Policy makers as institutional entrepreneurs: The rise of mission-oriented innovation policy

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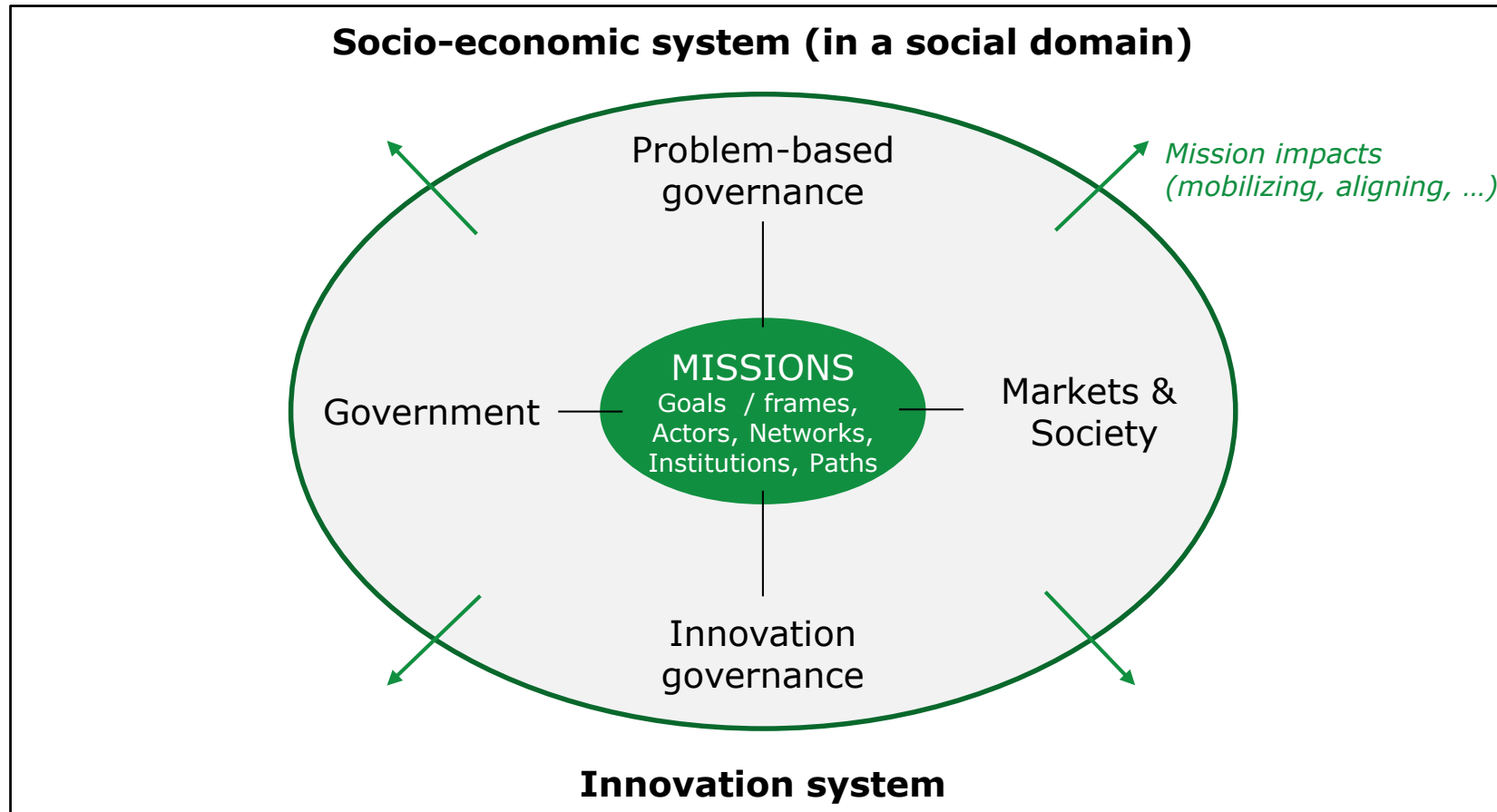
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  - *Preliminary illustration from two Dutch missions*
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Introduction

- Rising interest for missions and corresponding policies
  (Mazzucato, 2016; Edler & Fagerberg, 2017; Hekkert et al., 2020)

- New intervention logics regarding 'transformations'
  (Weber & Rohracher, 2012; Schot & Steinmueller, 2019; Borras & Edler, 2020)

- New government roles → Institutional theory

  - Overcoming resistance, creating legitimacy
    (Battilina et al., 2009; Jolly et al., 2016)

  - Agency in relation to system changes
    (Kukk et al., 2016; Fuenfschilling & Truffer, 2016)

- *"What can we learn from an institutional perspective on mission-oriented innovation policy?"*

Missions and mission-oriented innovation policies

Socio-economic system (in a social domain)

Problem-based governance

Government

MISSIONS
Goals / frames, Actors, Networks, Institutions, Paths

Markets & Society

Innovation governance

Mission impacts (mobilizing, aligning, …)

Innovation system

Example: *"A sustainable and completely circular economy by 2050, with resource use halved by 2030"*

The challenges missions respond to	Principles for managing a mission
1. Uncertainty and contestation	4. Setting specific ambitious goals
2. Complexity and comprehensiveness	5. Providing directionality
3. Urgency	6. Involving stakeholders
	7. Adjusting incentives
	8. Coordinating policies
	9. Evaluating in new ways

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Source: Janssen, Torrens, Wesseling, Wanzenböck, Patterson (2020)

Missions and mission-oriented innovation policies

Mission-oriented innovation system:

tier 2   tier 1

MISSION

- *combining*
- *catalyzing*
- *(de)selecting*
- *initiating*
- *…*

Technological innovation system

Solution A

Symbiosis, competition, …

Solution B

National innovation system

Adapted from: Janssen, Hekkert & Frenken (2019)
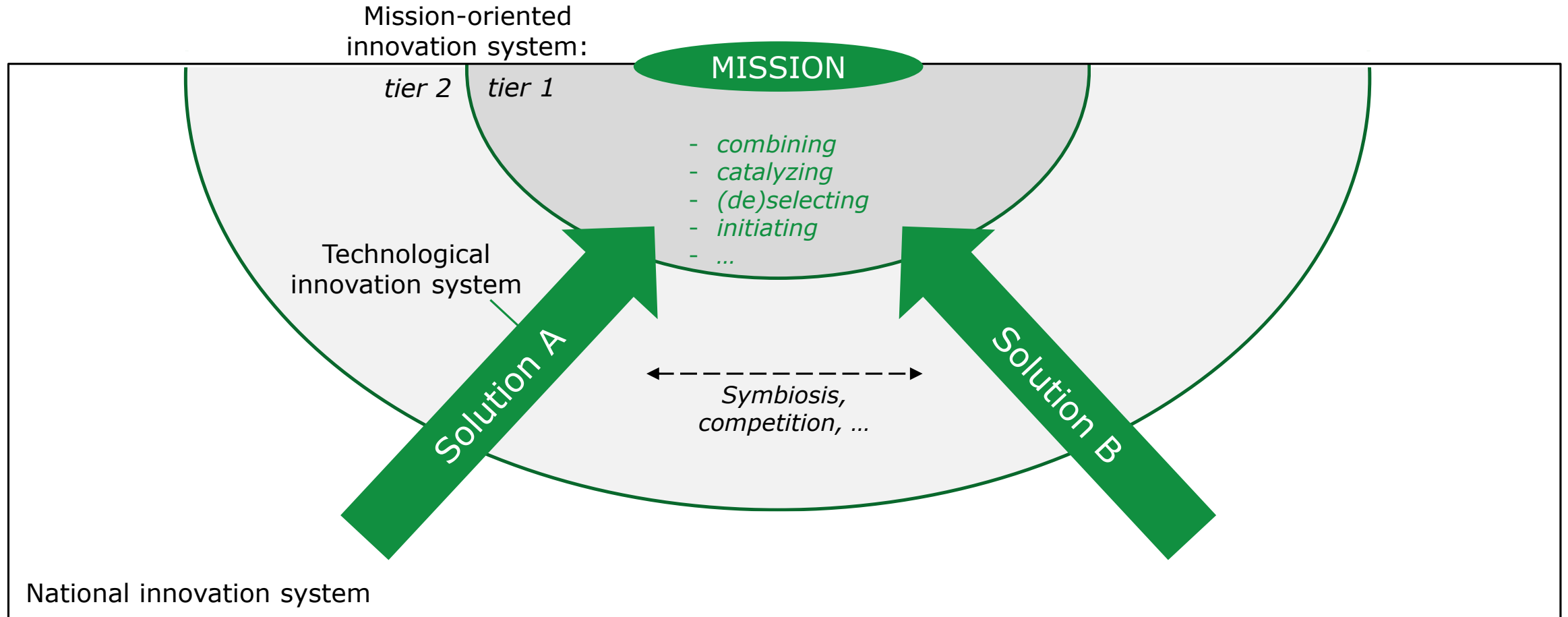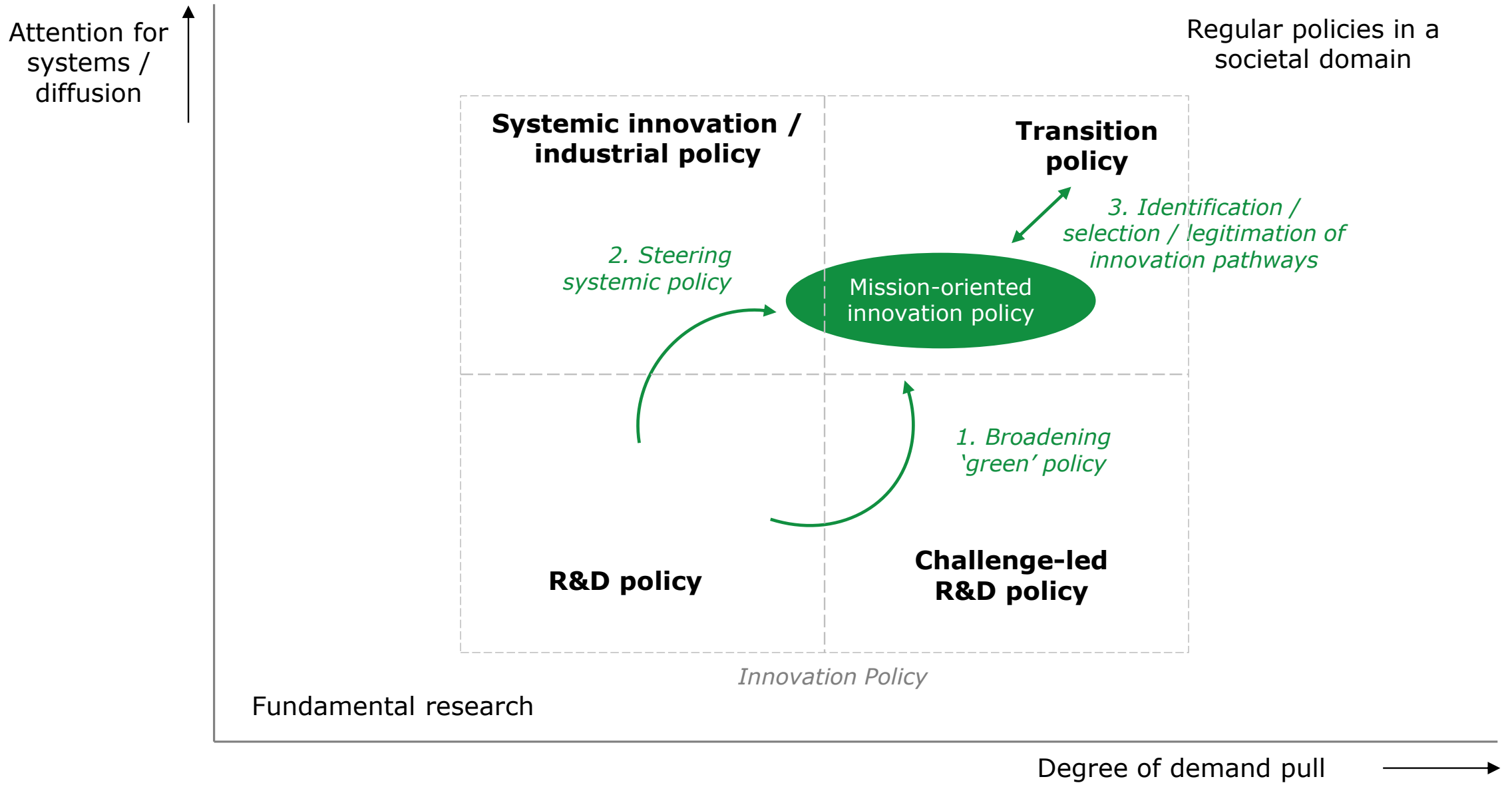
"Mission cycle"
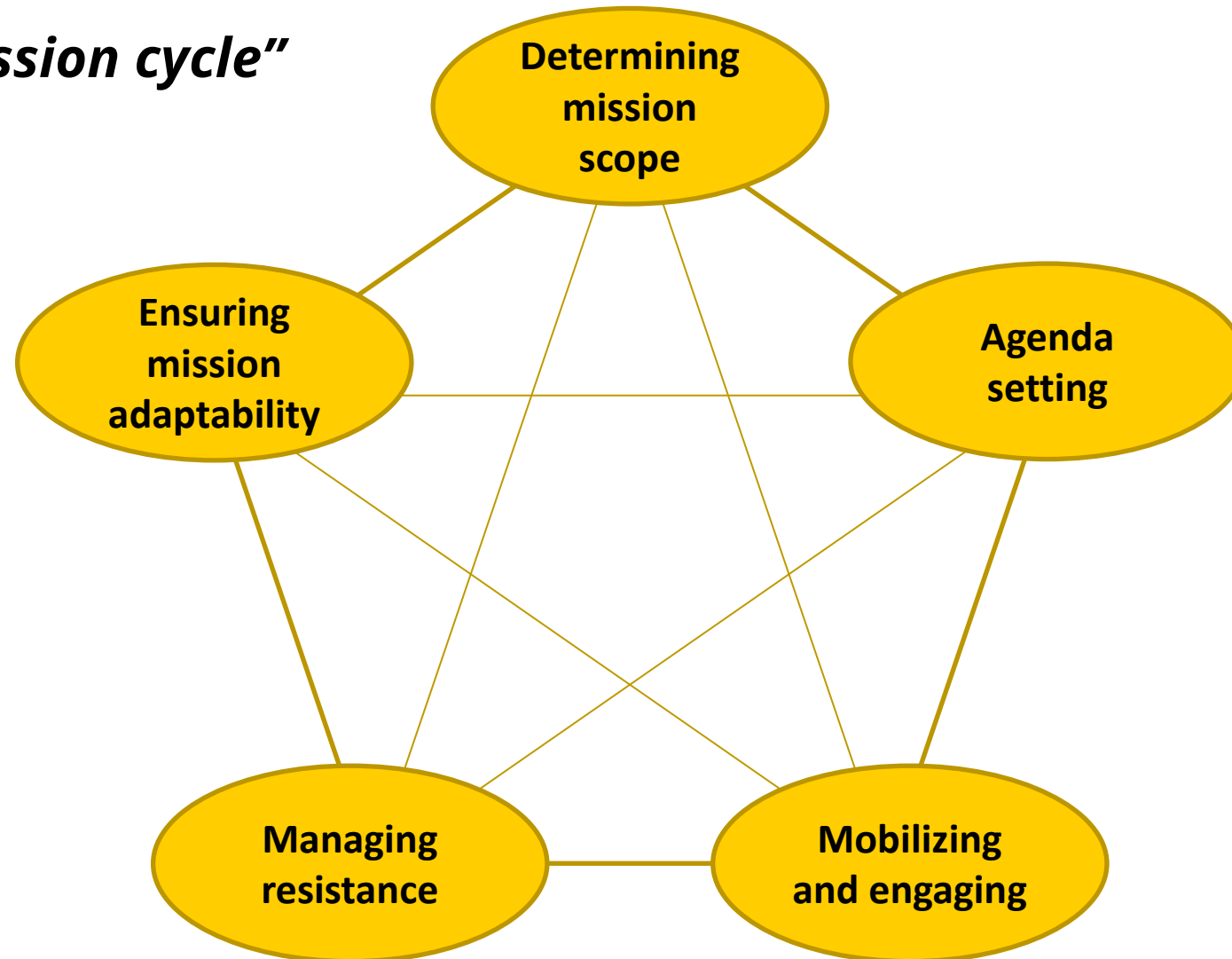
Missions and institutional entrepreneurship

Mission activity	Institutional theory concept	Tension	Questions	Risk
Determining mission scope	Vision on creation and disruption (for overcoming isomorphism / inertia)	Setting specific targets versus setting broad 'orienting conditions' for societal activity	Should missions provide concrete, actionable targets to focus attention, or instead focus on setting broad 'goal posts' within which societal actors develop solutions to complex problems?	A complex adaptive systems perspective suggests that narrow target-setting is unlikely to succeed. Yet the notion of missions is premised on the idea of providing directionality that is otherwise lacking. How to reconcile these competing ideas?
Agenda setting	Collective openness	How are missions decided? Who is involved, and who is not, and why?	How open or closed are agenda-setting processes for missions? What are the implications of different actors being included / excluded (e.g. government, industry, community, marginalized social groups?)	If missions are set by an elite or closed group then they are likely to be contested by other social actors. Yet if 'all' social groups are considered, then missions may not ever get off the ground. There is a need for balancing boldness with inclusion, but how can this be achieved?
Mobilizing and engaging	Mobilize allies (agency, opportunities, resources), discourse, vision frames	How to translate broad interest in strong commitment?	How to organize and tap into self-organization? Can missions leverage agency, opportunities and resources?	Policy makers should strike a balance between initiating own activities to meet their goals and encouraging others to contribute to that goal; following just one of these approaches would either be very costly or otherwise lack possibilities to exercise control and provide guidance.
Managing resistance	Creating (social) legitimacy	Treating an issue as a mission gives it urgency, but this may lead to overlooking critical social effects	What are the social impacts of missions (e.g. distributional effects, shifts in patterns of political power, impacts on property rights or political rights)? How do these social impacts influence the social legitimacy of a mission? More broadly, when is a mission legitimate or not? Does legitimacy change over time (e.g. increase, decrease, differently constituted), and if so, under which circumstances?	Is there something inherent about the normative character of missions? For example, would geoengineering led by the US or China be considered a legitimate mission if they labelled it as such? If not, why not? Should the notion of missions be imbued with some sort of normative quality (e.g. sustainability, equity)? If so, what does this mean for our analytical understanding of missions and their governance? For example, does it need to involve both means and ends? How does this relate to economic and governance theory that is cautious about specifying ends?
Ensuring mission adaptability	Avoiding inertia and isomorphism in policy	Fixity vs flexibility in missions over long timeframes and between places/problems	To what extent, and by which processes, do missions adapt over time and differ across places (e.g. in response to new knowledge, contextual circumstances, and political priorities)?	Missions that are inflexible may not remain appropriate or credible in a rapidly changing world. On the other hand, 'mission creep' over time where new political agendas / interests are imposed onto an existing mission may change the purpose of the mission, or undermine its social legitimacy

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Preliminary findings from two case examples (NL)

Conclusions

- The institutional perspective highlights a set of activities overlooked by studies on mission policies/governance.

- The activities also point at some important tensions.

- The illustration of two Dutch missions shows variety in the degree and conduct of institutional enterpreneurship (regarding individual missions and MIPs).

- Further research could help to create an understanding of which practices might work under which conditions.

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For more info, see:

Mission-oriented Innovation policy observatory (MIPO)
www.uu.nl/en/research/copernicus-institute-of-sustainable-development/mission-oriented-innovation-policy-observatory