

Mission Possible: Assessing Governance Approaches For Transformative Policy in Germany

Focus Paper #26



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Focus Paper #26

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1. Institutional reforms as a foundation for successful mission-oriented policy in Germany

1.1 Overview and key challenges

In recent years, mission-oriented policies – driven in part by the mounting societal challenges – have firmly taken root in political practice. A growing number of countries, including Germany, are embracing mission-oriented strategies (Kuittinen et al. 2018b; Kuittinen et al. 2018a; Larrue 2021).

However, implementing these interministerial and cross-sectoral strategies remains a major challenge in practice. Successfully driving these efforts requires the establishment of new coordination frameworks and operational models. In this context, the focus has shifted toward identifying effective (institutional) governance structures as key enablers of mission success (Janssen 2021; Lindner et al. 2021). Past experience (see section 1.2 and Lindner et al. 2023) has shown that Germany's existing institutional structures suffer from deeply embedded issues that hinder the effective implementation of mission-oriented and other transformative policies. Moreover, the choice of appropriate governance structures is a prominent topic in the federal government's current "Zukunftsstrategie", i.e. the Future Research and Innovation Strategy (EFI 2024).

It is no surprise, then, that various institutional innovations are being explored as alternatives to the status quo (see sections 1.3 and 1.4). Some of these ideas stem from recommendations by government advisory bodies or research institutions, while others are already in use in Germany or neighboring countries. While all these approaches share the goal of improving the governance and execution of mission-oriented policies, they vary significantly in focus and the extent they deviate from existing structures. This raises the question: Which of these institutional innovations are truly suited to address Germany's unique challenges,

and what obstacles might arise in the process of implementing them?

This paper aims to tackle these questions, providing guidance for policymakers and practitioners tasked with implementing mission-oriented policies. Specifically, this focus paper:

- Takes a first-of-its-kind comparative look at solutions that have so far only been discussed in isolation and offers a **systematic assessment of their strengths, weaknesses**, and potential challenges. In contrast to cross-national comparative studies (Breznitz et al. 2013; Janssen et al. 2023b; Janssen et al. 2023a), this analysis explicitly weighs the advantages and disadvantages of each solution against the specific institutional and political conditions that shape transformative policymaking in Germany.
- Offers a **differentiated analysis of how the strengths and weaknesses of these new solutions play out in addressing key governance challenges** – such as mobilizing non-state actors, coordination across sectors and overcoming siloed organizational structures – within critical areas like climate-neutral industries, the energy transition and healthcare. Based on this analysis, suitable governance solutions are identified for each scenario.
- **Aims to clarify the range of policy options available in the German context** and highlights **potential pathways** to support better decision-making. Drawing from these insights, the paper outlines **actionable recommendations for refining governance structures to advance the success of mission-oriented policies in Germany**.

1.2 Structural barriers to mission-oriented policy in Germany

Germany emerged as a European leader in mission-oriented policy with the launch of twelve missions under the 2018 adopted “High-Tech Strategy 2025”. However, during the initial implementation phase, several structural obstacles came to light, including insufficient coordination between ministries, unclear mission goals, and capacity limitations (Roth et al. 2021).

In light of the state of the 2023 Future Research and Innovation Strategy’s current rollout, this leadership position now appears at risk. On the one hand, the Expert Commission on Research and Innovation (EFI) (2024, p. 25) positively remarks that the strategy includes new approaches fit to address the upcoming transformations in an appropriate manner. On the other hand, the report by the EFI also laments a lack of alignment between various elements of the strategy and the actors involved. EFI Chair Uwe Cantner echoed this sentiment, stressing that overcoming siloed thinking is essential for successfully implementing mission-oriented policies in Germany.¹

As societal challenges continue to mount, the need for transformative policy approaches is growing. Many experts in both academia and political practice now see the integration of various policy areas, stakeholders and levels of action as increasingly urgent (cf. eg. OECD 2022, p. 330). However, existing structures seem ill-equipped to meet the new demands for more interministerial, cross-sectoral, reflexive and participatory policymaking (Lindner et al. 2021). In fact, in Germany, long-standing structural issues remain (Lindner et al. 2023), which have been observed across several areas of policy implementation:

- **Coordination gaps:** Rather than enabling synergies between different ministries and sectors, cross-cutting policies like missions often end being the lowest common denominator between ministries or are perceived as the sole domain of a specific ministry (cf. for example Hustedt et al. 2014). As seen in other contexts, the push for cross-sectoral action often stalls due to bureaucratic turf wars,

siloed thinking, departmental interests, and differing approaches to problem-solving (cf. e.g., Veit 2010). This frequently leads to what Scharpf (2000) calls “negative coordination,” where ministries focus primarily on minimizing the negative impacts on their own agenda, rather than fostering genuine cooperation.

- **Organizational and cultural constraints:** Established administrative practices often clash with the demands of transformative policymaking (Braams et al. 2022), which require greater agility (Weber et al. 2021). Even when mission-oriented policies are prioritized politically, internal bureaucratic routines and incentive structures can block progress by resisting the flexibility and experimentation needed to explore different solutions.
- **Challenges in stakeholder activation:** Mission-oriented policy requires broad mobilization and involvement of a wide range of stakeholders. Yet, current practice tends to focus on consultative elements (Wittmann et al. 2024), often overlooking the fact that successful mission implementation hinges on actively engaging additional actors and mobilizing their resources (Lindner et al. 2021).

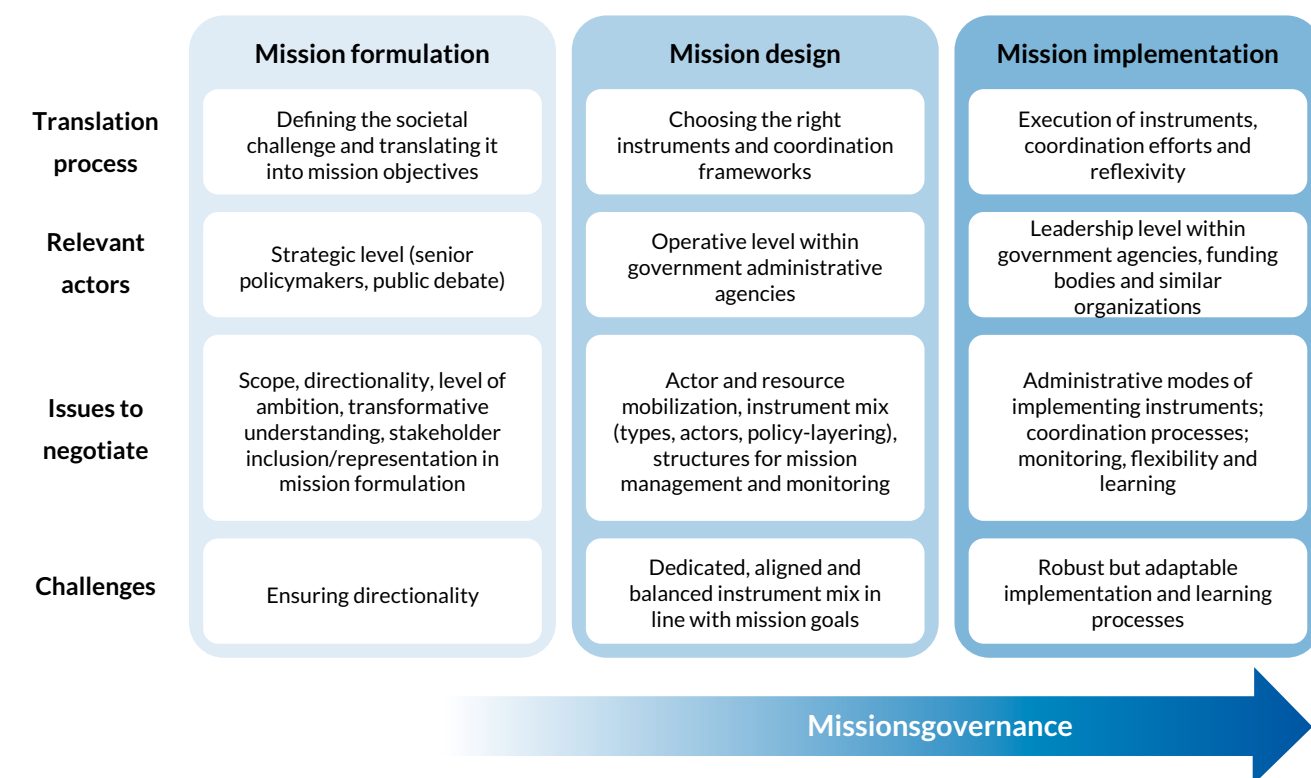
1.3 Why new institutional solutions seem necessary

Given the growing challenges and increasing demands on transformative, mission-oriented policies, continuing with the current mode of implementation seems less and less viable. Both academic and policy discussions have increasingly focused on how missions are governed, implemented (Janssen et al. 2021) and how the role of “mission owners”, such as lead ministries, as the key coordinators needs to be (re-)defined (Lindner et al. 2021; Lindner et al. 2023). While defining and formulation missions is an essential first step², the governance structures that shape mission design and implementation are critical to their success (see Figure 1).

1 <https://www.handelsblatt.com/politik/deutschland/innovationspolitik-zukunftsstrategie-der-forschungsministerin-erntet-wenig-begeisterung-/28767380.html>

2 See also the recently published study by Fraunhofer ISI on behalf of the Bertelsmann Stiftung on the practical implementation of mission formulation (Wittmann et al. 2024).

FIGURE 1: Phases of mission implementation
(adapted from Roth et al. 2021)



Source: Own illustration.

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The call for institutional innovation is also evident in recent reports, such as the EFI report 2024, which emphasizes the necessity of further institutional changes to create a more holistic approach to policy-making. These new goals bring increased demands on the actors involved, requiring new methods of policy development and communication. However, to date, the stakeholders in Germany and beyond have shown limited flexibility when it comes to adjusting their operational structures, routines, and processes (Larrue 2021; Roth et al. 2021). As a result, it remains doubtful whether incremental changes to existing structures will be sufficient to facilitate a new approach to policymaking.

For this reason, the debate has increasingly shifted from internal adjustments and general conditions for mission success (Lindner et al. 2021) toward more substantial institutional innovations – solutions that can either complement or, in some cases, replace existing structures (Lindner et al. 2023). In Germany, this shift has sparked a robust discussion on various new approaches (see section 1.4), with the goal of rethinking

existing structures by introducing novel institutional elements to improve the conditions for transformative policies and better address the challenges ahead.

1.4 Solutions under discussion and potential approaches

In recent years, academic and policy communities in Germany have increasingly turned their attention to finding the right institutional innovations to tackle complex societal challenges. The range of proposals so far includes academic studies, newspaper articles, and conference contributions.

Concurrently, some solutions are already being piloted in Germany, such as mission teams, while others have been successfully implemented in neighboring countries. Despite their different access points to governance, these solutions share a common focus on the mission owner as the central actor and a key driver of successful missions.³

³ Mission governance in a broader sense could also include other actors who are addressed/mobilized by the corresponding activities within the framework of a mission (mission arena). This position paper explores five specific approaches in greater depth. These either occupy a central place in the German debate or represent foreign solutions that seem adaptable to the German context.

The following five approaches are analyzed in detail:

- Mission teams, which are being implemented as part of the federal government’s Future Research and Innovation Strategy (BMBF 2023a). Similar initiatives can be found in the transformation teams of the Sustainability Strategy (Bundesregierung 2022)
- “Expanded Missions”: The expansion of mission teams through a high-level government committee for innovation and transformation, as recommended by the EFI (2023)
- Forms of stakeholder governance, as practiced in Belgium and the Netherlands, which have also been applied on a smaller scale in Germany through the National Decade Against Cancer (NDK)
- Mission ministries, which consolidate mission-relevant responsibilities within a single ministry, such as Austria’s Ministry for Climate Action or Germany’s restructured Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Action
- Mission agencies, specialized organizational solutions to manage specific missions, as proposed by the Fraunhofer Institute for Systems and Innovation Research (ISI) in a study for the Bertelsmann Stiftung (Lindner et al. 2023)

As outlined in Table 1, these solutions address different governance challenges and follow various strategic approaches (institutional integration, hierarchy,

stakeholder engagement) to enhance mission-oriented policy. While all approaches focus on mission design and implementation, mission teams with a government committee for innovation and transformation, stakeholder governance models, and mission agencies can, under certain circumstances, play a role in the mission formulation process as well. The latter two approaches also allow a broader integration of actors, extending beyond interministerial coordination.

1.5 Outlook

The next chapter (Chapter 2) provides an overview of the strengths and weaknesses of the institutional solutions discussed. Subsequently, these approaches are systematically compared based on their potential effectiveness, their alignment with the needs of mission-oriented policy, and their associated costs and challenges.

Chapter 3 will examine the context-specific suitability of these solutions in three key areas (climate-neutral industry, energy transition and cancer), highlighting which institutional approaches are most promising for each context. Finally, Chapter 4 summarizes the key findings of this position paper, including practical recommendations for shaping the governance of mission-oriented policy in Germany.

TABLE 1: Comparison of various institutional solutions

	Mission teams	Mission teams with government committee	Stakeholder governance	Ministry for missions	Mission agency
Formulation		(X)	(X)		(X)
Design	X	X	X	X	X
Implementation	X	X	X	X	X
Operational logic	Institutionalized exchange between ministries	Support for decision-making through high political prioritization	Crosssectoral co-governance with strong stakeholder involvement	Consolidation of ministerial responsibilities	Independent driver of mission
Focus ¹	Ministerial coordination	Ministerial coordination	Stakeholder engagement	Ministerial coordination	Stakeholder engagement

¹ Cf. also (Janssen et al. 2023).

Source: Own illustration.

2. A comparative analysis of different institutional innovations

2.1 Strengths and weaknesses of new institutional solutions

This section provides an overview of the key strengths and weaknesses of each new institutional solution through SWOT analyses. These assessments are based on a review of academic literature on these solutions across various countries, supplemented by expert interviews with individuals involved in these governance structures or conducting research on them.⁴ The established model of interministerial coordination – such as working groups and meetings of state secretaries – serves as the main reference point for comparing potential changes brought about by these institutional innovations. While the SWOT analyses take a broad view of various aspects of these solutions, the comparison is structured along two main dimensions.

- First, the functional dimension: How effectively do these institutional solutions meet the demands of transformative or mission-oriented policy?
- Second, the cost dimension: What are the political and economic costs associated with each governance model?

Drawing from Lindner et al. (2023) and related studies (Janssen et al. 2023b; Janssen et al. 2023a), the functionality of each institutional solution is evaluated based on the following guiding questions:

- Does the solution enhance strategic leadership, that is, is this institutional solution able to contribute to setting clear, coherent mission goals?
- Is there a clearly defined mission owner who can credibly lead and represent the mission, both internally and externally?

- Are institutional structures equipped to mobilize additional stakeholders (and their resources) to support the mission?
- Does the solution promote a reflexive approach, facilitating continuous monitoring and adjustment of both the mission's goals and the methods used to achieve them?

To evaluate and compare the political and economic costs of the different solutions, the following criteria are applied:

- What is the estimated timeline for establishing the institutional solution?
- Does the solution have the capacity to sustain the implementation of a mission across multiple legislative cycles?
- What are the direct (tangible) and indirect (e.g., efficiency losses, political friction, etc.) costs associated with the institutional solution?

These two dimensions – functionality and costs – provide a structured framework for analyzing the specific pros and cons of each institutional solution.

Following this framework, the next sections will present detailed assessments of both dimensions for each innovation, compare them to the current model of interministerial coordination, and summarize the results in SWOT analyses. Finally, these findings will be synthesized and discussed in a comparative overview (see section 2.2).

⁴ The interviews were conducted under confidentiality, so the interviewees remain unnamed.

2.1.1 Mission teams

Mission teams, introduced under the German government's Future Research and Innovation Strategy (BMBF 2023a), differ from the traditional model of ministerial coordination by institutionalizing cooperation through interministerial teams at the working level. These teams bring together staff from relevant ministries to jointly steer missions. At a strategic level, the mission teams are supported by mission mentors from the “#Zukunftsstrategie” forum – the expert advisory board of the Future Strategy.⁵

The mission teams operate primarily as a coordination unit between ministries, but has no dedicated resources. As such, this approach is more of a formalization or continuation of existing practices rather than a novel solution which offers limited additional political weight.

In this light, the creation of mission teams reflects a modest political prioritization with minimal institutional backing, hardly signaling a policy shift. However, the effectiveness of governance structures in mission-oriented approaches depends heavily on political support (Roth et al. 2022; Zenker et al. 2024). Without support at higher levels, such as state secretaries, mission teams risk becoming just discussion forums, where ministerial interests take precedence over real collaboration (cf. EFI 2024).

Consequently, this solution is often seen as insufficient to address the underlying coordination and decision-making challenges. Additionally, there is a risk that poor communication between working groups and decision-makers could hinder coordination efforts from the start. This results in mission teams primarily function as operational units that report to their respective ministries, without creating the structures necessary for more agile policymaking.

The EFI has rightly pointed out the risk of a disconnection between the strategic level of missions and their implementation, as mission teams struggle with strategic coordination while individual ministries retain responsibility for executing specific action (EFI 2024).

The EFI also highlights the lack of operational autonomy and the absence of a dedicated budget as significant obstacles to the success of mission teams (EFI 2024). Additionally, establishing clear mission ownership and mobilizing stakeholders beyond the ministries seems unlikely to be achievable within this setup.

Given these constraints, mission teams do not represent a fundamental change compared to the current model of interministerial coordination, and there is little indication that they will create additional capacity.

While a project office was established to support the Future Research and Innovation Strategy, participation in the mission teams remains an additional task on top of existing responsibilities (Roth et al. 2021; Wittmann et al. 2020; Wittmann et al. 2021b). This leaves mission teams vulnerable to disruptions from staff turnover, leading to a loss of institutional knowledge. While it is possible for mission teams to develop cross-ministerial problem-solving skills, the success of such efforts will depend largely on their composition, and the individual competence and motivation of the assigned staff.

The main advantage of this institutional solution is its relatively low cost. This is due to the low barriers to setting up mission teams and the ability to leverage existing structures, which can be adapted with some degree of flexibility.

While mission teams only partially meet the additional demands of mission-oriented or transformative policies, their possibility to establish them quickly based on already present resources makes them a flexible tool for ad-hoc mission governance in an interim solution.

2.1.2 “Expanded Mission Teams”

The proposal to **expand mission teams by adding a government committee for innovation and transformation**, as recommended by the EFI (2023), seeks to address the strategic shortcomings of the mission teams. Key proposals include:

⁵ The #ZukunftStrategie Forum, composed of 21 representatives from academia, business and civil society, serves as the central advisory body for the Future Research and Innovation Strategy. It provides input on cross-cutting issues that span multiple missions, while also offering strategic and expert support to individual missions.

- Elevating the role of mission teams by directly involving state secretaries as members, thereby elevating them above the current working level of ministerial employees,
- Establishing dedicated mission budgets, and
- Strengthening accountability and strategic coordination by creating a high-level government committee for innovation and transformation, which would operate under the Federal Chancellery. This committee would provide strategic oversight while mission teams focus on operational implementation.

The increased political prioritization and high-level oversight aims to improve collaboration between the ministries involved. At the same time, the inclusion of state secretaries in the mission teams is assumed to boost their decision-making power. Compared to the current model of interministerial coordination, this approach is expected to significantly improve the strategic leadership of the missions. Furthermore, having dedicated mission budgets would grant mission teams greater operational autonomy. Over time, this added capability could help foster a stronger sense of shared responsibility among the participating actors.

However, challenges remain, especially regarding stakeholder engagement, the lack of a clear framework for continuous learning and adaptation, and the still-unclear definition of mission ownership. A key issue is the inward focus on interministerial coordination, which doesn't address the need to mobilize external stakeholders. Additionally, the governance structure would become more complex with the creation of an additional coordinating body, which would need time to establish its role, while mission ownership remains ambiguous. Although higher-level structures could lead to better coordination, their effectiveness will depend on the political commitment and accountability of the actors involved. The risk of disconnect between strategy and implementation would still exist.

One outstanding feature of this model is its potential for meta-governance – an approach that could enable better alignment and synergy across multiple missions, rather than treating each mission in isolation. The government committee would be well-positioned to manage cross-mission dynamics and address potential overlaps, though the thematic breadth of its activities could pose challenges to effective mission implementation.

Strengths

- Improved formal collaboration between departments
- Rapid and flexible execution
- Low costs

Weaknesses

- Focus on internal coordination, without expanding capacity for the role of mission owner
- Added governance complexity from creating extra coordination bodies
- Lack of clear mandate and dedicated resources, leading to low accountability

Opportunities

- Fostering a shared, interministerial or cross-departmental understanding of challenges and strategies
- Flexibility to adapt to content changes
- Building on existing/established thematic networks
- Potential for strong implementation capacity and resource availability

Threats

- Disconnect from strategic decision-making processes
- Limited political priority and uncertainty around continuity

Similar to the mission teams, this expanded version appears to be relatively low-cost and quick to implement. However, it would likely require more significant political negotiation before it could be rolled out effectively. Critical factors such as the establishment of shared mission budgets and the authority of the government committee for innovation and transformation – along with its scope of responsibilities – would need to be clearly defined, and their long-term stability remains uncertain.

While the autonomy and operational capacity of mission teams will grow through the establishment of a government committee for innovation and transformation and the enhanced role of state secretaries, challenges will persist with engaging stakeholders, securing mission ownership and implementing policies with a reflective, adaptive approach.

2.1.3 Stakeholder governance

The motivation behind establishing a stakeholder governance model is to directly involve stakeholders in mission implementation, expanding the range of actors

beyond ministries and political decision-makers. While this model has been widely used in other countries, such as the Netherlands and Belgium, its application in Germany has been more limited, with early examples like the National Decade Against Cancer (NDK) operating on a smaller scale.

Although the structure of stakeholder governance can vary, it is defined by the direct involvement of stakeholders at every level of mission governance. This approach goes beyond traditional consultation formats, such as advisory boards, by giving stakeholders at least partial decision-making power. Including stakeholders like industry representatives and civil society organizations in a **co-governance framework** provides significant advantages, particularly in terms of mobilization. Compared to the traditional model of interministerial coordination, this approach has the potential to bring in additional resources. Depending on the form, the influence of the stakeholders ranges from mission formulation and design (National Decade Against Cancer) to joint implementation, including the provision of resources (as with the “Topsectors” in the Netherlands). As a consequence, the close involvement of relevant stakeholders offers the opportunity to mobilize ad-

Strengths

- High political visibility and prioritization due to the government committee and involvement of state secretaries
- Stronger institutionalized collaboration across departments
- Greater operational autonomy through dedicated budgets for mission teams
- Rapid and agile execution

Weaknesses

- Focus on internal coordination, without expanding capacity for the role of mission owner
- Increased governance complexity with the addition of new coordination bodies
- Heightened political prioritization and shared mission budgets lead to longer negotiation processes

Opportunities

- A unified budget fosters a shared sense of direction and purpose
- Potential for strategic oversight and coordination across various missions

Threats

- Disconnection between strategy and implementation due to the wide range of topics covered by the government committee

ditional resources for a mission. Stakeholder contributions range from their valuable experience and their function as multipliers to win over further stakeholders for the mission goals, as in the case of the German initiative “National Decade against Cancer” (NDK) (Roth et al. 2021; Wittmann et al. 2021b) or that of the Belgian initiative “Circular Flanders”, to effective co-financing by private sector actors, as in the case of the Dutch “Topsectors”⁶ (Janssen 2020).

This model offers potential improvements over the current system in terms of strategic leadership, mission visibility (through a coordinating body) and reflexivity. It can boost the legitimacy of mission implementation, reduce competition between ministries by creating a broadly representative institutional body, and bring in a wider range of perspectives. Directly involved stakeholders can act as stabilizing forces for a mission, since their business/other interests rely on stable and foreseeable developments. This stabilizing role can be crucial during political transitions, such as government changes. Increased stakeholder participation also helps maintain broader public support for the mission's goals and the larger transformation effort (Loorbach 2010). Cases like the Topsectors (Netherlands) and Circular Flanders (Belgium) have established secretariats and permanent roles to track mission progress. Ultimately, however, the success of this governance model depends on the motivation of the stakeholders and the incentives provided within the mission framework to encourage cooperation.

One potential challenge to this approach is an unclear mandate for stakeholder governance, especially when existing governance structures overlap, and responsibilities are poorly defined. Another possible drawback is the high level of institutional complexity that comes with involving a larger, more diverse group of stakeholders, many of whom may have limited governance experience. This can result in longer negotiation processes, making it harder to implement solutions quickly. At the same time, these extended negotiations could contribute to the longevity of the approach, helping to ensure its relevance beyond a single legislative term and providing stability in the face of political changes.

One of the primary challenges lies in selecting stakeholders and ensuring representation of underrepresented or unorganized interests. There's also a risk that well-organized or resource-rich interest groups dominate the process, while less-organized groups struggle to participate. This imbalance could lead to the adoption of lowest-common-denominator solutions or allow dominant actors to push for outcomes, potentially resulting in technological lock-ins, that benefit them but undermine the mission's overall flexibility and goals (Padovano und Galli 2003). It's essential to design the stakeholder selection process in a way that prevents overly influential actors from dominating agenda-setting or blocking potential solutions.

Building stakeholder governance structures could lead to a significant shift in how stakeholders are engaged and mobilized, fostering stronger commitment of involved actors. However, developing and refining these structures requires considerable time and extensive discussions.

2.1.4 “Mission ministry”

The key idea behind restructuring ministries to create a dedicated “mission ministry” is the expectation that this will lead to better coordination and integration of government actions, addressing the silos and coordination issues that often plague different ministries. This approach focuses on streamlining ministerial coordination by internalizing negotiation processes within a single entity. Concentrating responsibilities within one ministry also sends a political signal, highlighting the high importance of the mission (cf. Durrant et al. 2019, p. 7). It can also generate momentum for addressing the issue (Braun 2008), disrupting existing administrative structures and enabling novel approaches to problem-solving, instead of relying solely on existing competencies (Marsh et al. 1993).

In terms of the functional requirements for a mission-oriented policy, this approach offers several key benefits.

⁶ Topsectoren -Factsheet Dutch Solutions to Grand Challenges: <https://www.topsectoren.nl/binaries/topsectoren/documenten/publicaties/2019-publicaties/september-2019/23-09-19/factsheet-dutch-solutions-to-grand-challenges/Factsheet+Dutch+Solutions+to+Grand+Challenges.pdf>

<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comprehensive involvement and mobilization of stakeholders • Direct integration of perspectives from affected actors • Mitigates competition among departments by involving neutral, third-party actors 	<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential for lengthy negotiation and consensus-building processes, especially due to the larger number of stakeholders • Difficulty in engaging unorganized interests or identifying representative stakeholders for these groups
<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creates commitment and incentives for stakeholders (resource mobilization) • Strengthens mission goals through the stability interests of economic stakeholders • Increases societal acceptance and refines objectives through stakeholder perspectives 	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Risk of dominance by certain (well-organized) interest groups • Danger of entrenching existing structures or diluting objectives due to powerful stakeholders with specific interests • Unclear responsibilities between or within institutional frameworks may hinder stakeholder motivation and participation

Source: Own illustration.

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In addition to establishing a clear and visible mission owner with a strong mandate, there could be positive effects on strategic capability, because political prioritization aligns with the mandate for ongoing execution. Paradoxically this may also intensify the commonly observed “STI trap,” where missions are largely viewed as research policy efforts targeting science, technology and innovation that fall short of delivering on their broader interministerial and cross-sectoral objectives.

However, concentrating responsibility in one ministry may also lead to a decreasing willingness among other ministries to cooperate on cross-cutting issues. Additionally, the ministry tasked with the mission could become politically more vulnerable, as it would serve as the main focal point of public criticism. In terms of stakeholder engagement, reflexivity and overall capacity for mission implementation, this approach brings little change compared to the current model of interministerial coordination, as it mostly reorganizes existing structures. As a consequence, the necessary capacities for transformative policymaking aren’t automatically enhanced, particularly because the tension between traditional bureaucratic practices and the needs of transformative policies (cf. Braams et al.

2021, 2022) persists. Shifts in organizational culture will take time and are largely depend on the leadership of the responsible minister (Braun 2008; Richards et al. 1997) and other contextual factors, such as ideological differences or the extent to which various departments are integrated into the new ministry.

While the formal restructuring of ministries occurs quickly on paper, its success is largely dependent on political dynamics and power relationships (Sieberer 2015), and longer-term processes will be needed to realize its full potential. In the early stages, efficiency is likely to decrease– not only due to reorganization efforts but also because of productivity losses during the adjustment period. Existing workflows won’t yet be established (Durrant et al. 2019), and the restructuring phase may bring uncertainty, perceived losses, and additional workloads (Griffits et al. 2005). This means that efficiency gains in addressing problems may only materialize in the medium term, and in some cases, restructuring could even introduce new challenges (Durrant et al. 2019).

Moreover, when it comes to tackling complex societal issues, ministerial responsibilities may not be clearly

defined from the start. In the early stages of mission implementation, there's often ambiguity around which aspects need addressing and which means and resources are necessary to do so. Questions like whether a stronger integration of research and investment promotion is sufficient, or whether regulatory aspects need to be addressed in parallel, need to be clarified. In addition to initial efficiency losses, the growing size of the ministry may pose further management challenges, as increasing information asymmetries complicate hierarchical decision-making (Braun 2008). This could ultimately raise the overall costs, for example, through more coordination rounds or the need for additional management oversight.

Compared to other solutions focused on interministerial coordination, the mission ministry model offers more long-term stability, especially if it endures across multiple legislative periods. However, this solution is

still dependent on the political climate and power dynamics within the government. As a result the structure and responsibilities of the ministry could be influenced by shifts in party power (Sieberer 2015). That said, this approach has the potential to firmly establish a strong mission owner with a clear mandate, robust competence and sufficient resources, creating an actor capable of maintaining the mission's strategic direction over an extended period.

Creating ministries that align with mission objectives (mission ministries) offers the chance to streamline coordination processes and establish a central mission owner with clear authority and high visibility. While formal changes can be made quickly, fully integrating and embedding the new direction can be complex, time-intensive and may come with additional indirect costs.

Strengths

- Less need for interdepartmental coordination and competition
- Sends a strong political message about the issue's importance
- Disrupts established power structures, creating opportunities to reorganize key focus areas
- A clearer mission owner with solid execution capabilities and sufficient resources

Weaknesses

- Higher upfront costs (e.g., loss of productivity, transition periods)
- Larger and more diverse departments can lead to management challenges
- Sticking with traditional ministerial frameworks doesn't make stakeholder engagement easier
- Focuses on reorganizing existing structures rather than building new capacities and skills for transformative policymaking
- Reliant on political windows of opportunity and power dynamics

Opportunities

- Develop a comprehensive, centralized approach to problem-solving
- Long-term mission leadership under a single authority, provided the new departmental structure is maintained across multiple legislative terms

Threats

- A central mission owner could complicate collaboration with other ministries
- An expanded ministry may become a focal point for political and public criticism
- Slow internal change and continuation of the traditional ministerial approach
- Disparities between merged entities and ideological differences block the formation of a unified vision

2.1.5 Mission agency

Unlike mission teams (with or without a government committee), which aim to modify or complement existing structures, the concept of a mission agency, as described in Lindner et al. (2023) represents a more radical change. This approach envisions a new organizational solution in the form of a dedicated agency responsible for fulfilling the mission, consciously disrupting existing structures. The central role of a mission agency is to act as a technically competent driver of both internal and external initiatives, guiding the entire process of mission implementation, supporting and monitoring progress and sparking debates around further development. Although this model has not yet been implemented in the German context, insights can be drawn from the experience of Dutch transformation teams (Government of Netherlands 2017), for example, which function similarly to a mission agency by driving government initiatives and mobilizing stakeholders.

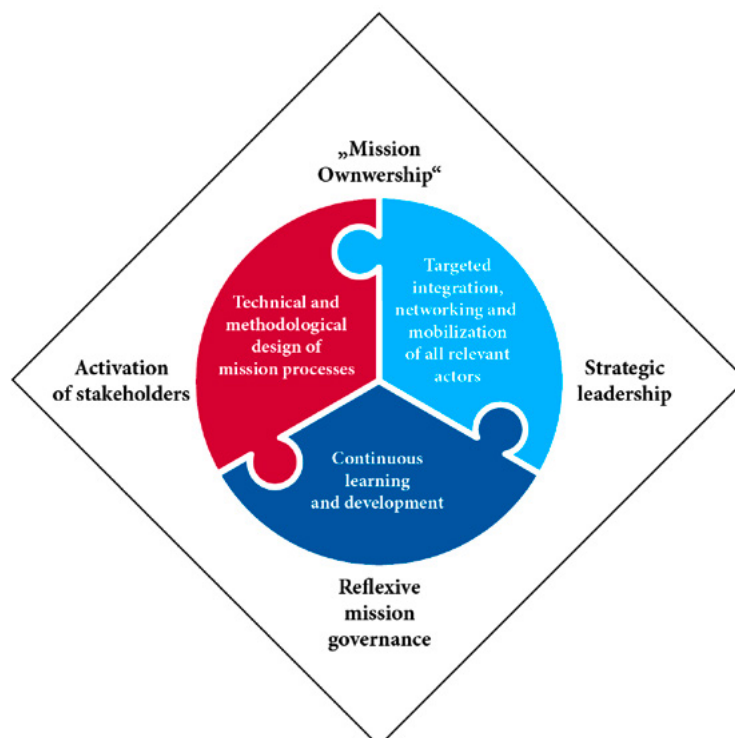
The potential strengths of a mission agency include the creation of a clear mission owner with a strong mandate and legitimacy, fully dedicated to achieving

the mission’s goals. The agency would serve as the central point of contact for the mission, both internally and externally (Lindner et al. 2023).

Rather than being confined by existing structures, the agency can be designed around the specific challenges of the mission, enabling a deliberate change of established patterns and routines. By operating outside traditional ministerial boundaries, it can help reduce the typical interministerial competition since the mission would no longer be seen as the domain of a single ministry. This also helps avoid the “STI trap,” where missions are reduced to being viewed solely as science or research initiatives.

Moreover, a mission agency offers new opportunities for engaging stakeholders beyond traditional structures, since its mandate would include external communication, public debate initiation and progress monitoring. This approach also prevents existing structures from being overburdened with additional tasks, while enabling the recruitment of new talent with a broad range of skills and perspectives. The creation of a new agency allows for the targeted selection of personnel, bringing together expertise from various fields and

FIGURE 2: Key capabilities of a mission agency



sectors, including government, academia, NGOs and industry (Lindner et al. 2023). Over time, this blending of perspectives could positively influence the ministries involved, especially through staff exchange, helping to build transformative capacities in areas like policy monitoring and stakeholder engagement.

Similar to the stakeholder governance model, but unlike ministry-based solutions, a mission agency's mandate is more adaptable and can evolve with the mission's progress, allowing it to set different priorities. For example, as the mission advances, the need for enhanced monitoring capabilities may grow, or certain technological solutions might prove particularly promising, necessitating a stronger emphasis on those areas.

A potential challenge arises from the fact that, unlike ministries, a mission agency would have only limited financial resources of its own. While the existence of

complementary funding approaches of other actors like ministries (Lindner et al. 2023) could create leverage, the strength of a mission agency lies primarily in its role as a facilitator of the key challenge, its monitoring and progress reporting, and its alignment/signalling with high political priority. The capacity to act independently or make progress alone seems restricted – especially when compared to a mission-driven ministry, for instance. Therefore, the mission agency's main role would be to persuade and mobilize other actors, providing them with the necessary support and legitimacy for policy changes.

Closely tied to this is the fact, that broad recruitment for the agency could lead to a limited understanding of government processes or even a disconnect between the mission agency and ministerial actors (cf. e.g. Schwaag-Serger cited in Merx et al. 2019, p. 37; Wiarda 2023). Despite the agency's broader stakeholder focus, government actors will remain one of

Strengths

- Establishes a clear mission owner with strong legitimacy
- Mitigates departmental competition by introducing a "neutral" entity outside the traditional ministerial structure
- Opens new pathways to mobilize additional stakeholders through the mission agency's broad mandate
- Builds capacity and resources in the mission's focus area through the creation of new structures

Weaknesses

- Setting up a mission agency takes place in part alongside mission implementation, which may lead to initial inefficiencies and higher costs
- Requires developing legally sound solutions tailored to the mission agency's specific context
- May face limited independent funding to drive longterm, sustainable initiatives

Opportunities

- Breaks away from established responsibilities, offering a problem-driven starting point
- Establishes a systemic problem-solving approach by recruiting talent from diverse sectors (government, academia, society, business, etc.)
- Embeds a broader systemic perspective and fosters capacity-building beyond the agency through personnel mobility
- High adaptability and reflexivity of the mission agency to evolve with the mission's progress

Threats

- A central mission owner could impede cooperation with or between departments
- Broad recruitment within the mission agency could lead to gaps in understanding ministerial processes and decision-making dynamics
- Risks disconnecting from ministerial and political decision-making structures
- High political prioritization may stifle experimentation
- Competition or lack of coordination between multiple mission agencies may cause overlap or neglect key intersections

its primary partners and points of contact. This makes an understanding of ministerial workflows essential for the agency's effectiveness. The Dutch model of transformation teams shows that secondments from ministries and agencies can create an effective linkage, facilitating the flow of information between mission teams and government departments.

Another issue could stem from the increased political priority assigned to the mission, which may hinder experimentation. Breznitz et al. 2013 und Breznitz et al. 2018 have highlighted in their analysis of innovation agencies that a central position within the innovation system can obstruct the testing of radical solutions, which are more likely to emerge on the periphery in a protected experimental environment. The high political prioritization that comes with establishing a mission agency could therefore limit the ability to explore radically new approaches in implementation.

Additionally, challenges may arise when mission agencies focus exclusively on their assigned topics, potentially developing only a limited understanding of related fields. In the worst case, this could lead to inefficient competition or redundancy in case of several mission agencies. Furthermore, a range of potential obstacles and cost factors could emerge, including the challenge of creating an agency while the mission is already being implemented (Lindner et al. 2023). Given the recruitment strategy aimed at drawing talent from various

sectors, sufficient time must be allocated for internal development.⁷

Moreover, this approach requires the context- and case-specific development of the agency's mandate, as well as the legal framework governing it. The example of the Federal Agency for Disruptive Innovation (SprinD) illustrates that a time- and resource-intensive process may be necessary to successfully establish and bring such agency to action. This could, in turn, slow down the long-term progress of the mission (cf. EFI 2023).

In terms of potential, it is worth noting that a mission agency could ensure the long-term, sustained pursuit of a mission across multiple legislative periods. However, this would require solid legal foundations and adequate resources. If these conditions are met, an established mission agency could fully leverage its strengths, guiding the mission with growing expertise, networks and legitimacy, while remaining adaptable to changing contexts.

A mission agency creates a clearly defined mission owner with a strong mandate and full legitimacy who is focused on driving the mission's goals and serving as the primary point of contact both internally and externally. However, building a mission agency is a resource-intensive and time-consuming endeavor.

⁷ See the experience of Dutch transformation teams highlights that building a shared understanding of challenges and approaches can be a multi-year process.

TABLE 2: Comparison of different institutional solutions

	Mission team	Mission teams with innovation council	Stakeholder governance	Mission ministry	Mission agency
Actor mobilization	(-)	(-)	+	-	+
Mission ownership	0	(+)	+	+	+
Strategic leadership	-	(+)	(+)	+	(+)
Reflexivity	-	-	0	(-)	+
Response speed/availability	(+)	0	-	(-)	-
Stability/continuity	(-)	0	+	+	+
Direct and indirect costs	-	(-)	(+)	0	+

Legend: - very low; (-): low 0: medium/neutral (+): high + very high

Source: Own illustration.

2.2 Comparison of different approaches

Table 2 summarizes the key findings from the SWOT analyses of each institutional solution and offers an initial comparative evaluation based on the dimensions outlined above. The detailed insights from the SWOT analyses were aggregated within the categories discussed in section 2.1, providing an approximate assessment for each approach.

One immediate observation is that moderate changes, such as mission teams, show only limited improvements in functionality compared to the baseline of traditional “interministerial co-ordination.” This raises the question of whether these approaches are truly capable of meeting the extensive demands of transformative or mission-oriented policy. In contrast, solutions like mission agencies, stakeholder governance models, and mission ministries generally perform better in terms of meeting functionality requirements of mission-oriented policies. This is largely because these solutions promise significant improvements in areas such as mission ownership, strategic leadership, and, in some cases, stakeholder mobilization and reflexivity.

However, the analysis also shows that implementing these more ambitious institutional innovations requires considerably more time and leads to higher direct and indirect costs. Enhanced functionality, therefore, comes with greater implementation costs and effort, especially during the planning and execution phases.

The analysis shows that no single, universal solution is equally suited to tackling different missions. Instead, the key question is under what conditions the weaknesses of specific approaches may matter less, while their particular strengths maximize advantages.

With this in mind the following chapter explores various societal challenges and related potential missions, seeking to clarify the conditions under which different institutional approaches can leverage their strengths – or suffer from their limitations.

There is no universal solution that fits every mission equally well. The key question is: under what conditions do the weaknesses of certain approaches become less relevant, while their unique strengths provide the most benefits?

TABLE 2 a

Societal challenge	Climate-neutral economy	Sustainable energy system (energy transition)	Health
Specific issue / example mission focus area	Decarbonizing the steel industry	Cross-sector integration (digitalization, mobility, heating)	Reducing cancer rates
Key governance challenges	Coordinating state actors, engaging non-state actors	Coordinating actors across sectors	Breaking down silos between healthcare provision and research
Institutional solution	Mission ministry Stakeholder governance	Mission agency Mission teams with government committee for innovation and transformation	Mission agency Stakeholder governance

Source: Own illustration.

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3. Context-specific suitability

Research on innovation agencies has demonstrated that there is no universal formula for institutional design (Bound et al. 2016; Breznitz et al. 2018). Instead, the key to successful governance structures lies in context-sensitive frameworks that are tailored to the specific conditions of the innovation ecosystem. In light of this, the following section explores the suitability of various institutional innovations in addressing three representative subproblems of broad societal significance:

1. Decarbonizing the steel industry,
2. managing the interfaces between the energy transition and other sectors,
3. and reducing cancer incidence.

These subproblems fall under the broader areas of a sustainable economy, a sustainable energy system and public health, which are prominently featured in the German government's High-Tech Strategy 2025 and Future Strategy (BMBF 2018, 2023b). Despite their shared relevance, these subproblems vary significantly in terms of actor structures and thematic scope (see Table 2a below), leading to distinct governance challenges. Comparing these challenges helps clarify the conditions under which certain governance approaches are particularly effective.

3.1 Decarbonizing the steel industry

German businesses and policymaking face increasing pressure to achieve its goal of greenhouse gas neutrality by 2045 while remaining competitive. As one of the country's most carbon-intensive sectors, the steel industry plays a pivotal role in this challenge (KEI 2023; UD 2023).

To meet this target, a wide range of measures must be coordinated and accelerated to implement existing technical solutions, including renewable energy, hydrogen, carbon capture and storage (CCS), and carbon

capture and utilization (CCU) (Leeson et al. 2017; Otto et al. 2017; Ras et al. 2019; Wietschel et al. 2020). The efficiency and cost-effectiveness of these solutions can vary across the value chain (Limbers et al. 2023).

Complicating matters are concerns about the environmental safety of these technologies (BUND 2024), as well as their integration into existing national and international policy frameworks, such as the German government's Future Research and Innovation Strategy, the steel action concept, climate agreements by the BMWK, and funding from the EU Innovation Fund. Moreover, trade unions must be actively involved to ensure the transformation of the sector is both sustainable and socially equitable.

A mission in this area, therefore, has a crucial role in implementing well-coordinated measures that support the decarbonization of the steel industry while safeguarding its competitiveness and protecting jobs. Key components of a mission strategy for a climate-neutral steel industry must include incentives – such as subsidies or other fiscal mechanisms – and provide stable legal frameworks that make decarbonization investments attractive and feasible for producers.

One advantage of a mission aimed at achieving climate neutrality in the German steel industry is the relatively small number of key stakeholders. This is largely due to the high market concentration among producers and the centralized organization of employee representatives, primarily through the "IG Metall" tradeunion (Küster-Simic et al. 2020). In addition to the primary political actors – specifically the ministries for the economy, environment, and research (BMWK, BMUV and BMBF) – additional stakeholders, particularly environmental organizations from civil society, need to be taken into account.

Given the relatively small number of actors and stakeholders involved, along with the significant pressure to drive this transformation forward, restructuring ministries or adopting a stakeholder governance model seems particularly well-suited for the role of mission

owner. In contrast, governance approaches such as a mission agency or mission teams (with or without a government committee for innovation and transformation), which operate more on a strategic level, appear less relevant here. Their added value seems limited given the mission's strong focus on implementation.

Option #1: Mission ministry

By adjusting the distribution of responsibilities among the relevant ministries, regulation, oversight, and incentive-setting could be consolidated under a single authority responsible for the entire value chain. While broader issues might overwhelm a central actor, the relatively narrow group of stakeholders involved in decarbonizing the steel industry makes it feasible to establish a strong mission owner in the form of a dedicated mission ministry, capable of managing all aspects of the mission.

Placing the mission within a ministry would not only signal its high importance but also reduce the need for coordination across previously separate ministries. This approach creates a politically empowered, highly legitimate entity with strong decision-making authority, ideal for handling the concentrated set of stakeholders in the steel industry. The ministry would have the resources to monitor progress and set effective incentives.

This model is particularly advantageous in supporting the upscaling and commercial testing of innovations such as carbon capture and alternative production methods – areas typically managed by the BMWK – and the funding mechanisms overseen by the BMBF.

One potential downside of this approach is the time required to integrate research and investment funding into a new mission ministry and synchronize workflows. However, in the case of a structural transformation, likely to unfold over several years, within a well-defined sector like the steel industry, this challenge is less of an issue. The ministry can evolve alongside the mission's progress, provided the transformation process is initiated quickly.

It's also important to recognize that some responsibilities, such as fiscal policy measures (e.g., generous depreciation rates for new technologies), are deeply

entrenched in other ministries, such as the finance ministry (BMF), and may not be easily transferred to a mission ministry.

Option #2: Stakeholder governance

An alternative approach for mission governance, particularly given the structure of actors and stakeholders, is a form of stakeholder governance. Unlike contexts with a large number of stakeholders, the relatively small group involved here allows for representative participation in mission governance with relatively low complexity. This approach could also build on the BMWK's existing "Carbon Contracts for Difference" initiative.

Stakeholder governance offers the advantage of directly incorporating the expertise of those involved, enabling the tailored implementation of flexible, context-specific solutions. It also presents an opportunity to mitigate competitive imbalances by addressing the unique circumstances of individual businesses, thereby increasing incentives for accelerating the transition to climate-neutral production. Involving societal actors, especially trade unions, further ensures that the industrial transformation remains socially equitable. Ultimately, this process is likely to enjoy greater public visibility and legitimacy than traditional top-down approaches. Additionally, involving non-political actors could help mitigate interministerial competition.

The potential drawback of this approach is the potentially lengthy negotiation process required before implementation. However, given the manageable number of actors and solution options in this case, a prolonged setup process is unlikely.

To facilitate the decarbonization of the steel industry, which involves a limited number of stakeholders, the institutional solutions of a mission ministry or stakeholder governance approach appear particularly well-suited.

3.2 Energy transition

While the shift from a fossil fuel-based energy system to one powered by renewable energy is largely driven by sustainability goals – such as achieving greenhouse

Factsheet: **Climate-neutral steel production**

Mission objective:	Accelerate the transformation process
Societal involvement:	Low to moderate
Key government actors:	BMBF, BMWK, BMUV
Complexity of the actor structure:	Low complexity, driven by a few major industry players and concentrated labor interests
Scope of the topic area:	Relatively narrow, with a focus on implementing solutions within a single sector
Key challenges:	Coordinating government actors, mobilizing non-state actors
Potential institutional solutions:	Mission ministry, stakeholder co-governance

Source: Own illustration.

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gas neutrality by 2045 – other factors play a role as well. Although the initial impetus for the energy transition came from the move away from nuclear energy, the issue has since become entangled with discussions about Germany's future economic development and energy sovereignty, especially in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine (Bundesregierung 2023).

While the goal itself is widely accepted, numerous debates surround the best path forward. These include questions about the right mix of energy sources and their local feasibility, the pace and process of the transition, evolving technological demands, and the requirements of a more flexible energy generation system. The increasing interconnection of sectors like heating and mobility due to electrification and digitalization further complicates matters. As a result, this field involves a wide array of actors at different levels, contributing both top-down and bottom-up. However, many remain siloed in existing institutional and sector-defined structures. A key focus for missions in the energy transition, given this diverse stakeholder landscape, could be the integration of efforts across sectors and actor groups, and the coordination of differing needs to accelerate the ongoing transformation processes (Wurm et al. 2023).

The recent expansion of the Ministry for Economic Affairs into the Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Action is already a step toward integrating actions through ministerial restructuring. Yet, with unresolved technological challenges and the interlinkage of sectors such as mobility and heating, questions remain about how to accelerate the transformation further and improve the policy integration in these areas. In this context, the introduction of mission agencies and a government committee for innovation and transformation – complementing mission teams – emerges as a promising approach.

Option #1: Mission agency

A mission agency presents a particularly promising option for missions operating at the intersection of multiple sectors or when moving from research policy to practical application. It could serve as a neutral actor, mediating between the needs of various stakeholders and the responsible ministries, while also functioning as a “translator” between different technical perspectives and monitoring implementation progress. Additionally, the agency could help build expertise at these intersections and embed this knowledge in the relevant ministries over time.

Because the agency's primary role would be one of coordination and facilitation, its limited independent resources would be less of a concern, since its focus would be on balancing stakeholder demands and setting strategic priorities. The agency's focus on specific aspects of these intersections could open additional opportunities for pilot projects, allowing lessons learned from specific initiatives to be applied across other sectors. This focused and experimental approach could reduce potential political resistance.

Option #2: Innovation teams with a government committee for innovation and transformation

An alternative approach involves the creation of mission teams, supported by a government committee for innovation and transformation, bringing together relevant ministries at the cabinet level. Unlike a mission agency, this approach focuses more on interministerial coordination than on collaboration with external stakeholders.

The main advantages of this model are its streamlined structure and capacity for high-level management across sectors and issues. This approach would be particularly well-suited for cases where multiple dimensions (or sub-missions) need to be addressed simultaneously. The institutional element of overarching coordination by the government committee can focus on tracking multiple dimensions and prevent particular issues from falling through the cracks and balance the mission load to avoid overwhelming the process as a whole. While a mission agency might be at risk of a too narrow focus – addressing its specific topic without considering broader interactions – the combination of mission teams and a government committee would be more adept at managing the complex intersections between various sectors.

In practice, the government committee could take on a supervisory role at a higher level, while mission teams would focus intensively on specific thematic intersections. This setup would allow for significant flexibility, enabling the integration of additional sectors as needed, depending on future developments.

Another key advantage is that the government committee could serve as a central platform for learning and adaptation, while simultaneously laying the groundwork for future cooperation.

To facilitate collaboration between different stakeholder groups and policy sectors in the energy transition, a mission agency or mission teams, combined with a government committee for innovation and transformation, would be effective options.

3.3 Combating cancer

In the health sector, one of the key challenges is tackling the rise in cancer cases and its associated impacts – an issue addressed in various national strategies, such as Germany's High-Tech Strategy 2025 and National Cancer Plan, as well as at the EU level through the Combating Cancer initiative.

The role of mission-oriented policy in this context is to develop effective solutions and approaches while bringing together diverse stakeholder groups to better integrate established policy areas, including research

and innovation policy with healthcare and treatment services.

However, in Germany, efforts to address the societal challenge of cancer are highly fragmented. Interministerial cooperation is limited, leading to a range of parallel, uncoordinated solutions. For example, the Federal Ministry of Health pursues a service-oriented approach through the National Cancer Plan, while the German National Decade Against Cancer (NDK), led by the BMBF, follows a distinct research-driven strategy (NDK 2019). These projects lack formal coordination.

In areas that cut across traditional policy fields – such as occupational safety, prevention and nutrition – coordinated, interministerial action is essential. As such, the central requirements for a mission in this field include:

1. Coordinating and aligning research and healthcare policies, with the involvement of other relevant ministries.
2. Engaging diverse societal stakeholders and fostering wider public debate, which are key to driving behavioral changes and embedding cancer prevention more deeply into everyday life (Wittmann et al. 2020).

Given these considerations, the most suitable approaches to address these challenges appear to be the creation of a mission agency or an intersectoral stakeholder governance model. In contrast, restructuring ministries or forming mission teams alongside a government committee for innovation and transformation seems less appropriate due to the cross-cutting nature of the issue, existing structures and the need for broader stakeholder involvement beyond government actors.

Option #1: Mission agency

A mission agency could play a key role in several ways within this context. First, it could act as a catalyst for broad societal dialogue and drive a more problem-focused approach. As a new and neutral entity, the agency could navigate between different perspectives (research, healthcare, and prevention) while maintaining credibility and mobilize previously unrepresented interests and stakeholders.

Second, a mission agency could serve as the mission owner, facilitating coordination between existing ministerial structures and, over time, advancing capacity-building alongside the respective ministries.

The additional time needed to establish a mission agency would be less of a concern, given the long-term nature of this issue. Unlike the decarbonization of the steel industry, where the pressure to act is immediate due to its impact on competitiveness, the fight against cancer is a gradual, long-term challenge.

Similarly, the agency's potentially limited resources wouldn't pose a significant hurdle. While research is largely driven by private funding, changes in public health behavior are typically achieved through a combination of incentives, targeted campaigns (such as public awareness initiatives on prevention), and fostering a wider societal conversation about healthier lifestyles. In this area, an agency could have a far greater role as a mediator and facilitator than in more economically driven initiatives.

Option #2: Stakeholder governance

An alternative approach could be developing a stakeholder governance structure, similar to the research-focused model established by the NDK. The key advantage of this model lies in its ability to integrate a broader range of actors, allowing expertise to be incorporated early in the mission design process and enabling non-governmental stakeholders to contribute directly to achieving mission goals.

A notable benefit is the opportunity to engage key stakeholders in cancer prevention – such as medical professionals and patient advocacy groups – as multipliers, which would offer greater flexibility in designing initiatives. By directly involving relevant actors in the mission's strategy and implementation, the framework could incentivize collective progress in cancer prevention and treatment. Additionally, involving stakeholders with a problem-driven focus could counterbalance the entrenched silos within ministries. Although longer negotiation processes – similar to the extended setup period of a mission agency – would not be a major obstacle, a stakeholder governance structure may be less effective in involving unrepresented interests. In this case, groups such as patients and affected individuals, who are harder to reach, may be overlooked, while more organized actors could dominate the debate. Conflicting interests (e.g., prevention vs. treatment) could also pose a challenge to achieving unified solutions. Furthermore, given the wide societal relevance of the issue, the number of potential stakeholders is relatively large. It would be important to clearly define the scope of relevant stakeholders early on, ensuring that all key players are included without undermining the mission's progress.

To enhance integration in cancer prevention and close the gap between healthcare delivery and research, the solutions provided by a mission agency or stakeholder governance models are particularly effective.

Factsheet: combating cancer

Mission objective:	Integrating actions across different areas (treatment and prevention)
Societal involvement:	Very high
Key government actors:	BMG, BMBF
Complexity of the actor structure:	Medium, due to the need for cross-sector coordination and somewhat dispersed stakeholder groups
Scope of the topic area:	Broad, with significant siloing across sectors
Key challenges:	Bridging the gap between research and prevention/care, addressing the STI trap, and using behavior change as a key lever
Potential institutional solutions:	Mission agency, stakeholder co-governance

Source: Own illustration.

4. Discussion and outlook

4.1 Key findings summary

This paper examined various institutional approaches to enhance the implementation of mission-oriented and transformative policies in Germany. The analysis drew on recent efforts within the country (such as mission teams), best practices from abroad (stakeholder governance, dedicated mission ministry) and current proposals from academia (mission teams with a government committee for innovation and transformation, mission agencies). In the first step, the strengths and challenges of these institutional approaches were reviewed based on the literature and interviews, and systematically analyzed using SWOT frameworks.

Next, the paper assessed how well these institutional solutions could address different mission areas by focusing on three key societal challenges: decarbonizing industry, the energy transition and the fight against cancer. Special attention was paid to the specific actor configurations within each challenge and the thematic scope of each issue.

The following conclusions emerged from this analysis:

1) Transformative action requires new institutional solutions

Incremental changes, such as the current form of mission teams, are inadequate to meet the growing demands of transformative policy and to fundamentally reshape existing operational structures. As seen with the mission teams established under the Future Research and Innovation Strategy, many issues with interministerial coordination persist (EFI 2024). While efforts to institutionalize cooperation point in the right direction, these measures alone are not sufficient to overcome structural barriers to transformation in Germany – such as administrative culture and siloed thinking – or to build the necessary long-term capacities for effective action.

Relying solely on mission teams may serve as a temporary or interim measure but committing to truly transformative policymaking requires a deliberate focus on further developing institutional solutions that can significantly improve governance and implementation. Without such development and the creation of the necessary capacities, transformative policies risk remaining mere aspirations that never move beyond the conceptual stage.

2) Different governance structures for different contexts

As the analysis highlights, various institutional solutions address the core requirements for implementing mission-oriented policies to different extents. However, it's important to note that there is no single "silver bullet" governance structure able to fit all types of missions. Instead, decisions should be made based on the specific actor configurations, the structure of the topic, the political context, and the corresponding mission framework (if already established), weighing the strengths and weaknesses of each approach.

For the case studies examined in this focus paper, different solutions appear promising, as each approach's strengths align differently with the specific contexts.

Two critical dimensions in evaluating these institutional solutions are: their ability to handle complex actor configurations, and the thematic scope or "breadth" of the mission in question.

For instance, the limited ability of a mission ministry to mobilize stakeholders isn't a significant hurdle in the decarbonization of the steel industry, given the relatively small number of key actors. However, this limitation becomes a major drawback in the case of cancer prevention, where the actor landscape is far more complex, with siloed structures and unorganized interests. Another example involves the thematic scope that each solution can effectively manage. A

mission ministry, for instance, tends to have a narrower scope than a mission agency or a government committee for innovation and transformation, which provide broader meta-coordination.

3) Balancing functionality and (time) commitment

Institutional solutions that propose fundamental changes generally seem better suited to meet the evolving demands of mission-oriented policymaking (see section 1.2). However, there's often a trade-off between enhanced functionality and the time, resources and lead time needed for implementation. Depending on political opportunities or the urgency of the issue, the institutionally "optimal" solution may not always be available for addressing the challenge. For example, in the case of climate-neutral steel production, a lengthy process of institution building or reform would not align with the pressing need for action. In such cases, it might make sense to opt for a second-best solution, even if a more complex institutional framework promise a better fit. Still, citing such challenges shouldn't serve as an excuse to immediately rule out more ambitious solutions or settle for the least demanding option.

4.2 Functional governance structures for mission implementation – where and how to begin?

Based on the insights from this focus paper, several conclusions and recommendations can be drawn for shaping future governance structures for mission implementation and mission-oriented policymaking in Germany.

1) Institutional solutions are necessary but not sufficient for missions to succeed

While the various institutional approaches discussed offer distinct advantages and meet different context-

specific needs, it's important to recognize that they represent only one part of the equation for successful mission-oriented policy (Lindner et al. 2021).

A key prerequisite for the success of any transformative or mission-oriented policy is strong political prioritization and support (Lindner et al. 2021). This is a critical success factor for all the proposed solutions. Moreover, institutional structures alone cannot make up for deficiencies in negotiation or mission formulation processes (Wittmann et al. 2021a). Therefore, any discussion on developing effective governance structures for mission-oriented policy – both in general and specific cases – should be embedded within a broader conversation on the framework conditions necessary for successful mission implementation (Lindner et al. 2021). At the same time, it's essential to challenge the current practice of tying the lifespan of missions too closely to political cycles, which often makes institutional changes seem impossible from the outset (cf. EFI 2024, p. 30).⁸

2) Strategically combining different institutional solutions for policy design

While the analysis focused on the strengths and weaknesses of individual institutional solutions, combining different elements (either in sequence or simultaneously) may be a promising solution. This approach allows for harnessing the strengths of multiple models while compensating for their potential weaknesses.

This is particularly relevant when considering the time-intensive nature of establishing structures like stakeholder governance or mission agencies, which risks losing mission momentum before tangible results can be seen. In this case, for example, the temporary reorganization of ministerial work through mission teams could strengthen the focus on a specific topic while the long-term creation of a mission agency or a stakeholder governance takes place in parallel.

Thereby the mission teams could serve as a interim bridge, supporting the initial phase of a mission while

⁸ Institutional design choices around the Mission Owner bring up various considerations that can shape the resulting solutions. One prominent example is how stakeholders are engaged. Should the focus be on key players who are already ahead in the field (front-runners), or should the emphasis be on representing established structures? In the expert interviews, it appears that one factor contributing to successful implementation in the Netherlands was the focus on forward-thinking actors – both within ministries and across other stakeholder groups. This emphasis allowed for the development of more transformative approaches, which could then be integrated into organizations and scaled beyond them.

the longer-term development of a mission agency is underway, helping to fill the early-stage implementation gap. This approach could reduce the drawbacks and limitations of these comprehensive institutional changes necessary for their successful implementation.

A similar approach has been observed in the Netherlands with transformation teams, where central steering structures only took on a more prominent role as clear goals were established over time.

3) Understanding mission governance as a continuous learning and development process

The development of governance structures for missions should not be seen as a one-off decision. Instead, it should be approached as a continuous process of learning and adaptation, closely aligned with the mission itself.

In practice, this means:

- First, the focus should shift beyond just selecting mission topics and place greater emphasis on identifying the appropriate governance structures needed to address each specific challenge. Ideally, even during the mission formulation phase, it should be considered how governance structures can contribute to the desired outcomes
- Second, governance structures should be viewed as evolving over time, developing alongside the mission. Regularly reassessing and refining these structures is essential, and this process may also include experimental elements. To make this possible, it is critical to maintain strong political support and a long-term focus on missions, ensuring the flexibility needed to develop effective governance frameworks.

4) Identifying key requirements as the basis for developing effective governance solutions for missions

Just as the negotiation processes during mission formulation should be tailored to the specific actor configurations and the political and social context (Wittmann et al. 2024), the institutional solutions must be customized to the mission's unique characteristics. The development and selection of appropriate institutional structures require a clear understanding of the key governance needs, the mission's objectives, the scope for action and the specific context of the mission.

The chosen institutional solution should resonate with the mission's objectives as well as its actor and problem structures. There is no one-size-fits-all governance solution that can deliver equally effective results across different missions.

Table 3 summarizes, based on the findings from Chapters 2 and 3, which institutional solutions are particularly well-suited or less suitable for specific challenges. This overview is designed to serve as a guide for policymakers, helping them identify promising solutions while ruling out less effective ones.

TABLE 3: Suitability of institutional solutions

Institutional solution	Best suited for	Less suitable for
Mission teams	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initial exploration or as a stepping stone in developing governance frameworks for a mission • A foundational element in mission governance that can be complemented by additional components (e.g., a government committee) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transformative policymaking that demands integration across ministries rather than simple coordination • Missions aimed at mobilizing broad stakeholder resources
Mission teams with government committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinating multiple interconnected missions • Missions dealing with topics at the intersection of various ministries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategies involving highly diverse missions with minimal overlap • Transformative policymaking focused on policy integration rather than coordination • Missions aimed at mobilizing broad stakeholder resources
Mission ministry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrating policy in well-defined areas with a limited number of stakeholders • Missions focused on accelerating the implementation of pre-identified solutions or diffusion-based approaches • Missions heavily centered on individual ministries or policy instruments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Issues where the solutions are still vague or poorly defined, making it hard to outline the specific scope of work • Topics with a strong cross-cutting nature that span the responsibilities of multiple ministries • Missions aimed at mobilizing broad stakeholder resources
Stakeholder governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Missions that focus on mobilizing private resources and actors • Situations where key stakeholders are already organized within formal structures (e.g., industry associations) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Situations dominated by a few key players or where a high percentage of stakeholders are unorganized • High-pressure environments where immediate decisions and results are required
Mission agency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Societal challenges that require breaking down established responsibilities and policy silos to develop new approaches • Complex challenges requiring exploratory work and extensive negotiation on defining the problem or mission objectives • Scenarios where the relevant stakeholders are unclear or poorly organized 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High-pressure situations where quick decisions are necessary • Missions that primarily focus on individual policy tools or involve only a small number of actors

Source: Own illustration.

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