

Harnessing Collective Intelligence for Public Sector Innovation: Mission-Oriented Innovation in Action

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This teaching case explores how mission-oriented innovation enables Innov'Agency, the national innovation agency of a Nordic country, to rethink the government's role in addressing complex societal challenges that no single institution can resolve independently. It examines how Innov'Agency applies systems thinking, adaptive leadership, and collective intelligence to convene actors, co-create and prototype solutions, and catalyze urban mobility transformation. The central dilemma is whether this innovative, collaborative approach can overcome the entrenched silos in food systems. Can public agencies drive systemic change in fragmented and deeply rooted areas such as food? Through this case, graduate master's-level students as well as professionals and executives will critically appraise how public institutions design and lead missions that balance environmental sustainability, public health, and social equity. In addition, a role-play will teach them to identify levers for system change, manage multi-stakeholder dynamics, and navigate uncertainty through experimentation and collaboration.

Liam Dorsey, Head of Strategic Design at Innov'Agency, the national innovation agency of a Nordic country, leads the Streets Shift Mission, an ambitious effort to reshape urban mobility through mission-oriented innovation. As he shares his team's early achievements with a global audience of policymakers, urban planners, and innovation leaders, a pressing dilemma lingers in his mind: Can this bold, experimental approach overcome the entrenched silos and traditional ways of thinking that have long defined the public sector? Can governments truly embrace such a transformative shift?

The Streets Shift Mission extends beyond urban mobility. It is about shifting perspectives and redefining the role of government in tackling complex societal issues that no single institution can tackle alone. "We cannot simply optimize our streets for better traffic flow," Dorsey says. "We need to think about streets as spaces for public health, sustainability, and vibrant communities." That means a different way of engaging for Innov'Agency. Over the past year, they had collaborated with an ecosystem of actors to prototype and refine mobility solutions, learning through iteration and real-world experimentation. As Dorsey and his team apply these principles to food systems, another critical question arises: Can the mission-oriented approach succeed in the more fragmented multi-actor realm of food production, distribution, and consumption? Will they succeed in overcoming resistance from traditional structures and in enacting meaningful, systemic change across the country's food sector, just as they have in urban mobility?

Context

Mission-Oriented Innovation

Economist Professor Mariana Mazzucato, Founding Director of the UCL Institute for Innovation and Public Purpose (IIPP), recently popularized mission-oriented innovation and emphasized governments' essential role in taking bold action to address complex challenges and generate public value with positive spillovers (Mazzucato, 2017; Mazzucato et al., 2020). The Observatory of Public Sector Innovation (OPSI) at the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) defines mission-oriented innovation as a coordinated approach to addressing systemic challenges that do not fall within the remit of a single institution. Mission-oriented innovation aims to achieve transformative outcomes by setting measurable, ambitious, time-bound goals ("missions"), fostering cross-sector collaboration, and aligning policy, regulation, and innovation (Larrue, 2021). Unlike traditional innovation policies that focus on individual sectors or technologies, mission-oriented innovation targets multi-sectoral grand challenges, mobilizing actors across sectors and governance levels (Wanzenböck et al., 2020). By 2019, Innov'Agency began testing mission-oriented innovation principles to tackle such complex and systemic societal challenges.

Adaptive Leadership

Ronald Heifetz introduced adaptive leadership at Harvard University to help organizations and individuals navigate our era's complex and evolving challenges (Heifetz

et al., 2009). Unlike technical problems, these challenges require learning, trial, iteration, and collective action. Defined as "the practice of mobilizing people to tackle tough challenges and thrive" (Heifetz et al., 2009, p. 2), adaptive leadership is particularly relevant in volatile, uncertain, and complex environments. It values diverse perspectives, experimentation, and adaptation based on feedback. Effective adaptive leaders manage resistance by addressing the losses associated with change, rather than the change itself (Heifetz et al., 2009). As such, adaptive leadership aligns closely with mission-oriented innovation, as both emphasize continuous learning, collaboration, experimentation, and stakeholder engagement. For Innov'Agency, adaptive leadership meant facilitating workshops where diverse stakeholders could openly confront tensions.

Innov'Agency and the Nordic Context

Since its inception in the early 2000s, Innov'Agency, a national innovation agency in a Nordic country, has been mandated to drive sustainable growth and ensure the country's future readiness. Founded as a funding body focused on selected industries, it evolved into a catalyst shaping the country's innovation landscape and one of the first agencies to adopt mission-oriented innovation. The country's strong tradition of public investment in societal well-being, high institutional trust, and a proactive public sector provided a unique environment for this work. In fact, in Nordic countries, long-standing practices of multi-stakeholder collaboration, consensus-driven governance, and open dialogue had created a fertile ground for participatory, cross-sectoral innovation (OECD, 2019). For example, the Million Homes Programme (1965–1974) was officially announced by the Swedish Parliament and aimed to construct one million affordable homes within ten years. It was achieved through a combination of political will, centralized planning, and multi-level coordination (Hall & Vidén, 2005). Similarly, Sweden's "Vision Zero" to eliminate traffic fatalities illustrates how explicit ambitions, framed around bold quantitative goals and societal outcomes, can align actors toward large-scale transformation (Craens et al., 2022; Elvebakk & Steiro, 2009).

Innov'Agency can draw on these foundations to experiment with new ways of working, breaking down silos, supporting cross-sector collaboration, and investing in capabilities like systems thinking and strategic design. Internally, the agency embraced a shift toward greater openness to uncertainty, iteration, and collective learning, driven by the need to reimagine institutional responses to global challenges. In this context, Dorsey was hired as Head of Strategic Design. With a background in strategic design and urban planning and a strong foundation in mission-driven innovation, he saw the potential to leverage these practices to challenge traditional governance and policy frameworks and help achieve the nation's vision of becoming a fossil-free welfare state.

Smart Cities and Urban Mobility

As city governments face growing populations and the need to reduce carbon footprints, smart cities and mobility

solutions have emerged as key strategies for urban transformation. Cities like Barcelona, Amsterdam, and Singapore have led the way, integrating technologies to develop sustainable transportation networks. Micro-mobility solutions and shared mobility systems, such as (electric) bikes and scooters, have become essential for short trips, offering quick, low-carbon alternatives. In Barcelona, the Superblocks, car-restricted areas that promote pedestrian-friendly zones, have become a model for reducing congestion and creating healthier, more sustainable urban spaces. Similarly, the "15-minute city" concept, in which essential services are within a short walk or bike ride, is also gaining traction (e.g., in Paris). These trends focus on reimagining urban spaces to foster community engagement, sustainability, and equity, and inspired Innov'Agency as it prepared to launch the Streets Shift Mission.

Mission-Oriented Innovation in Action: The Streets Shift Mission

Identifying the Challenge Area

Innov'Agency's decision to pilot mission-oriented innovation with mobility emerged over a period of two to three months. Dorsey and his team deliberately chose not to apply mission-oriented innovation to a specific industry. They began by examining the country's national priorities with the intention of addressing complex and interconnected challenge areas. With Innov'Agency's broad mandate, they could look across sectors and societal needs. Mobility stood out as a robust collective challenge. It was "everyday" and "everywhere": deeply embedded in people's lives and spanning a vast spectrum, from wheelchairs to walking and cycling to cars, heavy trucks, and high-speed trains. Mobility did not belong to a single institution and was not only about logistics and utility. It was about personal needs, social connection, fun, and joy. It carried profound systemic relevance, touching on health, sustainability, and equity, while reflecting the country's legacy as a 20th-century leader in global mobility. Nevertheless, this legacy posed a pressing question: How could the country transition toward more inclusive, sustainable, and innovative forms of 21st-century mobility? After engaging with Innov'Agency leadership, Dorsey and his team chose mobility as the focus for their mission-oriented innovation experiment.

Framing the Mission

Once Dorsey and his team chose mobility as their focus, they mapped key actors to define their mission. They then conducted "system in the room" workshops, convening public, private, and third-sector stakeholders in open, non-hierarchical spaces for dialogue. Cross-sectoral engagement was relatively easy due to the strong trust and collaboration among government, industry, and civil society. Using systems thinking principles, Dorsey and his team identified strategic levers within the mobility ecosystem, public transport, streets, vehicles, intelligent mobility technologies, policies, and incentives that could drive the most significant impact. The workshops also revealed Innov'Agency's assumptions, particularly the legacy belief that innovation should prioritize industrial

growth. Reframing mobility through the agency's original remit, Dorsey broadened the focus to include health, community, and sustainability. The country's 40,000 km of streets became a key intervention point, not just for vehicles, but for social interaction and community life. This led to the Streets Shift Mission: to make every street in the country healthy, sustainable, and vibrant by 2030 (see Figure 1). Achieving this mission would require balancing tensions between competing priorities, such as the need for quick, visible solutions and the long-term goals of sustainability and public health.

From System in the Room to Room in the System

Dorsey and his team continued running "system in the room" workshops. Public health officials, urban planners, environmental experts, municipal representatives, and local communities had to rethink what a street was meant to be. Streets were redefined as an ecosystem with diverse inputs and outputs, and were treated as a central urban system that connected multiple public domains, including transport, urban planning, public health, safety, culture, retail, and the environment. One public health expert highlighted the need for walkable spaces that encouraged exercise, a business owner shared concerns about congestion affecting local commerce, a city planner focused on improving infrastructure and traffic flow, and local communities emphasized the need for spaces to meet and ex-

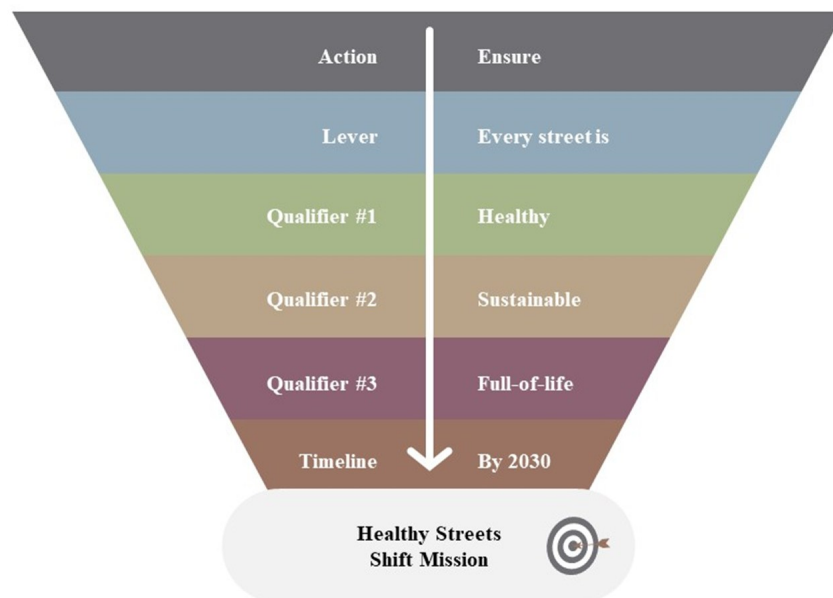
change. Streets were no longer seen as the sole responsibility of traffic departments. All participating actors gradually expanded their view of the streets beyond traffic to encompass public health, sustainability, commerce, and community. Streets became the leverage points through which coordinated interventions could deliver simultaneous and diverse outputs. Actors prioritized outputs by considering improving environmental quality, well-being, or biodiversity recovery. They then developed a model that outlined the comprehensive advantages of simultaneously addressing climate resilience, preventative health, social equity, and economic performance (see Figure 2). As such, streets were augmented, and actors started seeing room to maneuver in the system.

Solution Design

Dorsey and his team shifted to solution mode: How could they transform the country's streets while starting small? Although governed by the same national law, the streets' physical and social conditions varied across municipalities, requiring a flexible, modular approach adaptable to local contexts while driving systemic change. The focus shifted from what would be taken away (e.g., parking spaces or traffic lanes) to what could be gained instead. Dorsey emphasized that their goal was not to impose a solution but to engage communities and ensure the changes resonated with those who would live with them

Figure 1

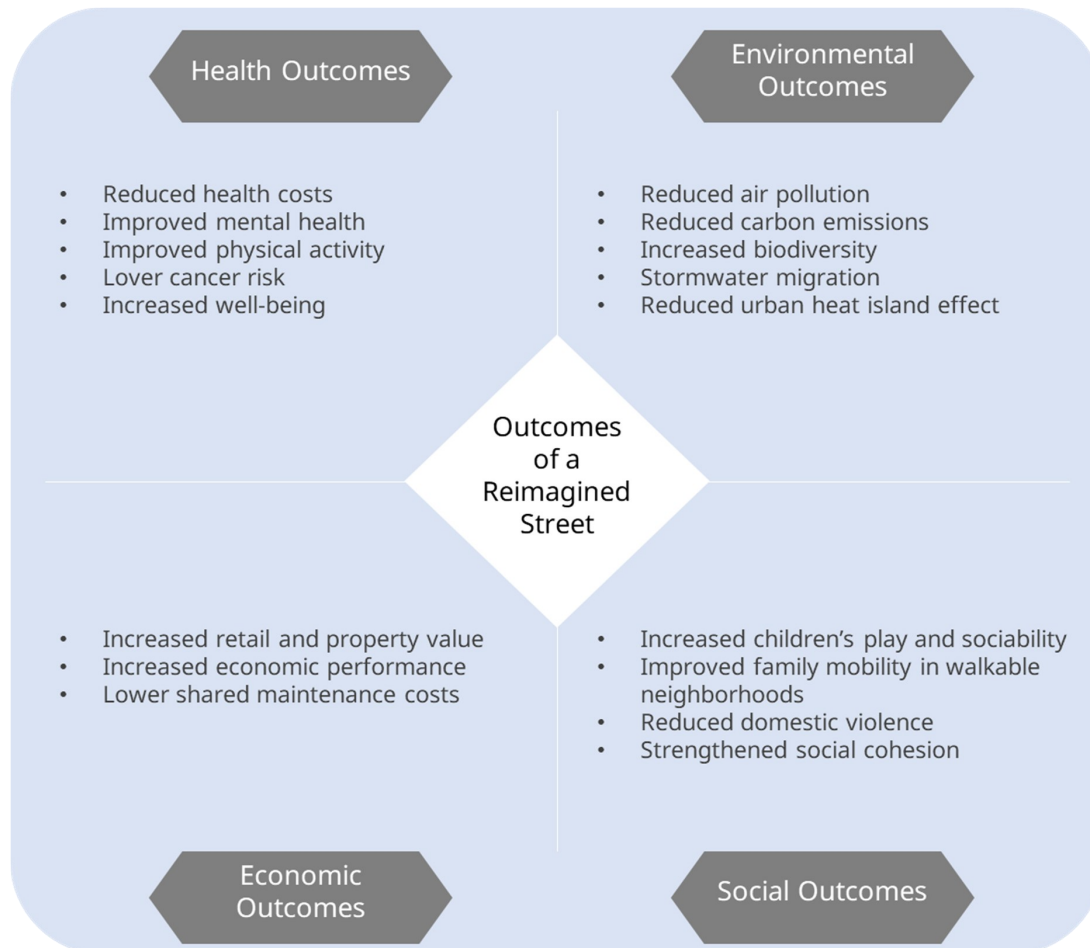
Structure and Framing of the Healthy Sustainable Streets Shift Mission



Note. Critical elements of the mission are (1) an action verb (ensure) that showcases the commitment and continued engagement, (2) a well-defined lever (every street), (3) qualifiers that drive a direction of change (healthy, sustainable, and full of life) and that are not overly specific, and (4) a timeline (by 2030). Inspired by *Mission-oriented innovation—A handbook from Vinnova*, (p. 362-363), D. Hill (2022), Vinnova.

Figure 2

Potential Outcomes of the Healthy Sustainable Streets Shift Mission



Note. Inspired by *Mission-oriented innovation—A handbook from Vinnova*, D. Hill (2022), Vinnova.

daily. Reshaping streets became a fun and creative process, with participatory design as a key feature of the project.

The first design experiment occurred in streets where children poured out of classrooms daily. Innov'Agency invited these children to imagine their ideal streets. Using simple design kits, children created vibrant, playful, and functional environments with bike and scooter parking, seating areas, and playgrounds. While the officials excelled at ensuring safety and envisioning outcomes, the children stood out in the design process. "Who better to shape the streets," Dorsey reflected, "than the streets' residents and daily users themselves?" This approach handed design power back to the community. As Dorsey recounted, one senior official said, "That's the first time in 25 years of working for the Transport Agency when I have actually been to a project on the ground, outside my office." The experience underscored the mission's impact in connecting diverse actors. As a result, each street became

a unique space reflecting its community, showcasing Innov'Agency's commitment to diversity, sustainability, and health over sterile efficiency.

Prototyping and Scaling

Dorsey and his team knew the mission's success depended on small, adjustable, scalable interventions that could drive broader transformation. The designs created by children were handed over to urban planners and architects, evolving from simple kits into real-world prototypes. Streets were temporarily closed to cars and transformed into pedestrian paths, bike lanes, and modular play areas. Local communities, businesses, and senior government officials watched the children's visions come to life. One of these prototypes, the "one-minute city", turned parking spaces into multifunctional areas such as seating zones, green spaces, playgrounds, or hubs for micro-mobility services using modular wooden kits designed for rapid assembly. It became a flagship output of the Streets Shift Mission, and a follow-up research revealed

strong public support for this intervention, with 73% of respondents rating it positively, indicating strong engagement and satisfaction. A senior representative leading a public center for architecture and design noted that prototypes sparked public dialogue on the future of streets, with broad media coverage reinforcing the approach's potential to advance national ambitions (Hill, 2022).

Not all prototypes were successful, and each served as a learning experience. A key lesson was the importance of moving rapidly from strategy to action. Adopting mission-oriented innovation meant not crafting a perfect plan upfront, and experimenting, learning, adapting, and fine-tuning, even if it meant returning to the drawing board. Given the interconnected nature of missions, multiple complementary prototypes were managed as a portfolio, each contributing to the broader goal of healthier, more sustainable streets. As the team transitioned to the scaling phase, the children's designs became blueprints for municipalities nationwide. New partnerships with local manufacturers and sustainable material suppliers allowed the creation of modular kits adaptable to each street's unique character.

The Mission Board

As different prototypes emerged, so did the need for a governance model that reflected the iterative and adaptive nature of mission-oriented innovation (see Figure 3). The Mission Board was at the heart of this model. It consisted of a coalition of key actors, including Innov'Agency, the National Center for Architecture and Design, the Transport Agency, the Public Health Agency, and representatives from relevant municipalities. Their role was to steer the mission, ensuring alignment with national priorities while maintaining flexibility to adapt to real-world challenges. Supporting the Mission Board, a Project Team took on the hands-on work of coordinating prototype de-

velopment, funding calls, and engaging municipalities. Additionally, Local Mission Boards were established in participating municipalities, ensuring that each prototype reflected the specific needs of its urban context.

Innov'Agency's Evolving Role

Innov'Agency's role in the Streets Shift Mission was another moving piece in this experimental approach. Initially, actors saw Innov'Agency primarily as a funding agency (its original role), which led to a "where is the money?" attitude in early discussions. Over time, however, Innov'Agency's role became more apparent: They actively shaped the mission and were the "glue" between often disparate system actors and elements. A representative from one of the leading mobility corporations emphasized that Innov'Agency's neutral platform enabled diverse stakeholders to unite around a shared goal, while rapid prototyping catalyzed dialogue, debate, and change (Hill, 2022). They engaged around 500 organizations and facilitated over 25 workshops to foster collaboration. What distinguished this effort was the collective intelligence and action, enabled through "on-the-ground" participative activities, which allowed all actors to generate, test, and share knowledge across boundaries. The Streets Shift Mission stood in sharp contrast to parallel efforts Dorsey was leading to adopt a mission-oriented approach to revamp industrial policy in Parliament. These efforts struggled to gain traction because they failed to engage the right mix of actors beyond the political sphere, highlighting the critical importance of context, inclusion, and system-wide participation that the Streets Shift Mission successfully achieved.

Transforming Food Systems

The Streets Shift Mission demonstrated the transformative power of mission-oriented innovation, particularly in

Figure 3

Typical Mission Governance Structure



Note. Adapted from *Mission-oriented innovation—A handbook from Vinnova*, (p. 492), D. Hill (2022), Vinnova.

shifting perspectives and leveraging adaptive leadership and collective intelligence to tackle complex societal challenges. While fulfilling, this approach came with its own challenges. Driving collective action, gaining buy-in from diverse actors with competing priorities, and balancing market-driven needs with public health and sustainability required patience, persistence, and trust.

Dorsey and his team realized that they needed to tackle another use case to demonstrate the impact of the mission-oriented innovation principles. Globally, food systems were undergoing a critical reevaluation given their contribution to environmental degradation, health issues, and social inequalities. The need for a sustainable, healthy, and equitable food system has never been more urgent. Like mobility, food was also "everyday" and "everywhere", with its web of interconnected challenges, ranging from environmental sustainability and public health to social equity. Food systems also faced unique tensions: large agri-businesses focused on efficiency and profit, while local producers and communities prioritized health, equity, and sustainability. Overcoming decades of industrial-scale production required delicately balancing innovation with the realities of politics and economics. Issues such as food waste and food deserts, particularly in disadvantaged areas, were often overlooked, and a lack of coordination across the supply chain exacerbated these challenges.

A fascinating strategic lever emerged: school food. School meals accounted for nearly half of all meals served, over two million daily. The country spent approximately US\$700 million annually in 2019 on school food. However, this "national kitchen" was designed around cost and hygiene. Dorsey thought: Could we reimagine this "national kitchen"? Could school food become a platform for transformation, an investment in public health, climate resilience, and social justice? Could mission-oriented innovation help transform a fragmented system dominated by an industrial, efficiency-driven mindset? As with the Streets Shift Mission, the challenge was not just technical. It was cultural, political, and human. Once again, Dorsey knew the answer would not come from one sector alone and was ready to bring many to the table.

Discussion Questions

As Dorsey and his team gear up to apply the mission-oriented innovation principles to reimagine food systems, many questions emerge: (1) Considering the complexities and interconnections within food systems, how should Dorsey and his team design the Food Shift Mission to apply mission-oriented innovation principles? (2) What potential solutions can be implemented through the Food Shift Mission, and what outcomes might these solutions lead to? (3) How can public sector innovation agencies such as Innov'Agency drive missions and enable transformative change in highly complex systems like food systems? (4) How do collective intelligence and adaptive leadership contribute to the effectiveness of mission-oriented innovation, and what does this reveal about their importance in public sector transformation?

Key Protagonist

Liam Dorsey is a highly experienced strategic designer and urbanist focusing on the intersection of design, technology, and urban environments. Dorsey had been involved in mission-oriented innovation since 2017. From 2019 to 2022, he served as the Head of Strategic Design at Innov'Agency, where he led mission-oriented innovation projects. He brought a designer's mindset to public innovation, absorbing the country's cultural, historical, and contextual nuances to shape a locally grounded version of mission-oriented innovation. The projects he led involved integrating systems thinking and participatory design to address complex societal challenges. Dorsey emphasized the importance of collective action and participatory methods, advocating for holistic and adjustable design solutions that responded to the specific needs of communities.

Teaching Note

Case Synopsis

Innov'Agency, a Nordic national innovation agency, hires Liam Dorsey, a seasoned strategic designer, to apply mission-oriented innovation to tackle systemic challenges and support the vision of a fossil-free welfare state. Dorsey and his team launch the Streets Shift Mission to transform the nation's streets by 2030. Alongside relevant actors, they reimagine streets as ecosystems that support public health, reduce emissions, and foster social connection. They implement participatory and iterative approaches, involving children, urban planners, and local communities in the co-creation and testing of solutions. As the mission advances, Innov'Agency adopts a flexible governance model that engages and empowers municipal, regional, and national actors.

At the end of the case, Dorsey is ready to apply mission-oriented principles to the more fragmented realm of food systems. In this context, the case challenges participants to design a mission that addresses the intertwined priorities of sustainability, public health, and social equity, using school meals as a strategic lever. Through a role-play and four guided discussion questions, participants explore how to identify and activate levers of change, frame missions that align diverse actors, and assess the institutional capabilities required to achieve a mission. The case invites participants to engage with real-world trade-offs, uncover hidden assumptions, and reflect on how innovation agencies can enable adaptive leadership and harness the power of collective intelligence.

Instructor Guidance on Case Complexity

This case deliberately presents intersecting issues, including urban mobility, the redefinition of streets, food systems, and the evolving role of government. These contextual details are included to reflect the complexity and ambiguity of real-world public-sector challenges. Some elements may function as apparent "red herrings," prompting participants to question what the core issue truly is. This ambiguity is intentional and mirrors the

sensemaking challenges practitioners face. Not all information is equally central to the case analysis, and instructors are encouraged to prompt participants to exercise judgment about what is most relevant to the mission at hand. Instructors can help participants recognize food systems as the focal challenge and the Streets Shift Mission as the reference case from which participants are expected to extract transferable principles (e.g., systems thinking, mission framing, governance design, and prototyping). Instructors are also expected to guide participants in adapting and applying these principles critically to the distinct context of food systems using the guidance provided across this teaching note. Used productively, these elements help surface assumptions, highlight the limits of analogy, and deepen discussion about how mission-oriented innovation must be adapted rather than replicated across domains.

Target Audience and Case Fit

Target Audience

This case is designed for graduate students in public policy, urban planning, and strategic design, innovation management, and social innovation, as well as executives, including public sector leaders, policymakers, innovation managers across sectors, and strategic designers. For students, the emphasis is on framing public missions and navigating complex multi-actor dynamics. For executives, it is also about translating collective intelligence into actionable insights and understanding the importance of context.

Case Fit

The focus of this case falls under the disciplines of public policy and governance, sustainable policy design, innovation management, social innovation, strategic design, and public leadership. It examines mission-oriented innovation as a challenge-led, outcome-driven approach that mobilizes diverse actors around bold societal goals (Larrue, 2021; Mazzucato, 2017). The case highlights systems thinking, which identifies interconnections and leverage points within complex systems (Meadows, 2008), adaptive leadership, which emphasizes learning, trust, and experimentation in uncertain contexts (Heifetz et al., 2009), and collective intelligence, the distributed knowledge, perspectives, and lived experiences of actors across the system (Mulgan, 2023; Söilen, 2019). In Innov'Agency's case, these principles translate into participatory approaches that build ownership and legitimacy, catalyzing engagement and public value creation. The case also invites reflection on how context shapes the feasibility and transferability of mission-oriented innovation.

Learning Objectives

This teaching case study assumes participants have prior knowledge of public sector innovation and systems thinking approaches. The learning objectives are for participants to:

1. Deepen their understanding of mission-oriented innovation as a transformative approach to address com-

plex systemic societal challenges;

2. Apply systems thinking to identify, build, and activate the ecosystems needed to tackle these challenges;
3. Evaluate the role of public innovation agencies in enacting change through inclusive and experimental approaches;
4. Critically appraise the importance of collective intelligence and adaptive leadership in designing and implementing mission-oriented innovation;
5. Reflect on how public institutions must evolve to respond to the complex challenges of our time with greater agility, collaboration, and long-term vision (for more seasoned and experienced participants).

Teaching Plan

Two teaching plans are provided, tailored to the target audience of the case: one for graduate master's-level students and another for executives attending professional education programs. Both plans offer tactics to help instructors judge participation and critical thinking. Both plans include a role-play, and it is recommended that graduate students and executives prepare for it before class. Details about the role-play and a preparation handout are provided in the Appendix.

Teaching Plan for Graduate Students

The case can be taught to graduate students during a 90-minute class:

1. Introduction (5 minutes):
 - a) Begin with an overview of Innov'Agency's implementation of mission-oriented innovation principles in the country's mobility sector (Streets Shift Mission).
 - b) Introduce the protagonist and the challenge of adapting these principles to food systems. Set the scene by using Dorsey's insights on the need to innovate: "You cannot use the methods that got you into this mess to get you out of it!"
2. Initial Poll (5 minutes):
 - a) Conduct a live poll, using tools such as Mentimeter, www.mentimeter.com, or Slido, www.sli.do, to gauge initial thoughts on the critical success factors of the Streets Shift Mission, ensuring students mention the key characteristics of the mission.
3. Role-Play (30 minutes):

Ahead of the class, divide students into groups of five for the role-play and circulate the handout provided in the Appendix. During class:

 - a) Invite students to role-play the mission design meeting where Innov'Agency facilitates the discussion (all groups in parallel, in separate areas of the room).
 - b) During the role-play, move around the room to encourage students to draw parallels to the Streets Shift Mission, to ensure all perspectives are voiced, and to prompt quieter participants by linking their expertise

to the mission discussion. Keep track of time to ensure you have enough to debrief and reflect.

4. Group Presentations and Debrief (25 minutes):

- a) Request each group to present their mission design, focusing on the mission phrasing, the strategic levers, and how they were derived. The time allocated to each group presentation depends on the class size. Allow at least three minutes per group presentation. If time permits, allow groups to react to each other's presentations. If time is short, combine role-play and presentations by having groups present only their mission statement and one strategic lever.
- b) After each presentation, ask groups to identify the most challenging trade-off they faced in designing the Food Shift Mission, drawing comparisons to the tensions Innov'Agency encountered in the Streets Shift Mission.

5. Discussion Questions (25 minutes):

- a) Critically analyze the discussion questions (see Discussion Points).
- b) Share the Epilogue of the case.

Teaching Plan for Executives

The case can be taught to executives during a three-hour session:

1. Introduction to Mission-Oriented Innovation and Initial Poll (15 minutes):

- a) Begin the session with an overview of mission-oriented innovation and its recent adoption as an approach to address complex societal challenges.
- b) Conduct a live poll, using tools such as Mentimeter, www.mentimeter.com, or Slido, www.sli.do, to gauge the executives' current familiarity with mission-oriented innovation and its characteristics.
- c) Facilitate an open discussion and emphasize the characteristics of missions.

2. Case Overview (10 minutes)

- a) Provide an overview of Innov'Agency's adoption of mission-oriented innovation principles in the country's mobility sector (Streets Shift Mission), linking back to the previously discussed characteristics.
- b) Introduce the protagonist and the challenge of adapting these principles to food systems. Set the scene by using Dorsey's insights on the need to innovate: "You cannot use the methods that got you into this mess to get you out of it!"

3. Role-Play (50 minutes):

Ahead of the class, divide executives into groups of five for the role-play and circulate the handout provided in the Appendix. During class:

- a) Invite executives to role-play the mission design meeting where Innov'Agency facilitates the discussion (all groups in parallel, in separate areas of the room).

- b) During the role-play, move around the room to encourage students to draw parallels to the Streets Shift Mission, to ensure all perspectives are voiced, and to prompt quieter participants by linking their expertise to the mission discussion. Keep track of time to ensure you have enough to debrief and reflect.

4. Group Presentations and Debrief (30 minutes):

- a) Request each group to present their mission design, focusing on the mission phrasing and highlighting strategic levers and stakeholder engagement strategies. Allow at least five minutes per group presentation. If time permits, allow groups to react to each other's presentations. If time is short, combine role-play and presentations by having groups present only their mission statement and one strategic lever.
- b) During the debrief, ask groups to identify the most challenging trade-off they faced in designing the Food Shift Mission, drawing comparisons to the tensions Innov'Agency encountered in the Streets Shift Mission.
- c) Facilitate a discussion using the questions provided in the Appendix.

5. Discussion Questions (40 minutes)

- a) Critically analyze the discussion questions (see Discussion Points).
- b) Share the Epilogue of the case.

6. Reflection and Path Forward (35 minutes)

- a) Ask executives to individually reflect on how government institutions in their context should evolve to become collaborative, adaptive, and innovative, and how they can harness collective intelligence to deliver public value.
- b) Ask executives to write down three actionable steps to apply the lessons learned to the challenges they face in their institutions.
- c) Invite executives to share their action plans with the rest of the group, fostering a collaborative atmosphere for ongoing reflection and practical application.

Online and Hybrid Adaptations

For online delivery, use breakout rooms for the role-play and a shared whiteboard tool to record mission statements. In hybrid settings, mix in-room and online participants in each group to maintain engagement and diversity of perspectives.

Suggested Assessment Options

We propose three options for assessing students' and executives' achievement of the learning outcomes of the case. (1) Assess students and executives based on their engagement in the role-play and the group presentation; (2) Assess executives based on their engagement in the reflection activity on the evolution of public institutions and public governance; and (3) Assess students' and executives' understanding of mission-oriented innovation using a short essay submitted after class, where they critical-

ly appraise the trade-offs in mission-oriented innovation and propose a mission for their own organization or community.

Discussion Points

This section provides brief guidance to answer the discussion questions posed to students and executives. The guidance is tailored to the audience, and additional pointers are provided to facilitate discussions with executives who are expected to have more practical experience.

Discussion Question 1

Question. Considering the complexities and interconnections within food systems, how should Dorsey and his team design the Food Shift Mission to apply mission-oriented innovation principles?

Suggested Answer. To design the Food Shift Mission effectively, students and executives should think about the principles of mission-oriented innovation and the steps outlined by Mazzucato (2017) and Larrue (2021) and showcased in Figure 1:

1. Anchor the mission to a bold, societal outcome: Frame a clear, ambitious, and inspiring goal that reflects public value and aligns with national priorities.
2. Map system interdependencies: Analyze how agriculture, health, education, logistics, environment, and culture intersect within the food system. Emphasize feedback loops and ripple effects across sectors.
3. Engage the right mix of stakeholders: Include actors from multiple governance levels and sectors to ensure diverse perspectives and ownership (Mazzucato et al., 2020).
4. Identify strategic levers: Use systems thinking to pinpoint leverage points, or high-impact intervention points (Meadows, 2008), areas of tension, opportunity, or misalignment where targeted action can trigger broader transformation (e.g., school meals, food waste, procurement).
5. Select and frame the mission around a lever: In this case, school meals are a powerful lever. They reach millions daily, shape long-term habits, and reflect shared values. Frame the mission around transforming school food to deliver system-wide impact.

Likely Participant Response. Participants may propose narrow fixes such as healthier menus, sourcing adjustments, or nutrition campaigns. Some may highlight the importance of involving farmers, parents, schools, and ministries, while underestimating the need to reconcile their competing priorities. Others may attempt to apply systems thinking by mapping interconnections across health, logistics, and education; however, they may stop short of identifying leverage points.

Common Misconceptions. A common misconception is assuming that one intervention, such as banning processed food, would by itself trigger system-wide transformation. Some participants may assume a government decree alone can shift entrenched food practices, underes-

timating the time needed to align competing priorities, as seen in Innov'Agency's experience with the Streets Shift Mission.

Facilitation Tips. To debrief the role-play, ask which step was most challenging to replicate in their context and why. Then, highlight what surfaced (or did not) about values, power dynamics, and systems thinking during the activity. With Executives, emphasize the need for an inclusive, participatory approach to challenge assumptions and unlock innovation. In addition, discuss the political sensitivity of food and the cultural significance of school meals. Finally, explore how framing school meals as a strategic public investment (rather than a cost center) can drive positive outcomes.

Discussion Question 2

Question. What potential solutions can be implemented through the Food Shift Mission, and what outcomes might these solutions lead to?

Suggested Answer. The Food Shift Mission could drive systemic change through a set of targeted solutions that produce a broad range of interconnected outcomes across public health, sustainability, social equity, and economic growth. Table 1 provides a suggested list of solutions and outcomes.

Likely Participant Response. Participants may emphasize solutions such as plant-based menus, local sourcing, or food waste reduction strategies. They may focus on incremental changes, such as portion control or waste minimization, without connecting them to broader systemic ripple effects. Some may concentrate selectively on one dimension, such as health or sustainability, while neglecting others, such as equity or economic growth outcomes.

Common Misconceptions. Participants may equate plant-based food with healthier diets without considering nutritional balance or cultural diversity, assume local sourcing is easily scalable across a nation without accounting for logistics and cost challenges, or overlook unintended consequences such as procurement shifts harming existing suppliers.

Facilitation Tips. Ask students to reflect on how systems thinking helped uncover these solutions and identify trade-offs during the role-play. With Executives, emphasize the difference between solutions (what the mission does) and outcomes (why it matters). In addition, reinforce the importance of aligning metrics and incentives across agencies and departments to support shared outcomes. Finally, invite reflection on institutional risks: What institutional risks might arise from reshaping school meals, and how could these risks be anticipated or mitigated?

Discussion Question 3

Question. How can public sector innovation agencies such as Innov'Agency drive missions and enable transformative change in highly complex systems like food systems?

Table 1*Suggested List of Solutions and Outcomes*

Area	Solutions	Outcomes
Public health	• Improve meal nutrition • Reduce ultra-processed foods • Integrate food education into curricula	• Lower childhood obesity • Improved academic performance • Prevention of diet-related and non-communicable diseases
Sustainability	• Introduce plant-based menus • Source locally and seasonally • Reduce portion waste	• Reduced greenhouse gas emissions, food waste, and environmental impact
Social equity	• Ensure universal access • Standardize nutritional quality • Co-design menus with diverse communities	• Improved access to healthy meals • Reduced disparities across socioeconomic groups • Increased inclusion in schools
Economic growth	• Shift procurement policies to support small, sustainable, local producers	• Greater market access for local actors • Stronger regional economies • More resilient food systems

Note: Inspired by *Mission-oriented innovation – a handbook from Vinnova*, by D. Hill, 2022, Vinnova.

Suggested Answer. Innov'Agency enabled the mission by adopting a collaborative governance model (see Figure 3) tailored to the complexities of food systems: misaligned interests, distributed responsibilities, and fragmented power. Innov'Agency operated across boundaries, taking on a neutral role described by Dorsey as the "cement between the bricks" (Hill, 2022). Innov'Agency connected actors, surfaced opportunities, and maintained mission direction, moving from traditional stakeholder engagement to deeper forms of co-design and co-innovation (Agger & Lund, 2017). Small-scale, intentionally imperfect prototypes were used to spark learning, reveal system tensions, and iteratively improve solutions through fast and real-world experimentation (Agger & Lund, 2017). This collaborative model was enabled by high public trust, shared purpose, and a history of cross-sector collaboration in the country, key preconditions for effective governance (Ansell & Gash, 2008). Its success also depended on institutional arrangements that fostered open, participatory practices and balanced formal structures with informal relationships (Agger & Lund, 2017; Van Gestel & Grotenbreg, 2021).

Likely Participant Response. Participants may emphasize Innov'Agency's role as a convener or neutral broker, connecting diverse actors, while others may highlight prototyping and small pilots as the primary lever for systemic change. Others may suggest the model can be easily replicated elsewhere, often without considering contextual factors such as public trust, institutional readiness, or historical collaboration.

Common Misconceptions. A frequent misconception is that once stakeholders are brought together, coalitions will sustain themselves without structured facilitation, resources, or iteration. Participants may also assume collaborative governance is equally feasible in all political and cultural contexts, or treat early prototypes as final solutions rather than learning mechanisms to inform broader system transformation.

Facilitation Tips. Debate the limits of transferability of mission-oriented principles and encourage students and executives to question whether practices such as participatory design and experimentation can be applied to other complex and interconnected systems. Highlight that while collaborative governance principles are broadly applicable, their success depends on contextual factors, such as public trust, prior collaboration, and institutional readiness. Surface the tension between mission ambition and institutional reality, and contrast Innov'Agency's enabling environment with contexts where such foundations may be weaker. With Executives, emphasize that collaborative governance depends on contextual factors like trust, shared purpose, and a tradition of cross-sector collaboration. Ask them to reflect on whether these factors exist in their system. Finally, discuss the need for formal structures and informal relationships to support the success of mission-oriented innovation.

Discussion Question 4

Question. How do collective intelligence and adaptive leadership contribute to the effectiveness of mission-

oriented innovation, and what does this reveal about their importance in public sector transformation?

Suggested Answer. The Streets and Food Shift Missions demonstrate how public institutions learn, collaborate, and lead in the face of complex challenges. The two missions also illustrate how Innov'Agency embeds collective intelligence and adaptive leadership as core enablers of public sector transformation, shifting from control to coordination, certainty to inquiry, and internal delivery to distributed sensemaking and action.

To harness collective intelligence, Innov'Agency:

- mobilized diverse actors across sectors, roles, and communities to co-design missions and surface systemic levers;
- recognized that critical insights often lie outside formal structures, especially among those with lived experience and frontline knowledge (Mulgan, 2023; Søylen, 2019);
- paired inclusive idea-generation with mechanisms for collective decision-making and implementation; and
- built trust, legitimacy, and shared purpose to turn distributed knowledge into coordinated action.

Innov'Agency also embraced principles of adaptive leadership (Heifetz et al., 2009) by:

- creating safe environments for learning, iteration, and the surfacing of competing values;
- replacing rigid plans with agile approaches built on early action and prototyping as tools for system-wide feedback; and
- embedding experimentation, reflection, and coordination across governance levels.

Likely Participant Response. Participants may emphasize the value of bringing in diverse perspectives and focus on the input phase rather than the challenge of turning those ideas into coordinated action. Some may equate collective intelligence with consensus-building, overlooking the productive role of disagreement and debate. In contrast, others may highlight adaptive leaders as flexible or open without addressing the institutional frameworks and enabling conditions that make such leadership effective.

Common Misconceptions. Participants may mistake collective intelligence for unanimity when it often requires constructive conflict and negotiation, or see adaptive leadership as tied to individual personality rather than institutional practice and design. Another misconception is assuming that gathering diverse data and perspectives is sufficient for transformation, neglecting the need for trust, facilitation, and decision-making structures to convert intelligence into action.

Facilitation Tips. Distinguish between intelligence and action and emphasize that gathering ideas from diverse

stakeholders is not enough; building relationships and trust to act on them is what drives transformation. With Executives, discuss the importance of context and enabling conditions for learning and experimentation, and prompt discussion on what it means to design for uncertainty. Finally, invite reflection by asking (1) what Innov'Agency could have done differently to harness collective intelligence further, and (2) what the impact of institutionalizing an agency dedicated solely to School Food would have been.

Narrative Epilogue: Base Camp One - A Journey Just Beginning

Dorsey and his team defined the Food Shift Mission as "Ensure that every student in the country eats healthy, sustainable, and tasty school food by 2025". They knew food was no ordinary topic. It touched everything: health, climate, education, and equity, and it was wrapped in culture, social norms, memory, and emotion. School meals emerged as a powerful leverage point: over two million meals served daily on a US\$700 million budget. Yet, policies focused narrowly on cost and hygiene. Dorsey and his team dared to ask: What if school meals became a national investment in public health, sustainability, and inclusion?

Unlike mobility, food lacked a strong industrial legacy in the country. The ecosystem was diffuse: food was everyone's business, yet no one's responsibility. Building the mission meant weaving together a coalition of students, parents, teachers, cooks, farmers, policymakers, and health experts, each with different stakes and constraints. The tension between cost, quality, and sustainability was constant. Nevertheless, the team pressed on, co-designing with communities and iterating with small-scale prototypes. They reimagined school meals as moments of joy and learning. More students stayed for lunch, waste dropped, and food became an integrated part of the curriculum.

However, the mission was never just about meals. It was about surfacing assumptions, shifting mindsets, and creating the conditions for collective action. Dorsey likened it to a snowball gaining momentum, with collective intelligence, trust, and alignment being built progressively throughout the process. He likened the mission to reaching 'Base Camp One' on an Everest climb. Reaching Base Camp One meant building a shared understanding, mobilizing a movement, and proving that transformation was possible. The summit, however, still lay ahead.

Years later, many early prototypes became tools, learning platforms, and redesigned dining spaces. Nevertheless, the deeper question remains: What if we built agencies around challenges, not sectors? If you were in Liam Dorsey's shoes today, which emerging societal challenge would you tackle, how would you frame your mission, and what institutional shifts would you make to move beyond Base Camp One?

Appendix

Role-Play Guide

Overview

Instructors can use this guide to help students and executives prepare for the role-play activity listed in the teaching plan. The objective of the role-play is to design a Food Shift Mission. The role-play is held in groups of five, followed by a plenary presentation and discussion where each group presents its Food Shift Mission to the rest of the class. We recommend that the role-play last 30 minutes for students and 50 minutes for executives, and the presentations are three minutes each for students and five minutes for executives. These recommendations can be adapted to your class size.

Ahead of the class, instructors divide students/executives into groups of five. Each student/executive represents a different stakeholder involved in designing the Food Shift Mission: the Head of Strategic Design at Innov'Agency (Liam Dorsey), one senior representative from schools and educational institutions, one senior representative from large agri-businesses, one representative from local communities, and one public health expert.

Role Instructions

Below are instructions for each role. It is recommended that the instructor share with students/executives details relevant to their role ahead of the class, allowing them time to prepare for their role-play. The handout below can be adapted to each role and circulated to students before class.

- **Head of Strategic Design at Innov'Agency (Liam Dorsey):** Leads the mission design discussion and aligns competing interests.

You facilitate the conversation and ensure all actors are heard. You will guide the group in defining the Food Shift Mission, focusing on the national vision for a sustainable, fossil-free welfare state. Your objective is to align competing interests and foster collaboration across sectors, including agri-businesses, schools, public health experts, and local producers. Remember that Innov'Agency is acting as the convener, helping to shape the mission and the innovative governance model required to make the mission scalable. Be prepared to apply systems thinking to identify the strategic lever of the mission, understand the interests and priorities of all relevant actors, and mediate tensions between them.

- **Representative of Schools and Educational Institutions:** Advocates for student health but resists operational changes.

Your focus is on food quality, student health, equity, and accessibility. However, you are reluctant to change long-standing practices and worried about facing operational challenges (e.g., adjusting to local food sourcing, managing inconsistent supply chains, and meeting budgeting constraints). Additionally, you think food-related decisions are outside your core responsibilities. You must

balance nutrition standards with student preferences and cost considerations, ensuring that meals are healthy and appealing, especially in disadvantaged communities.

- **Representative of Large Agri-businesses:** Represents private sector priorities around cost, competitiveness, and innovation.

Your primary focus is on efficiency and profitability in food production. You will advocate for solutions that can be implemented on a large scale to increase productivity and reduce costs. However, you must also acknowledge the need to achieve sustainability and public health goals. Be prepared to engage in conversations about sustainable farming practices, reducing food waste, and ensuring that large-scale operations align with broader social and environmental goals.

- **Representative of Local Communities and Producers:** Advocates for sustainability, localization, and equity.

Your priority is sustainability and equity. You will advocate for local sourcing and supporting small farmers to ensure the food system is healthy, sustainable, and accessible to all communities, especially those in rural or underserved areas. You will emphasize the need to address food deserts and ensure that smaller, community-based producers are included in the transformation of the food system.

- **Public Health Expert:** Represents the government's perspective on nutrition and health outcomes.

Your focus is on nutrition and health outcomes for all communities, particularly school children. You will advocate for food systems, prioritizing public health and emphasizing nutritious food access. You will push for nutrition standards in school meals and community-based food systems that improve public health, particularly in lower-income or vulnerable communities. Your role is to ensure that the mission focuses on preventing long-term health issues, such as obesity, diabetes, and malnutrition. You will argue that school meal programs should be a key intervention in improving childhood health and promoting better nutrition outcomes nationwide.

Debrief Questions for Executives

Below are suggested questions to debrief the role-play with executives:

- How did you navigate competing priorities during the role-play?
- How did Liam Dorsey ensure that all actors were engaged meaningfully in the process?
- What adaptive leadership principles did you employ to navigate the mission design meeting?
- What were the potential limitations to adopting mission-oriented innovation in this context?

Role-play Preparation Handout

The following can be used as a handout to distribute to the participants before the class. It needs to be adapted to

the type of participants (students vs. executives) and to each participant's role.

Dear Participant,

During the next class, you will participate in a role-play activity. You will be assigned to a group of five and take on the role mentioned in this handout. The objective of the role-play is to design a Food Shift Mission. The role-play will last 30 minutes (50 minutes for executives), and your group will have three minutes (five minutes for executives) to present your Food Shift Mission to the rest of the class. The role-play and group presentations will be followed by a debate.

To help you prepare for the upcoming role-play, this handout outlines the objectives, key questions, guiding principles, and your assigned role in the activity. We encourage you to engage deeply with the case and recommended readings in advance. Plan to set aside 120 minutes for thoughtful preparation to enrich your contribution and the collective learning experience.

- Objective: The goal of the role-play is to design the Food Shift Mission collaboratively, balancing the interests of all actors, addressing trade-offs, and ensuring that the mission aligns with the country's fossil-free welfare state vision.
- Questions
 - ◇ What strategic levers will you explore as the core of your mission?
 - ◇ How will you phrase your mission for food systems to ensure it supports a broad societal outcome (e.g., healthy, sustainable, and equitable food for all)?
 - ◇ How will you manage competing interests and priorities? (For executives only)
- Guiding Principles
 - ◇ Use systems thinking to identify interconnections between food, health, sustainability, and equity. Draw a map to visualize these interconnections, as it helps surface the interests of the relevant actors
 - ◇ Consider competing priorities and trade-offs that will arise during the discussion.
 - ◇ Leverage adaptive leadership to prioritize experimental and collaborative innovation over traditional, siloed approaches.
 - ◇ Refer to Figures 1 and 2 to visualize the food system and frame the mission.
- Your Role

[Add the relevant role to each handout using the above-mentioned details.]

I look forward to active participation in our next class.

Supplementary Materials and Readings

Designing Missions

Instructors, students, and participants can refer to Mis-

sion-oriented innovation – a handbook from Vinnova, by D. Hill, 2022, Vinnova. This handbook includes a wealth of information on mission-oriented practices, with a strong focus on systems thinking methodologies and concepts.

Mission-Oriented Innovation Today

Instructors, students, and executives looking to deepen their understanding of Mission-Oriented Innovation can refer to Professor Mariana Mazzucato's work. In her recent article, Mazzucato (2024) examines real-world applications of mission-oriented approaches, offering insights into the critical enablers and barriers to success.

Mission Action Lab

Instructors, students, and executives looking to deepen their understanding of mission-oriented governance can refer to the OECD's Mission Action Lab's latest report on using mission governance to reach climate targets (OECD, 2025). The report examines the elements crucial to a mission-oriented approach to governance, including structure, strategic orientation, coordination, execution, and resources.

Epilogue for Teaching Impact

In anticipated classroom use, this case engages participants across a wide range of disciplines, public policy, innovation management, strategic design, and sustainability, because it blends a compelling narrative with concrete tools for action. Instructors who pilot the case may find that the role-play activity sparks the most robust discussions, particularly when participants must balance competing stakeholder priorities in real-time. Some groups lean heavily toward policy or technical fixes, while others emphasize cultural and behavioral change; both approaches can be unpacked to reveal the systems thinking at the heart of mission-oriented innovation. In larger classes, breaking into smaller sub-groups before reconvening for a plenary discussion helps ensure balanced participation. The case also lends itself to reflective debriefs, where students connect lessons from Innov'Agency's experience to complex challenges in their own sectors. While adaptable to multiple teaching contexts, the strongest outcomes are expected when instructors explicitly connect the learning objectives to participants' current or future professional roles.

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