

MISSION-ORIENTED STRATEGIES

Innovation and public value

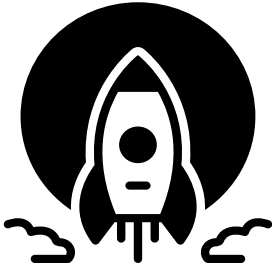
Innovation is a key driver of economic growth. Private companies competing in a free market is the most conducive setting for a high rate of innovation, but left to their own, markets often deliver more of the same, and head into a sub-optimal direction.

Society today is confronted with grand **challenges**, which the UN has summed up under the Sustainable Development Goals: for example reducing poverty, providing quality education to everyone, reducing inequality, producing clean energy and taking action on climate change.



To make it possible to achieve these goals, they need to be broken down in smaller, achievable chunks: these are **missions**. They are meant to act as a trigger for innovation, and produce solutions with spillover effects for the economy overall. In short, **missions provide a direction to innovation**.

Missions do not specify how to achieve success, because the right answers are not known in advance. They don't seek to pick winners and losers or set a top-down direction, but aim to stimulate the development of many different solutions.



Mission-oriented strategies, then, are a portfolio of missions, which require collaboration across sectors, to solve a challenge society faces.

The classic example of a mission-oriented strategy is the Apollo moonshot, an achievement that was first posited as a challenge, then translated into hundreds of missions across many sectors, and which ended up yielding many spillovers, some laying the foundation for new industries.

What makes a good mission

Missions, by design, are decentralised and look to involve the largest number of stakeholders. They aim for both radical and incremental innovation, with the largest possible amount of firms participating. As a result, they are also cross-sectoral, intending to spark innovation across sectors and disciplines.

A well-designed mission meets **five criteria**:

1. It is bold and inspirational, with wide relevance to society
2. It sets a clear direction, measurable outcome (even just whether it was achieved or not) and within a given timeframe
3. It is ambitious but realistic
4. It encourages cross-sectoral and cross-disciplinary cooperation
5. It involves multiple, bottom-up solutions, using a range of technologies

Political agenda setting
and civic engagement



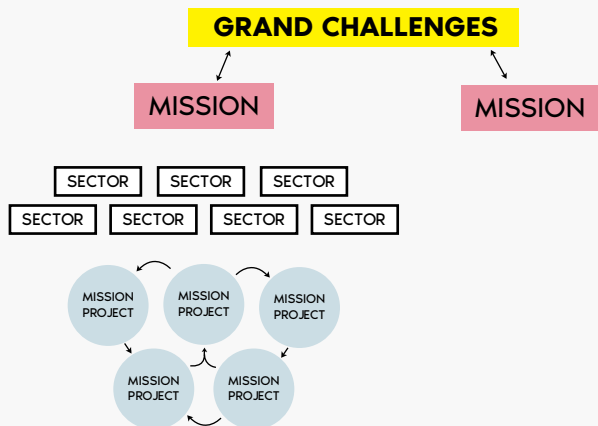
Clear targeted mission



Cross-sectoral
Innovation



Portfolio of projects and
bottom-up
experimentation



How to manage missions

Today's social challenges are more difficult and complex than the space race. These problems require more attention to the **relationships** between all stakeholders, particularly the way in which social structures and problems interact with political and technological issues.

Care must also be given to behavioural changes, smart regulation and a well-functioning critical feedback loop. In other words, social missions must involve the widest range of stakeholders, both in defining and executing the mission.



By nature, innovation is uncertain, with long lead times. Traditional private-sector based financing approaches are not a good fit for this kind of activity, so missions require **patient, strategic committed finance**, a need which the government can fulfil, for example through state investment banks.

Why missions now



The Covid-19 pandemic has shown how fragile our economy is, and how quickly lives and livelihoods can be affected. The threats facing us, such as climate change, are likely to have an even bigger impact. Hence we need to come up with drastic solutions to this quickly, and at the same time make our economy more resilient.

Through their focus on public value, innovation and the creation of spillovers for the wider economy, missions are the ideal tool. Armed with a clear goal, committed stakeholders and patient finance, missions could not only bring us closer to solving the grand challenges we face, but also lay the foundation for a more dynamic, prosperous and inclusive economy.

ABOUT REFSA

Research for Social Advancement (REFSA) is a progressive, non-profit think tank that promotes social advancement in Malaysia. Since its inception, REFSA has been at the forefront of policy discussions and debates in the important political and socio-economic issues of the nation. Today, our aspiration hasn't changed – we want to power the movement for a just, inclusive and multi-ethnic society.

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