills design has to offer, provide a way forward in making missions operationable.

The core of design-driven methods is to challenge one's own assumptions, bring empathy into play, provide space for experiments, and last but not least "rehearse the preferred future" through prototypes. Designers have the ability to apply a holistic perspective and co-create new solutions across disciplines and sectors together with the us-

ers. And with strong skills within visualisation, designers manage to make complexity understandable og tangible.

Missions can, therefore, be seen as a design exercise where the capacity of an ecosystem to act in mission-oriented ways is something to be crafted.

Keep in mind that there is no one way of doing missions. Their point of departure, focus and scope is highly dependent on the context of the individual challenge. For instance, some missions are defined by government with a strong political mandate and a clear sense of direction, but where capacity or ecosystem needs to be built. Others are brought together in broad partnerships, where the ecosystem and the actors might be clearly defined, but the scope and the direction of the challenge may be more unclear. In order to create impact with mis-

sions, all three dimensions of setting direction, mobilizing ecosystems and building capacity must be considered. This playbook gives an introduction to these key elements and describes how a design approach can operationalize and maintain the continuous work to realize lasting and sustainable mission impact.

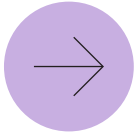


Creating impact

Missions are all about creating impact.

But how does impact in a mission-driven framework differ from how we usually view it and how do you work systematically towards creating it?

**Creating
impact**



Creating impact

What it is

We launch missions because our endeavours to address the large challenges we face as humanity have been ineffective.

We launch missions because we want to create impact.

Impact that we do not have the time to just sit and wait for.

Impact that needs a conjoined and directed effort in order to pivot us towards an alternative trajectory – out of the wicked problems we are tangled up in.

Instead of spending years analyzing and projecting which path is the right one to take in a fast-paced world where circumstances are continuously altered by events we

cannot predict - we need to act. Creating impact means allowing room for the uncertainty that is an inevitable part of long-term missions.

To create impact, we must set up mechanisms that facilitate a constant flow of learning from the activities we put in place and, more importantly, have a system in place that acts on these insights.

How to do it

Missions call for a structure that balance both stability and agility.

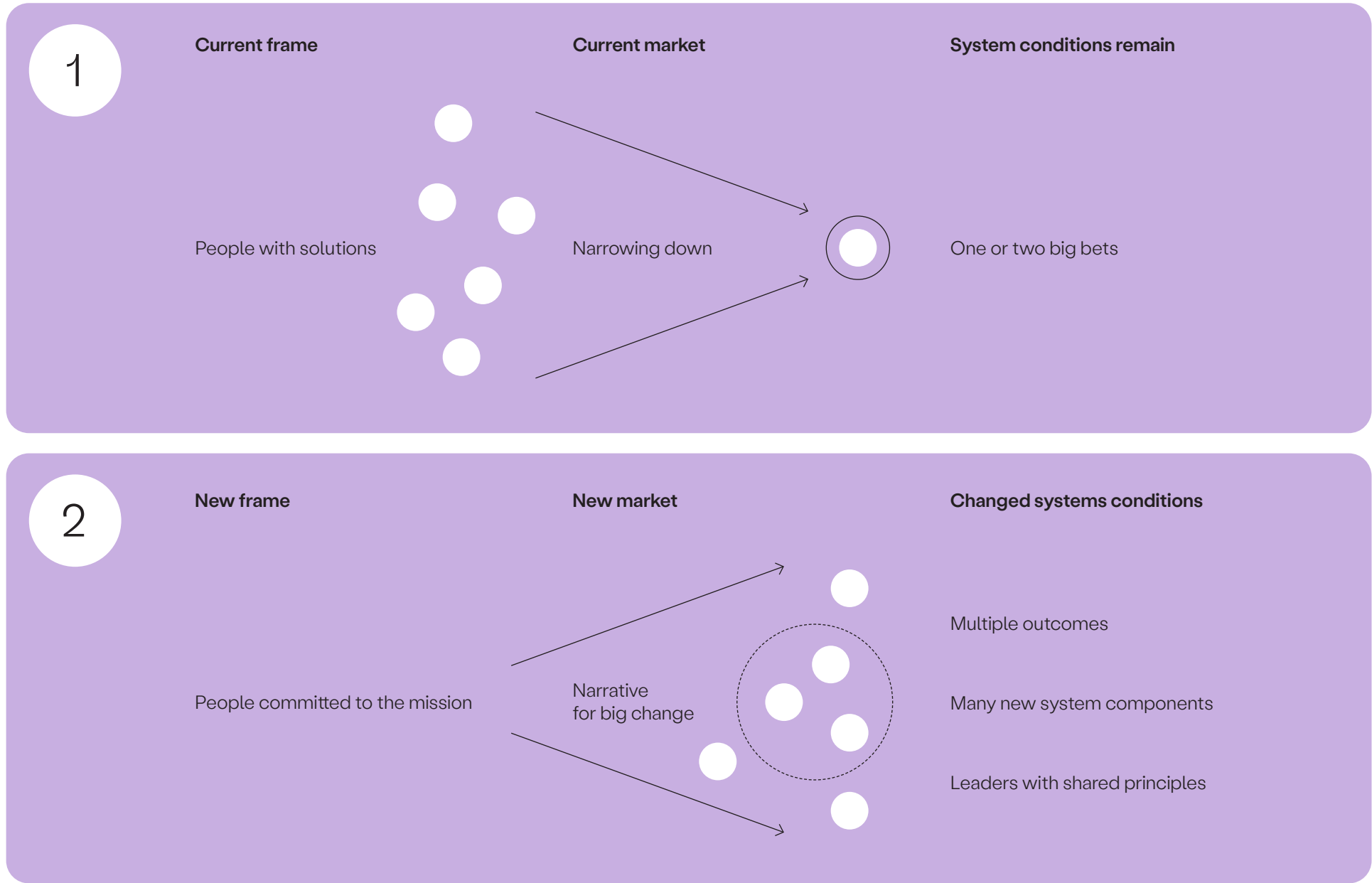
That means creating a **governance structure** for the mission work that leaves room for changing the project portfolio and the actor landscape as the mission progresses.

The foundation for making decisions like that is to build in **loops of learning** at the heart of the mission in order to constantly react and adapt to new learnings from both within and outside the mission ecosystem.

Broadening the frame in terms of impact to go beyond the mission ecosystem is crucial in order to secure that the **mission is built around creating impact from beginning till end**. This means, your task is not “just” to build the solution, but to create the system around the solution that makes it possible. Value creation, then, becomes a task of working towards committing people to the mission in order to **stimulate several smaller innovations that point in the same direction** rather than chasing the next big bang.

This is exemplified on page 7.

Create impact model



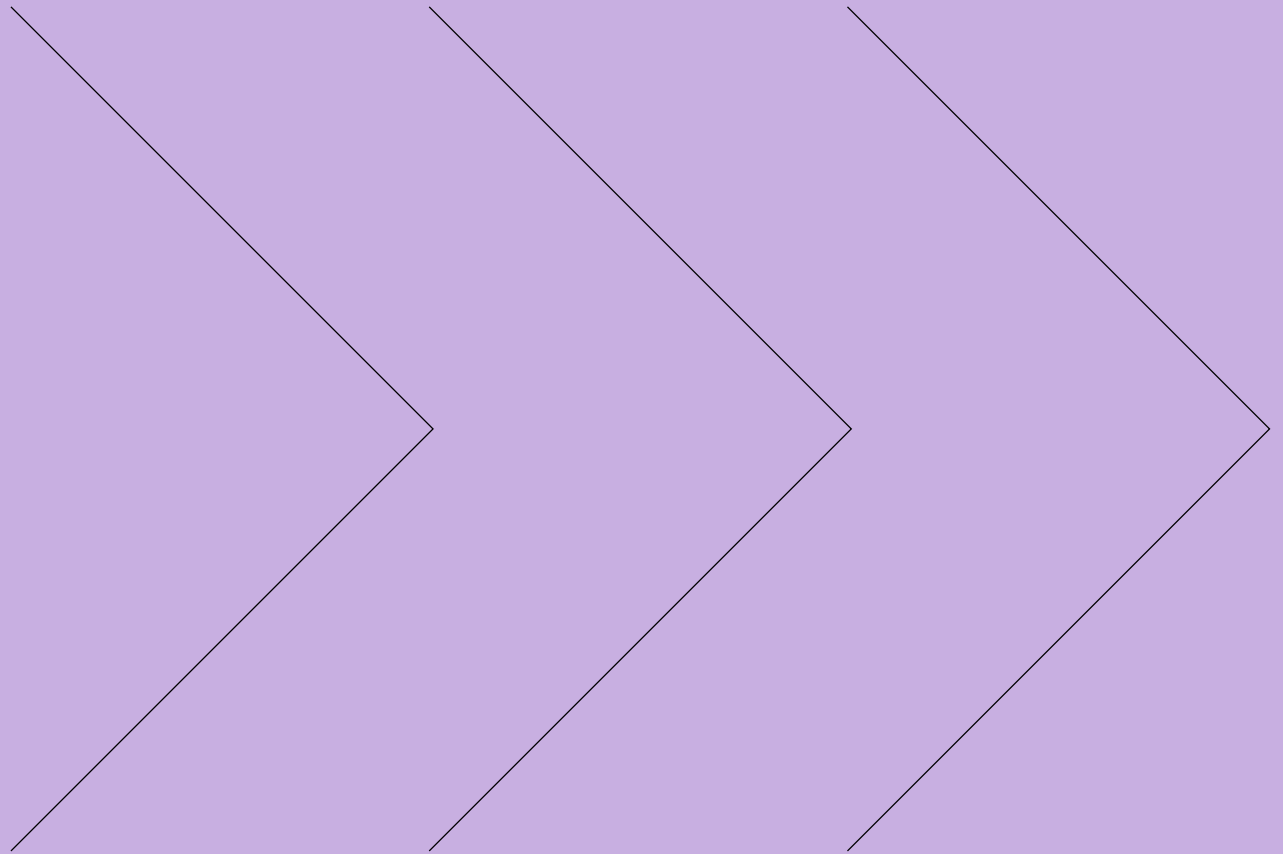
*Figure is an adaption from Conway R., Leadbeater C. & Winhall, J. (2019). The Impact Entrepreneur: Building a New Platform for Economic Security in Work (pp. 14–45). Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufacture and Commerce

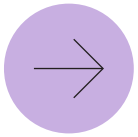


Setting direction

When you set out on a mission, you are going somewhere, you aim for a goal.

But how do we set a direction for an entire ecosystem to pursue?





Setting direction

What it is

The challenges we as society - and as humanity - face today do not suggest as straightforward a direction as sending a man to the moon. We may agree that we need to lower CO2 emissions, but how we lower it - the direction towards reaching that goal - can be taken via many different paths. While walking that path, it may be subject to technological advances, unforeseen natural catastrophes, new actors entering the ecosystem, and others leaving. Events and discoveries that we do not know of when setting out on the mission may well alter the direction as we go along. Therefore, the direction of the mission is not a given - it must be created and constantly revisited.

In this sense, the direction the direction of a mission is not a unified sin-

gle end point, but an intent: A sense of the future we strive to reach. We need a multi-dimensional and empathic perspective of the future if we are to act proactively on it in the present - be it as citizens, policy makers, researchers, entrepreneurs or managers.

Therefore, **setting direction is about awakening our shared imagination of what the future could be.** It is about creating preferred situations that we can relate to and strive for. Setting direction provides us the ability to shift from a problem focus to viewing the opportunity space when launching and driving missions.

How to do it

The saying goes that **"if you can imagine it - then you can design it."** This is not least the case for mission

work. By making future situations human, visual and concrete, design approaches can help scope and set the mission's direction from the outset. Further, design methods can contribute to a constant revisiting of direction. Through continuous trial and error as the mission work unfolds, it is possible **to create momentum in situations characterized by ambiguity and internal contradictions.** This is crucial - especially in complex systems where many different people, processes and structures have to meet, connect and create a higher sense of purpose.

Problem exploration and speculative design are valuable approaches when nearing in on and setting the direction.

To **explore the problem** means that

we must understand the potential for society - not just for the public but also for businesses, research and civic society - to solve the problem in question. Instead of jumping head first into creating solutions, we need to make sure that this is indeed a problem worth solving. We must also test the level of energy and interest among actors within the ecosystem.

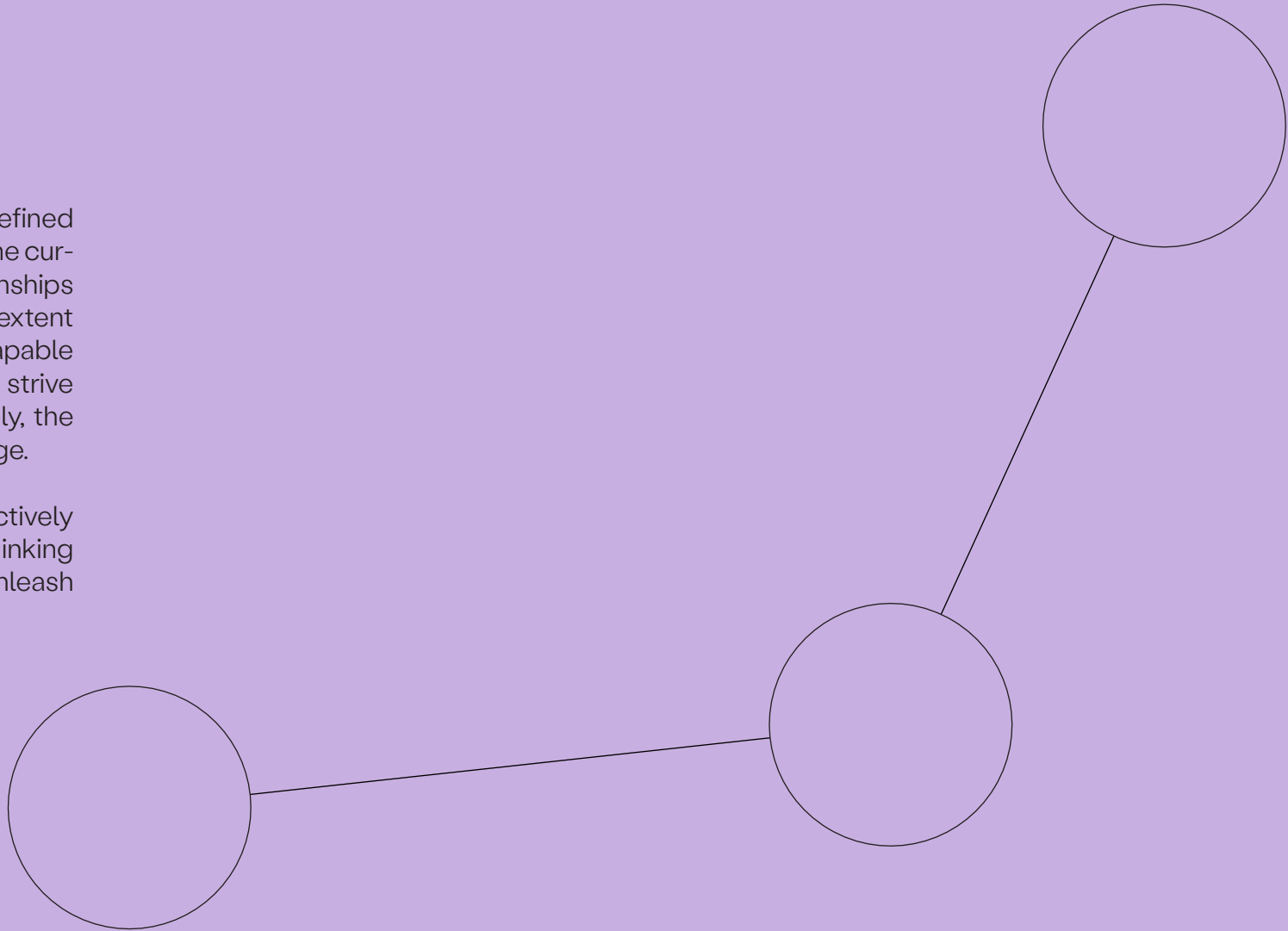
Understanding the problem and the actors' engagement in it is a necessary step. But just as important it is to **envision the future.** Through involvement of the ecosystem actors, the task is to paint a cohesive picture of the preferred future. This can be in the form of stories, images, or a film of the desired situation.

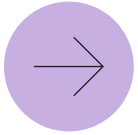


Mobilizing ecosystem

The problems of today are defined and shaped by the actors of the current ecosystem, their relationships and their transactions. To the extent that current actors are not capable of achieving the impact they strive for individually and collectively, the ecosystem will need to change.

But how do you work proactively and systematically with rethinking an ecosystem in order to unleash new solutions?





Mobilizing ecosystem

What it is

In short, mobilizing the ecosystem means gathering all relevant stakeholders (businesses, researchers, public and civic organizations, government, NGO's and associations) in the same room - around the same cause.

The challenge is to create that space for new conversations and knowledge exchange where new common ground and exploration of new partnerships and synergies can blossom.

Furthermore, the task is to acknowledge that everyone in the ecosystem is an expert in their own right and that all actors are highly dependent on each other in order to

create and accelerate real change. This requires more than just organizing the current system and the way it works differently. It is a constant calibration of the ecosystem in relation to the mission and the direction that has been set.

Consequently, this means cajoling the ecosystem out of "business-as-usual" and then keeping it there.

Carrying out mission-oriented innovation demands a shift in the understanding of the interactions within the ecosystem. A demand to move away from "what can I offer you and you offer me" to "what can we - together - offer the mission". It is not merely innovation spanning across

sectors. Rather, it is deep changes within the system that needs to be crafted.

How to do it

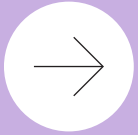
Looking at the ecosystem with fresh eyes and inviting its actors to change their ways takes a certain degree of convening power. Rallying actors to make a shift towards a common direction is a substantial task in itself when working in a mission-driven way.

Value creating system mapping, co-creation and visualization are design tools with a proven track record in aiding this work.

Value creating system mapping can help identify and map the actors in-

side (and outside) the ecosystem from a holistic perspective by dissolving sectors, industries and hierarchies. This entails asking how we can shift existing positions, relations, interactions and value exchanges and engage actors currently on the fringes of the ecosystem in order to spark change.

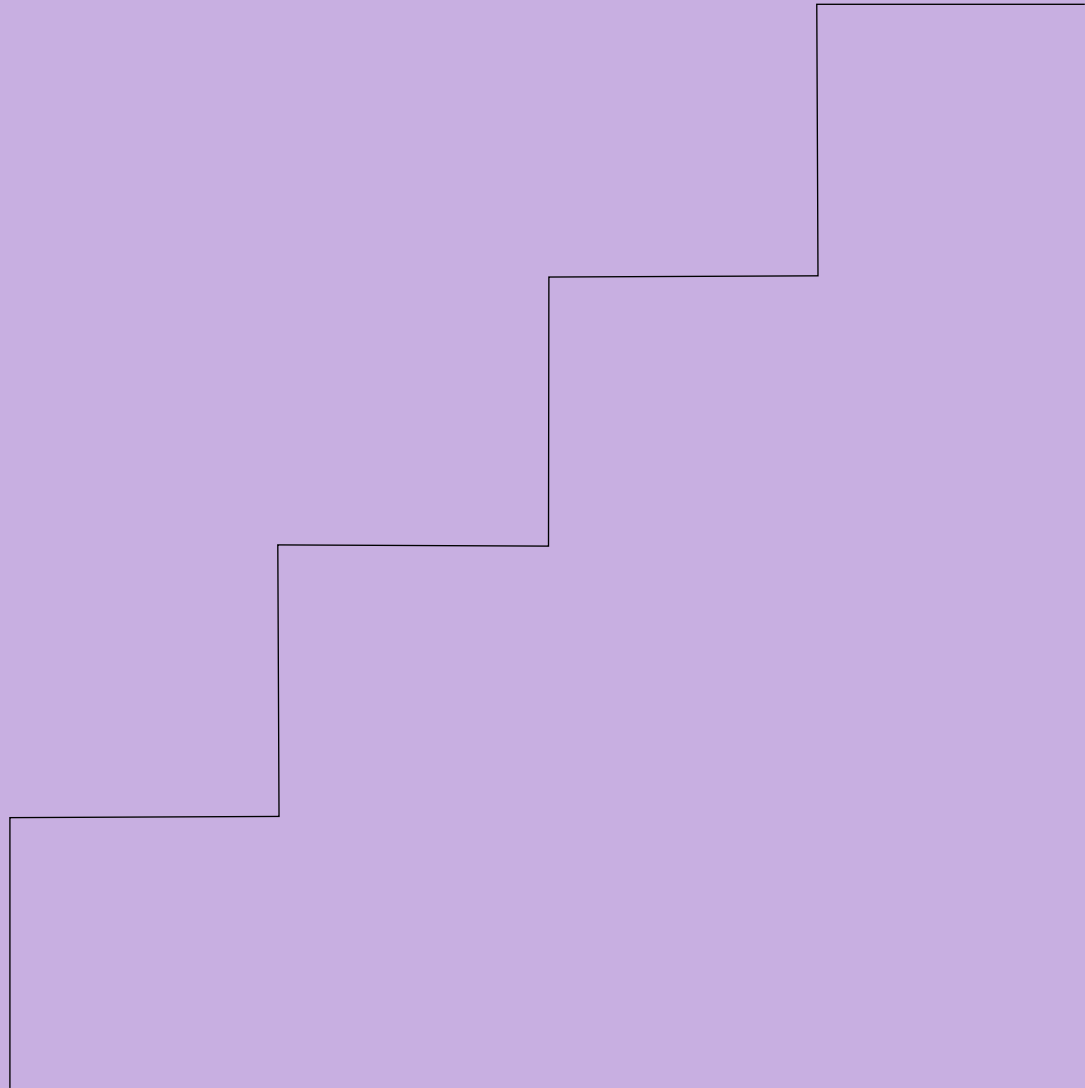
Co-creation and visualisation tools emphasize not what we can do individually but what we can do together. Designers' ability to visualize everything from conversations to challenges and ideas is valuable in creating a common language and establishing a shared understanding.

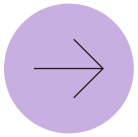


Building capacity

To mobilize the ecosystem towards a new, joint direction cannot be done overnight. It requires a focused and persistent effort for the whole ecosystem to start (re)acting differently.

But how do you build a mission that not only strive to realize its defined goal but also ensures that capacity is heightened within the system so it becomes capable of tackling both current and future challenges?





Building capacity

What it is

Capacity building happens as soon as processes and activities of setting direction and mobilizing the ecosystem are activated. All three dimensions run in parallel in a dynamic interplay that - together - creates impact.

Building capacity is the ability to continuously be curious, sensitive and open to the changes in the ecosystem, be it relations, connections or value exchanges.

Building capacity to succeed in launching and pursuing a mission is about mobilizing lasting resources in the ecosystem. Think about which methods, knowledge, skills, networks, funding and organizational elements - such as leader-

ship - that need to be in place for the ecosystem to work towards the goal of the mission.

On an operational level, capacity is about building the set of pathways to reach the mission: the mission portfolio. This will typically consist of projects and activities that collectively contribute to the mission.

How to do it

Building capacity concerns the ability of the organization and the broader ecosystem to realize the mission.

This includes the ability to **run the research and innovation processes bottom-up** - utilizing a broad variety of approaches, tools and methodologies.

But also to **organize and govern the ecosystem** in ways that support mission-driven innovation and facilitate the right interactions and dialogues within the system.

Building and leading a **mission portfolio** consisting of a multitude of funding sources, actors, projects and activities and **continuously mobilizing the resources** within the system. And in addition also to **learn from data and insights gathered on the ground** in the distributed web of activities and systematically build loops of learning, sparking it into new initiatives.

In that sense, building capacity is more of a subtle dimension feeding from and supporting the activities of the others. But it is also a

dimension that is crucial if we want to make the system strong enough to spiral off the current path in order to achieve the ambitious goal of the mission.