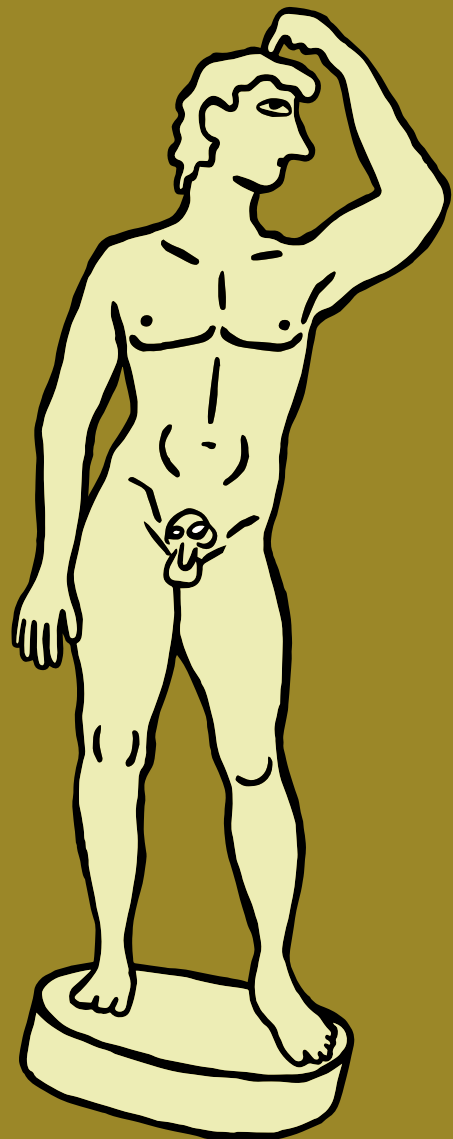


# Missions *playbook*

DDC

A design-led  
approach to launching  
& driving missions



## 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-oriented innovation can be a powerful approach to achieving significant societal goals, mobilizing 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.\*

Today, organizations across the globe are embracing mission-oriented innovation as a key approach to realizing their objectives. A recent survey conducted by the Danish Design Center (DDC) for the Organization for Economic Development and Co-operation (OECD) shows that missions are addressed by actors both in the public and private sectors; and they are more or less equally initiated from the policy level (top down) as from the market and grass roots level (bottom up).\*\*

## A running prototype

This DDC missions playbook is an ever- changing work in progress.

It is built on years of experience, collaborating with partners in Denmark and globally, 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 initiating and realizing long-term sustainable impact.

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 to enable green, digital and social transitions and our continuous development of practical tools and methods.

## Acknowledgements

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.

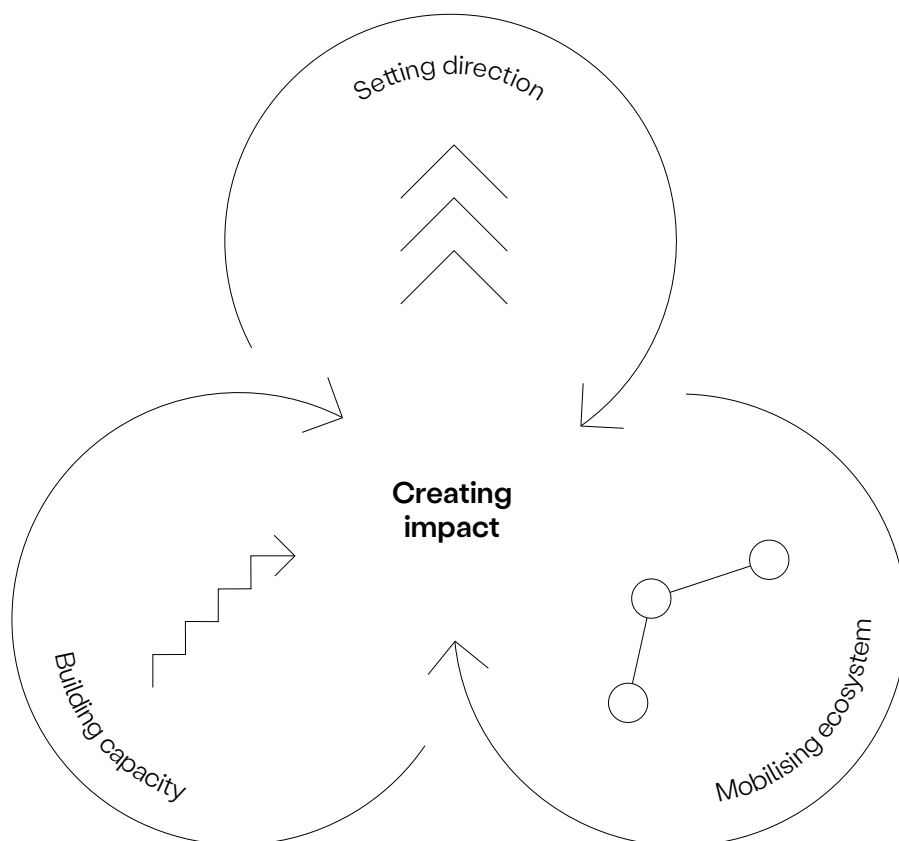
A huge thank you to Eugénie Cartron, Nickolas Laport and Rodrigo Echecopar for your substantial contribution in analyzing our practice and for drawing the contours of the Danish Design Center-way of doing missions.

# How do you launch and drive missions?

Missions provide a framework to address 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 by design

DDC

Organizations undertake missions to provide better answers to grand complex challenges - systemic and wicked problems - by spurring innovation and sustainable growth. A relevant way to think about these challenges is through the framework of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). While the SDGs point to particular goals to reach (by 2030), they also provide a shared language articulating the global challenges facing humanity and our planet. Applied in the right way, design is an approach highly suited to tackle exactly those types of problems. In both missions and design, the inherent relationship between problem and solution is that we explore where we need to go without knowing exactly how to get there. The thinking, approaches, methods, tools and skills design has to offer, provide ways of making missions concrete and 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 and iterative learning. Designers have the ability to apply a holistic perspective and co-create new solutions across disciplines and sectors together with the users. And with strong skills within visualization, designers manage to make complexity understandable and 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.

There is no one right 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 missions, 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 design approaches 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

DDC

## **What it is**

We launch missions because our endeavors to address the challenges we face as humanity have been ineffective. We launch missions because we want to create impact. Impact that is urgent. Impact that needs a both collaborative 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 forecasting 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 think less in single activities and more in portfolios. We must consider how to involve a wider field – for instance defined by a policy or market domain – to take part in achieving a concrete, measurable change.

And most importantly, we must also set up mechanisms that facilitate a constant flow of learning from the activities we put in place, and have a management process in place that acts on these insights.

## **How to do it**

Missions call for a structure that balances stability and agility – predictability and unpredictability. 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.

This means, the task is not “just” to build the solution, but to create the system around the solution that makes its achievement 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.

Ultimately, the goal of mission-oriented innovation is to realize not only a desired impact (such as reduced CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, more ethical digital products or improved mental health in the population), but to permanently change the system conditions under which such impacts can be produced. This entails both changed policy conditions and new markets, eg. new types of demand as well as supply. This means that while missions are intended to facilitate a

particular long-term impact there must be a recognition that “impact” can be enabled through multiple outcomes.

This is exemplified on next page.

### **Case**

In 2020, the DDC was charged by the Danish government – and its Board of Directors – to build a long-term mission focused on the circular economy. Building on our new five-year strategy, we decided to take a mission-oriented approach, meaning that we would need to build an entire portfolio of projects to realize the ambition.

As a first step, we built a roadmap outlining how we would grow our project portfolio on circular design and business models from less than 10 percent of our budget to 60 percent in just three years. This roadmap outlined not only project proposals, but “infrastructure” activities such as communication, new partnerships and investments in new tools and capabilities. Underpinning this we created a systematic learning mechanism - a process of on-going portfolio assessment and adjustment. This mechanism turned out to be crucial in our management of the evolution of this mission.

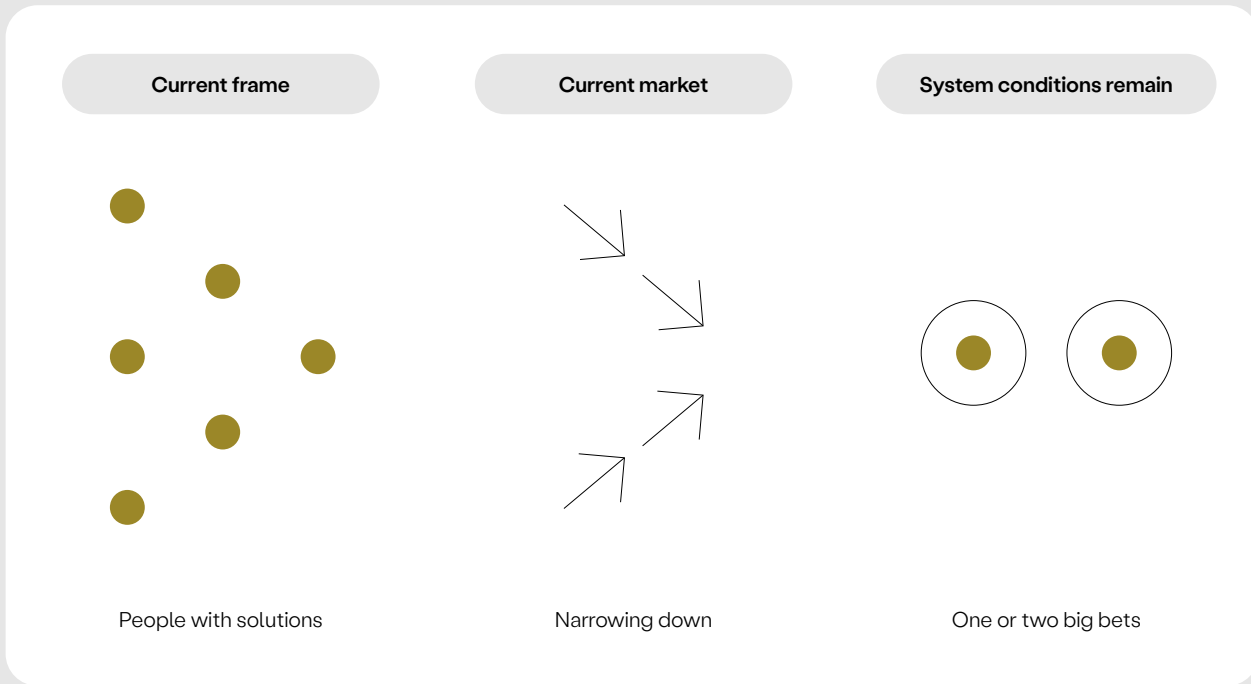
### **Tools**

Systematic portfolio management and learning processes are critical to not only tracking but dynamically managing the pursuit of mission outcomes and long-term impact.

- Learning mechanism
- Mission management model

# Creating impact model

1



2

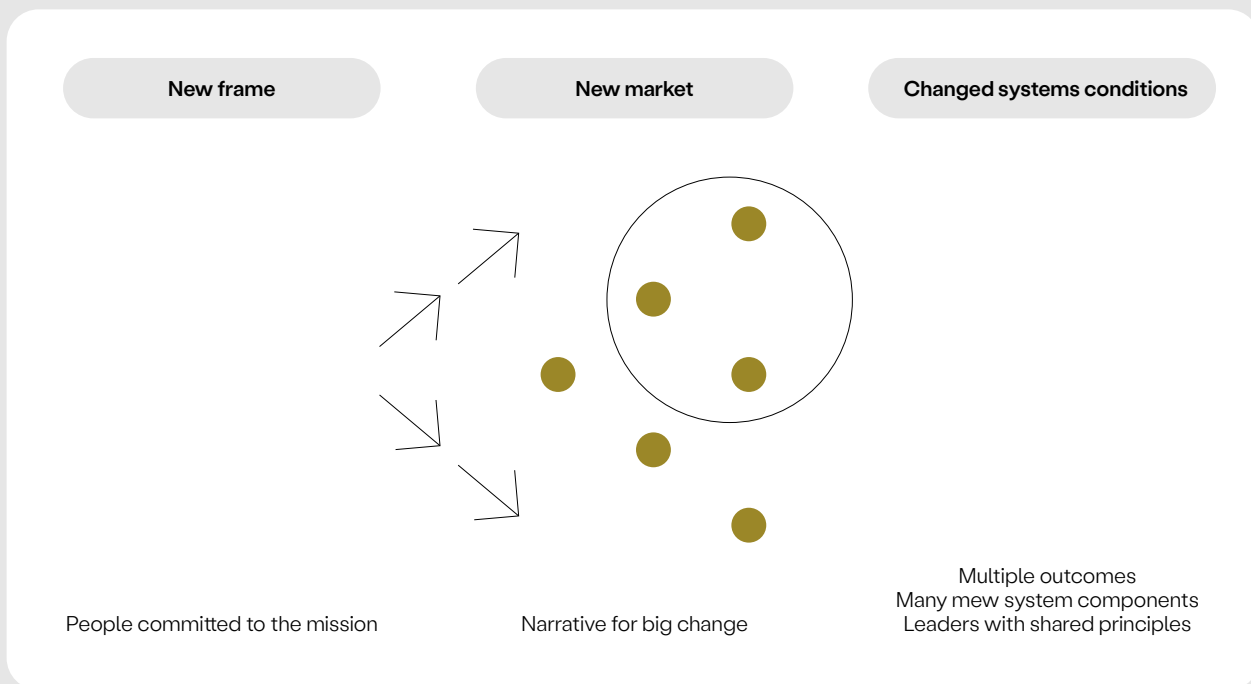
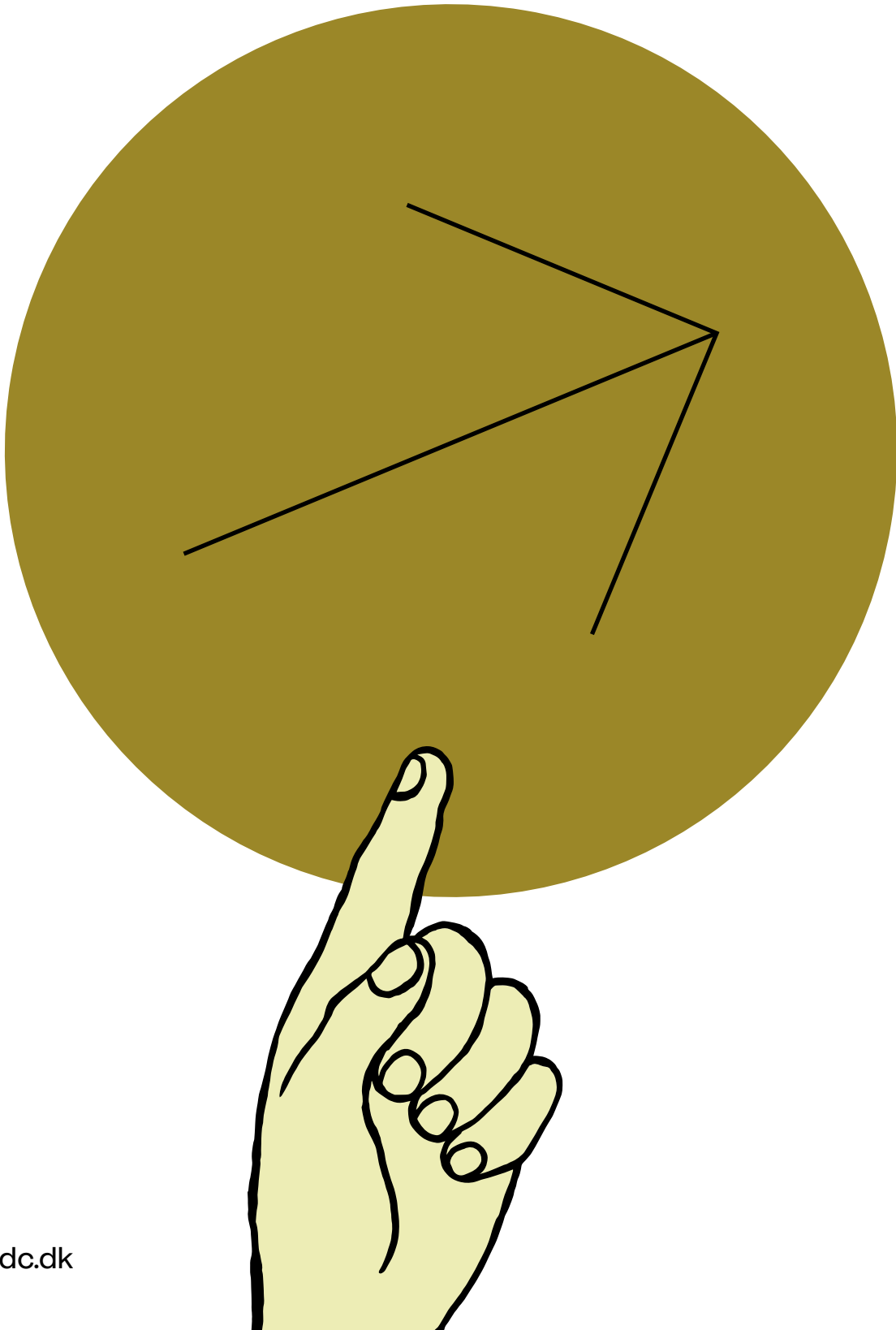


Figure is an adaption from Conway, R. Leadbeater, C. & Winhal, J. (2019) The impact Entrepreneur. Building a New Platform for Economic Security in work (pp. 14-15). Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufacture and Commerce.



# Setting direction

When you set out on an 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 person to the moon and ensuring a safe return. We may agree that we need to lower CO<sub>2</sub> 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 of a mission is not a unified single 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 address 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 future situation.

### **Cases**

We wanted to define a relevant direction in response to the European Union's New European Bauhaus (NEB) program. The NEB, launched by European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, invited designers, architects and artists to spearhead Europe's transition towards a green, carbon neutral economy with a particular emphasis on the built environment.

The DDC helped set the direction for this ambitious mission by inviting ecosystem stakeholders (business leaders, policy makers, technologists, academics, designers, architects and artists) to imagine what kind of society we would need to realize by 2050. The response, elicited through a series of carefully crafted online workshops led to the mission formulation: "Designing the irresistible circular society". This direction became the glue that held the subsequent mission building and proposal process together. It also led to a White Paper, with the same title, co-created with the Danish Architecture Centre, Bloxhub and Creative Denmark, which illustrated the types of solutions that can power the mission.

### **Tools**

Setting direction can be underpinned by scenario design – using storytelling, foresight and design artifacts to engage participants in exploring plausible futures.

Scenario design

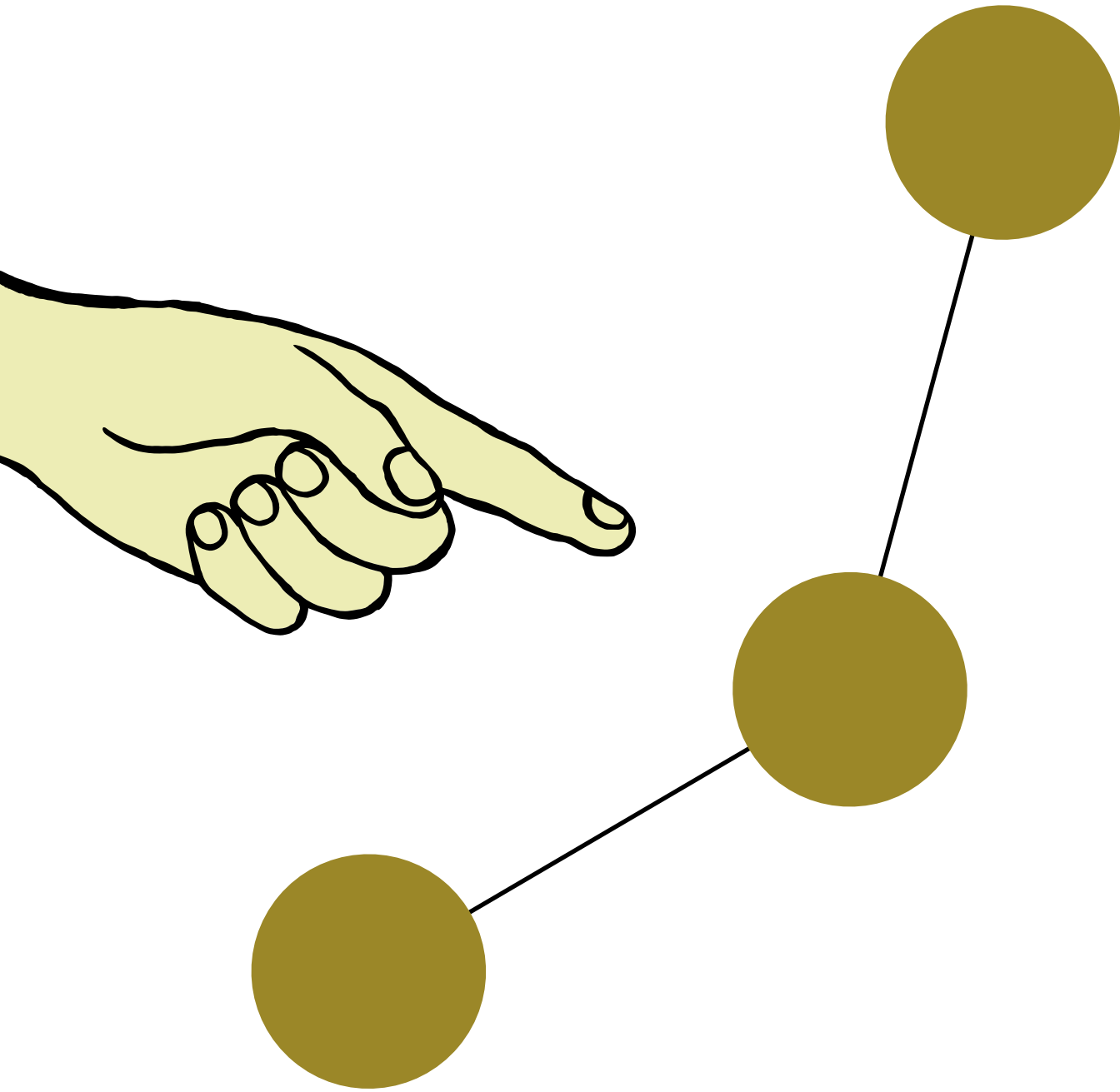
Find it [here](#)

Future tools

Find it [here](#)

# 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

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 the desired 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 nudging 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 inside (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 visualization 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.

## Case

The DDC worked with the Bikubenfonden – a philanthropic organization focusing amongst others on creating impact for vulnerable youth. In order to unpack the ecosystem of relevance to its long-term mission to transform youth support systems, we facilitated a number of workshops with Foundation staff to map the value creating system for this social field. These workshops led to a visualization of policy, civic and business actors across as diverse fields as social policy, tech entrepreneurship, and the cultural sector. The resulting maps of the value creating system allowed the Foundation, in a visual way, to see the entire actor landscape as well as the connections and interactions between individual players. This again allowed Bikubenfonden to position itself in the relevant places and develop its portfolio of activities.

## Tools

— Value creating system map

# Building capacity

## What it is

To work collaboratively towards a shared mission, the involved actors must have the capacity to do so. Think about which methods, knowledge, skills, networks, funding and organizational elements - such as leadership - that need to be in place for the ecosystem to work towards the common goal of the mission.

Capacity building can thus take many forms: Training in new competencies at individual and group level; Access to methods and tools; New digital systems to collect data and support on-going learning; Governance models that allow for legitimate collective decision making; Funding instruments that support dynamic portfolio management; and more.

In practice, capacity building happens as soon as collaborative processes of setting direction and mobilizing the ecosystem are activated. All three dimensions run in parallel in an interplay that - together - are required to enable long-term impact.

As initiator of a mission, you have the responsibility to question whether the current ecosystem actors have the capacity to contribute and add value to the process. Identifying the needs for capacity building requires the ability to continuously be curious, sensitive and open to the changes in the ecosystem, be it relations, connections or value exchanges.

## How to do it

Building capacity concerns the ability of not just your own organization but the broader ecosystem to realize the mission.

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

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.

### **Tools**

Capacity for contributing to mission-oriented innovation can take many forms. At the DDC we have assembled a range of design tools which, depending on the task, can be relevant to mission work.

Find tools and methods [here](#)

Additionally, we have curated this global repository of design tools for the OECD. Find them [here](#)

DDC

Danish Design Center



