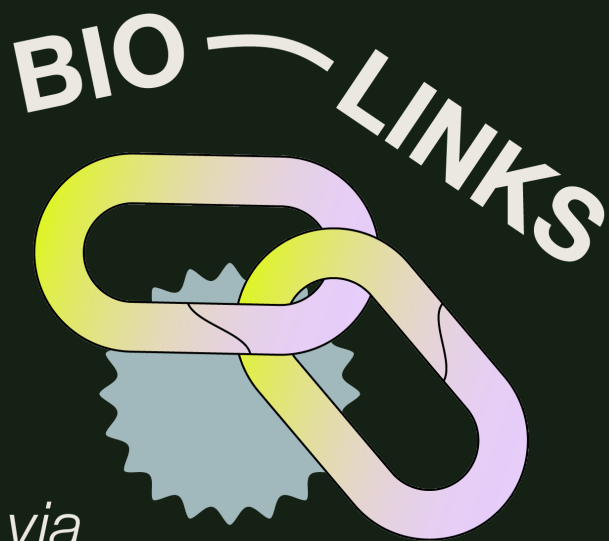




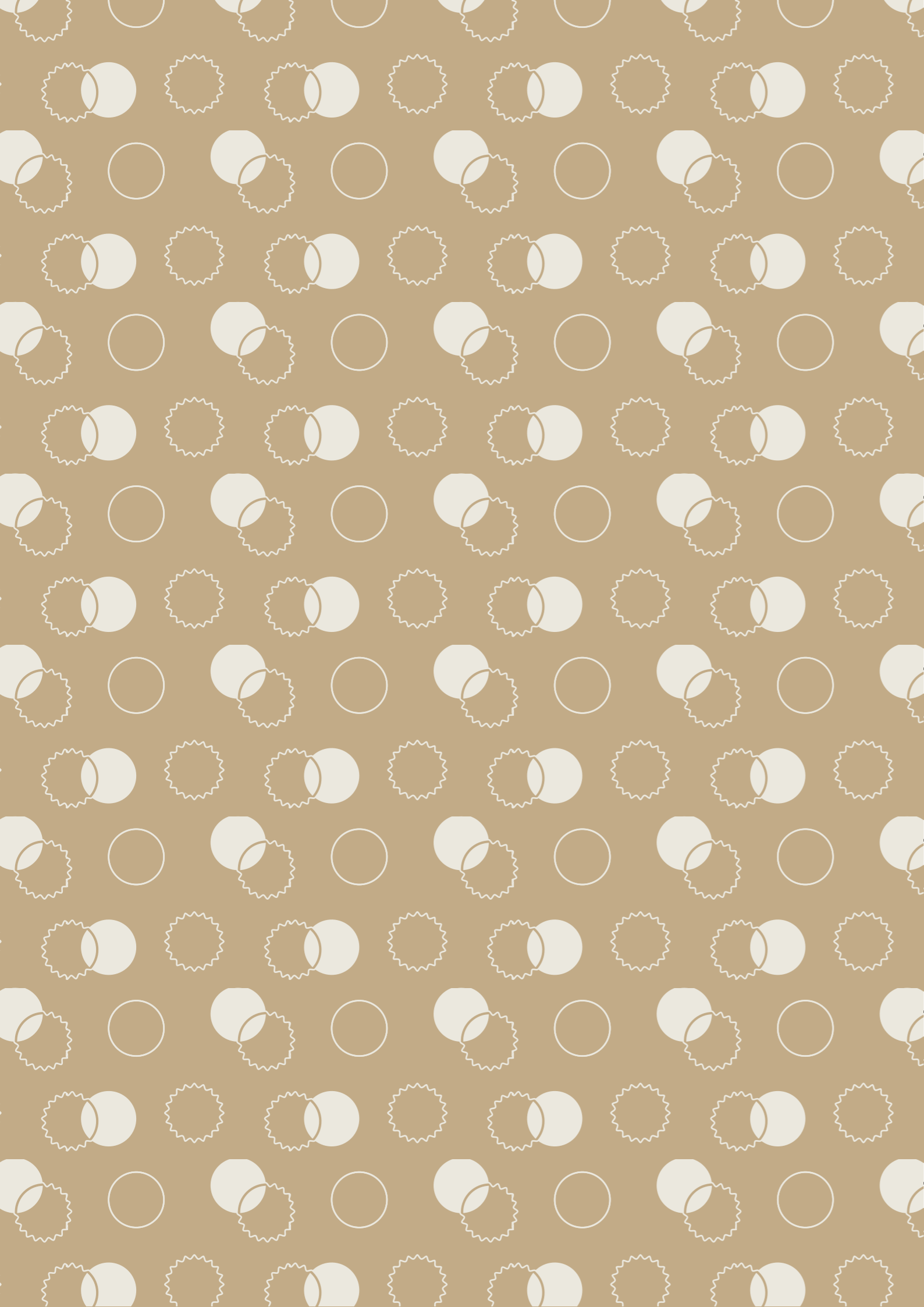
Project Report

Design for Government
2024



via

Agents of Change



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Executive Summary

Design for Government is a practice-based course which allows students to work together with a partner Finnish ministry finding opportunities on a brief provided by them. This year, for the tenth-anniversary course, our group partnered with the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) to work on the brief 'BIO-LINKS via Agents of Change' which is linked to PMO's ongoing project EU-LIFE (Ministry of Environment, 2024).

According to the Stock Resilience Centre (2023), Earth has already crossed six out of nine planetary boundaries that contribute humanity to sustain, develop and thrive on this planet. Researchers state that loss of biodiversity due to human activities directly or indirectly contributes towards harming these boundaries. During this crucial time, we need to think about how our governmental systems can integrate nature and biodiversity objectives into their policies coherently to support pro-biodiversity actions.

Despite addressing similar goals through National Biodiversity Strategy 2012-2020, in reality two-thirds of those objectives failed to make any significant positive impact (Ministry of Environment, 2021). Through our course, we identified that lack of policy coherence results in such fragmented policies by ministries which often overlap, even clash with each other. This phenomenon originates from the policymaker's unconscious assumption that all stakeholders have a shared understanding of the addressing topic. At the same time, isolated spheres of science and policy-making extends the knowledge gaps among the policy-makers which makes environmental decision making even more difficult. Establishing a cohesive network can enable linkage between these siloed bubbles and create a strong base of trust between PMO, ministries, services agencies and the scientific panels.

Together with the existing fuzziness of the policy cycle, the path-dependent behaviour of our civil servants acts as a barrier to bring radical transformation within the system. Hence, PMO acknowledges the need for capacity-building tools to unlock new ways of thinking and collaborating to outline shared vision for biodiversity.

Working closely with the Prime Minister's Office, we explored potential opportunities they can undertake to bridge synergies among the 11 ministries using a human-centric approach. Using background research, expert interviews and co-creating with our partner, we developed a proposal for a new network to support policy coherence.

We hope our report drives your motivation for daily actions towards regenerating biodiversity and acknowledges the potential benefits of collective practices within our governmental structures.

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	4
Glossary	7
Methods	8
Semi-structured interviews	9
Expert Panels	9
Focus Group	9
Literature Review	9
Industry Reports	9
Background Research	12
The top-down structure of the central government.....	12
Current policy-making process.....	14
Understanding of the Context	19
Insights	20
Clarity in shared understanding	20
The long-term vision of policymakers.....	20
Value piloting to support constructive policy development...20	
Need for radical transformation	21
Effective tools for policy coherence.....	21
Problem definition	22
Institutions are limited within their ‘Biodiversity Bubble’	23
Fragmentation of Policies	23
The role of Science remains unclarified	23
Vision	24
Entry Points	26
Connecting the change agent network.....	28
Supportive Tools for Capacity Building	29
Final concept	30
STEP 1: Build the Network	32
STEP 2: Unify the Pathway	36
STEP 3: Create the Links	38
STEP 4: Assess the Strategy	42
Narrative for Change	44
Critical Reflection	46
References	48
Appendix	50
Evidence	50
Design Method	52
Checklist for Strategy Assessment.....	58

Glossary

Through the learning outcome of our course, we understood how common concepts can be interpreted differently by individuals. Hence, we recommend readers to familiarise themselves with what we mean by these key terms in our proposal.

biodiversity

/ˈbɪɪə(ʊ)dɪˈvɜːsɪti/
noun

Biodiversity underpins the health of people and the planet. Biodiversity erosion can harm food safety, living conditions, and social and economic systems. Unattended, it can lead to widespread instability and potential conflict (WHO, 2020).

A: “Have you considered how your work affects biodiversity lately?”
B: “I have! Just yesterday.”

policy coherence

/ˈpɒl.ə.sɪ kəʊˈhɪə.rəns/
noun

A principle by which the government seeks to promote synergies between different policy sectors, identify conflicts between them and reconcile national and international objectives (Finnish Government, 2021).

A: “Did you know that there are almost 200 policies in the works at once?!”
B: “What a nightmare for policy coherence!”

change agents

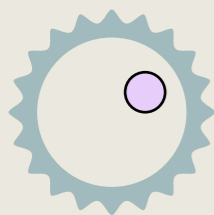
/tʃeɪn(d)ʒ ˈeɪ.dʒənts/
noun

Motivated individuals who take the initiative and orchestrate new changes within the organisation.

A: “I brought up the topic of biodiversity loss at work today.”
B: “You should join the BIO Change Agents!”

Insights

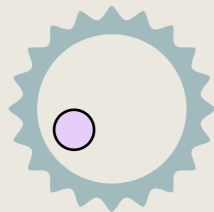
The data collected from our research were organised by affinity diagramming to connect common themes to converge our findings. Using systems thinking knowledge, our main five insights are then outlined as follows:



Clarity in shared understanding

Policymakers unconsciously assume that all participants have shared goals (the bubble). However, other ministries do not have the same understanding of Biodiversity as the Ministry of Environment.

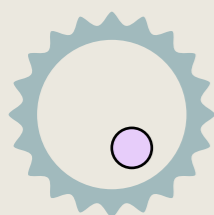
(2) Supported by Evidence 1-2, see Appendix 1



The long-term vision of policymakers

The political cycle causes the Prime Minister's office to change every 4 years along with the voices in the elected party and the ministries. This results in short-term vision development and weak orchestration by PMO, which is the core facilitator for horizontal collaborations. Such short-term visions do not support sustainability development challenges like biodiversity which require continuous commitment.

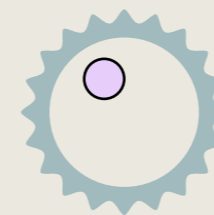
(3) Supported by Evidence 3-5, see Appendix 1



Value piloting to support constructive policy development

In the current practice of policymaking, piloting is a voluntary action that is often overlooked. This means that practical barriers such as stakeholder and citizen backlashes appear when the policy is implemented. This causes the policy cycle to start again, lengthening the overall process and reducing the motivation of the stakeholders.

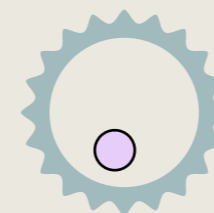
(4) Supported by Evidence 6-7, see Appendix 1



Need for radical transformation

Policymakers are path-dependent and do not support making radical changes. For example, currently, there is a large gap between what science states and what policy supports. Thus during the implementation stage, strong collaboration between scientists and policymakers is crucial to implement policies that support scientific evaluations.

(5) Supported by Evidence 8-10, see Appendix 1



Effective tools for policy coherence

Experts address the lack of effective tools in the current policy-making practice, to support objective communication and impact assessment. This causes inefficient utilisation of research and monitoring data in the decision-making process.

(6) Supported by Evidence 11-13, see Appendix 1

In summary, these five insights highlight possible opportunities that can enhance policy coherence in the central government. Enabled by these potentials, this report then defines the boundary of the problem, paving the path to an efficient proposal for policy coherence.

Problem definition

Based on the research process we have identified the problem, which we believe is at the core of biodiversity policy coherence. When it comes to coherent action, collaboration is key, making inter-ministry communication one of the key aspects for improvement. In this problematization phase, we discover three drawbacks of the current practice of policy-making.

Institutions are limited within their 'Biodiversity Bubble'

Ministries are siloed within their definition and vision for biodiversity, discouraging impactful communication to collectively join forces to tackle this global crisis.

Fragmentation of Policies

Reflecting on past actions, over two-thirds of the objectives implemented in Finland's biodiversity strategy 2012–2020 had little positive impact. Despite having multiple policies uplifting biodiversity, the impact has been unattainable due to their fragmentation leading to uncoordinated action (Ministry of Environment, 2021).

The role of Science remains unclarified

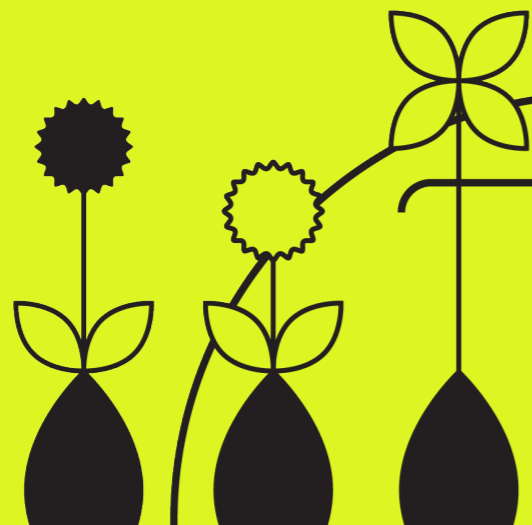
An effective connection between science and decision-making is required to outline effective policies to restore biodiversity. In current practice, politicians lack general scientific knowledge whereas science representatives lack knowledge of political processes (VNK, 2024).

Vision

The following is the shared vision identified by our three case groups solving policy coherence in biodiversity:

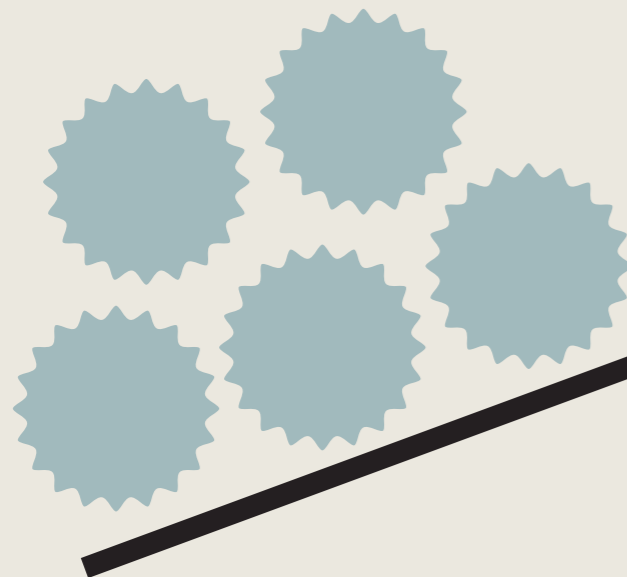
Our vision is for Finland to embrace its role in biodiversity, ensuring total coherence in our policies regarding it.

By integrating diverse perspectives and working within planetary boundaries at all government levels, we put biodiversity on top of the national agenda and work to realise a future in which humans and nature are one.



Entry Points

To address our three problems, we started outlining leverage points that could bring radical transformation to build policy coherence horizontally in the Finnish government. However, as Meadows (1999) states, encouraging variability and experimentation directs towards a state of 'losing control'. Hence, our primary step is finding which individuals are willing to lose control and initiate change within the system.

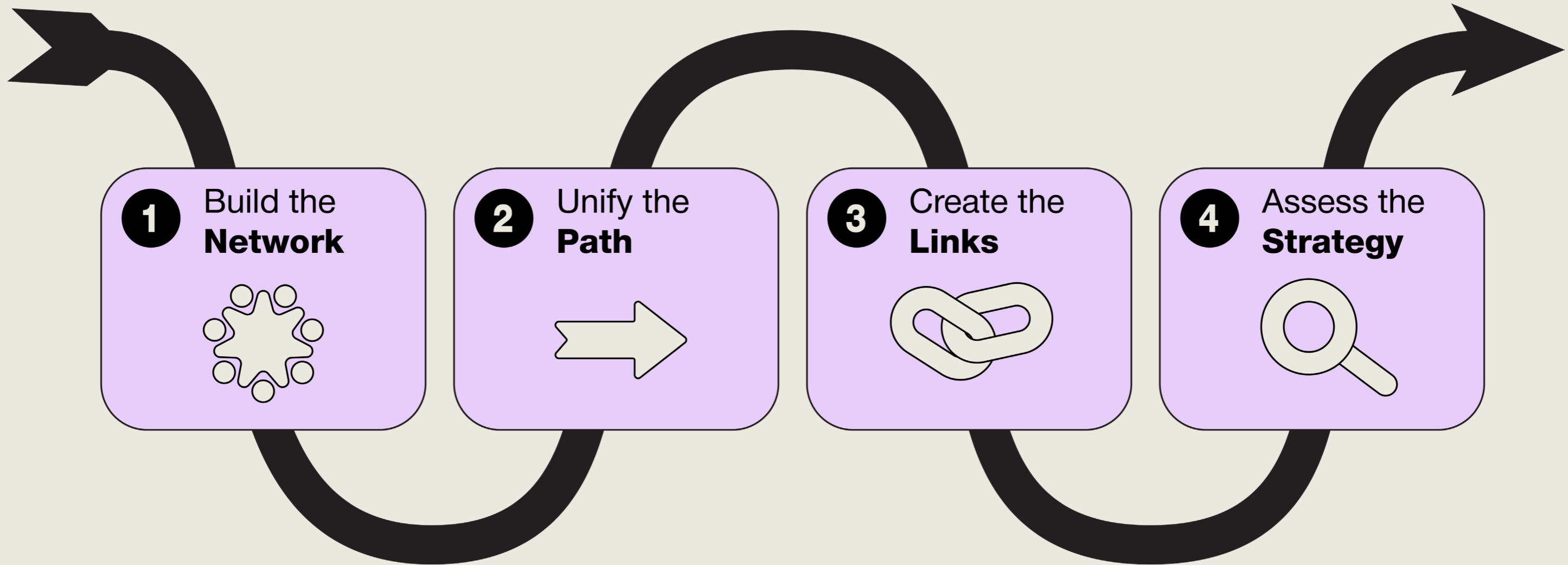


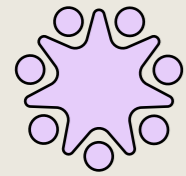
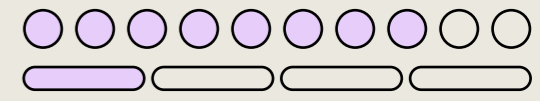
Reflecting on our partner's years of experience collaborating with various ministries, they have come across officials within these institutions who are highly motivated to step away from the path carved for them and foster new ways of thinking. We defined these individuals as 'Change Agents' who take the initiative and orchestrate new changes within an organisation. Connecting these highly motivated 'Change Agents' and providing them with tools for capacity building became a potential window of opportunity for PMO to accomplish the nation's vision of Biodiversity. Taking a step further, we find two entry points for the "Change Agent" group to start:

Final concept

This idea is developed into our final proposal, 'BIO Links via Agents of Change'. This proposal outlines a pathway for integrating the Change Agent Network into the existing government system, structured around four main steps (Figure 7). Although these steps are presented sequentially, the process is iterative. Similar to a policy cycle, we recommend stakeholders revisit and refine these steps every 12 months.

Figure 7
Four Steps towards
"Change Agent Network"





STEP 1: *Build the Network*

How does it work?

The first step involves establishing a network of change agents. This network will comprise both formal and informal frameworks (Figure 8).

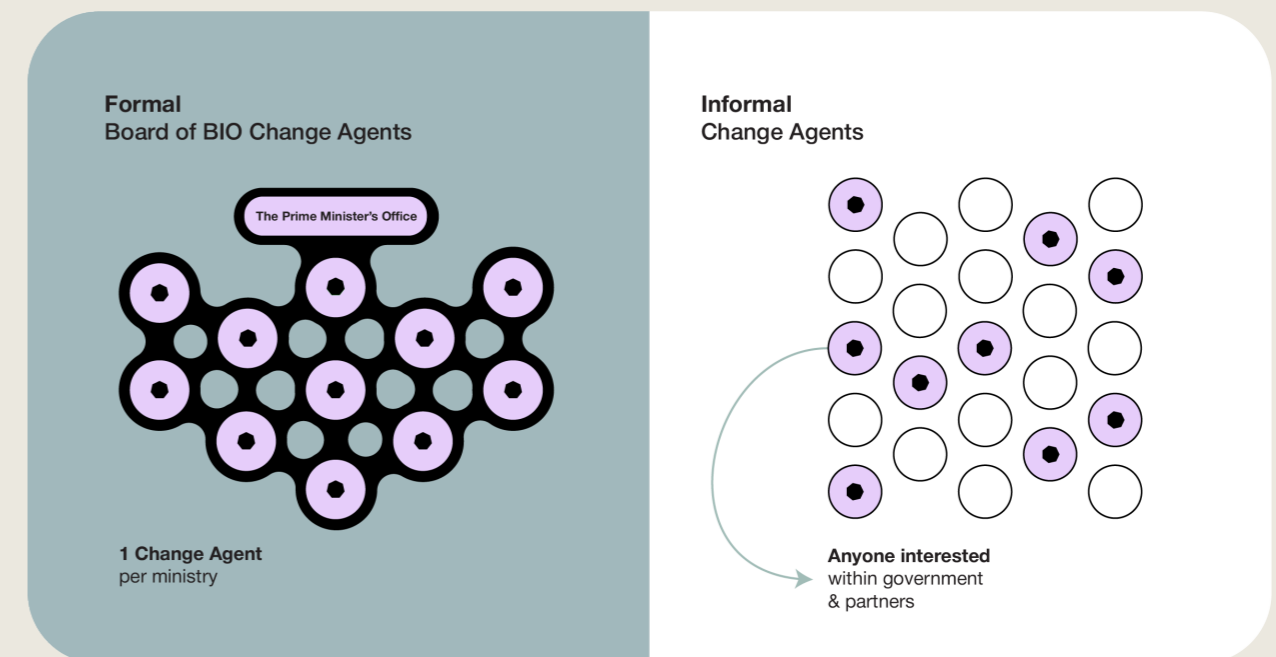
Formal Position

The formal positions are set within the Strategy Department of PMO and the 11 ministries. We envision an official, long-term board for the network, facilitated by the Strategy Department of PMO who will provide overall strategic direction. This long-term board is made up of official positions, including at least one middle manager from each of the ministries, whose main responsibility is to ensure the function of the Change Agent Network. We suggest the working term of this board is longer than four years, to offset the change in voices after each governmental election.

Informal Membership

For informal participation, voluntary applications are encouraged from participants from all levels, especially within vertical agencies and inter-departmental teams. Applicants do not need to have prior expertise in biodiversity but must demonstrate a strong commitment to the cause. Accepted network members will receive training and support tailored to their interests and needs, enabling them to integrate biodiversity-friendly action into their daily work. By establishing this dual-structured network, we aim to create a dynamic and resilient system, allowing self-driven actions while ensuring the productivity of the Change Agent Network.

Figure 8
Formal and Informal Framework
of Change Agents



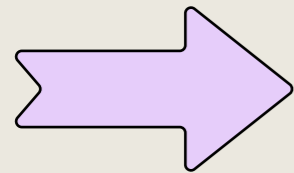
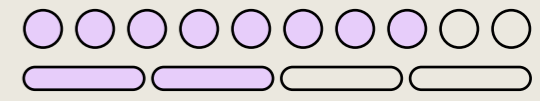
Where to start?

We propose the recruitment process of change agents takes place in three parts, namely 'Mapping' existing change agents, inviting potential agents to Informal meetings, and ensuring incentives of these biodiversity agents.

As mentioned earlier, some potential change agents are already identifiable. At the launch of this network, we encourage recruiters to begin with their interpersonal connections based on their previous experience and knowledge. After identifying the existing individuals, they are invited to an informal gathering to start building a community and promote the concept of change agents. The gathering does not have a set format, for example, picnic, coffee chat, etc. Finally, we propose creating an online network for change agents on a platform, for example, LinkedIn, motivating BIO Change Agents to promote their work in an official context.

For the first year of the network launch, this recruitment process might take longer than usual (we suggest no more than two months). As the Change Agent Network matures, we believe this process will become more self-driven from the bottom up. In later years, the official Network-Building step could be completed in one month. We also anticipate increased attention and recognition from government officials outside the network. When they see the value in this network, they can join at any time without considering the recruitment period.

Incentives are critical in network building. For this network, we want recognition to be one of the incentives. As a Biodiversity Change Agent, members will receive a 'badge' that they can proudly display, such as in the online LinkedIn profiles. Besides, at the end of the 12-month term, there will be a celebration of the network's achievements. Members who have made significant contributions to biodiversity will be rewarded. These rewards do not aim to be financial baits. Instead, we aim to promote the awareness of biodiversity value, and then continue self-drive and active engagement in this network.



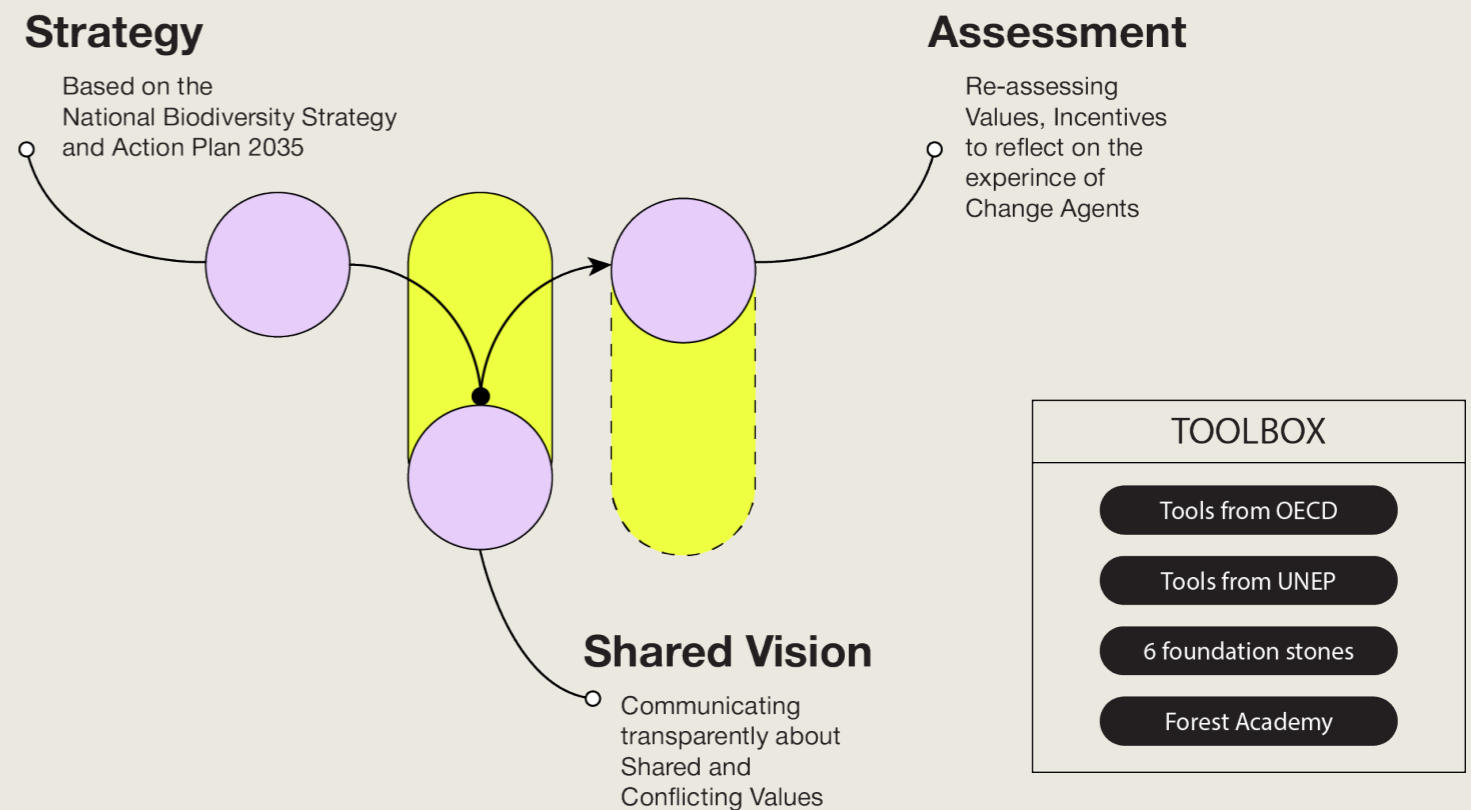
STEP 2: *Unify the Pathway*


How does it work?

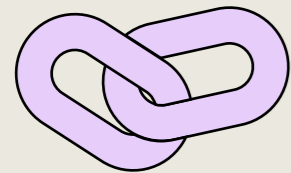
After establishing the network, the second step involves creating a shared pathway among change agents. There are three key actions in this step (Figure 9). First, we suggest members spend two months updating the pathway design and sharing the vision after the official recruitment each year. This process should be aligned with the goals set by the national agenda (for example, Finland’s Biodiversity Strategy of 2035) and facilitated by effective communication and collaboration tools. These tools are also beneficial for tracking progress and conducting future impact assessments. The last key step of this step is assessment. In this part, values and incentives are re-evaluated to prepare for the next iteration. As a result, this step targets the problems of fragmentation policies and “Biodiversity Bubbles”, avoiding the definition and vision silos for the theme.

Where to start?

During this step, it is critical for participants to communicate transparently about their shared and conflicting values to make way for collaboration. Although customised frameworks and toolkits for this step are lacking in the current Finnish central government context, various benchmarks can serve as informative references. This report recommends some of them: the Coherence Matrix by OECD (2022, p.17), the Action Checklist by UNEP (2021, p.105), the Six Foundation Stone Pathway from Bearing Point (BearingPoint, 2024) and the Forest Academy (Finnish Forest Association, 2024).



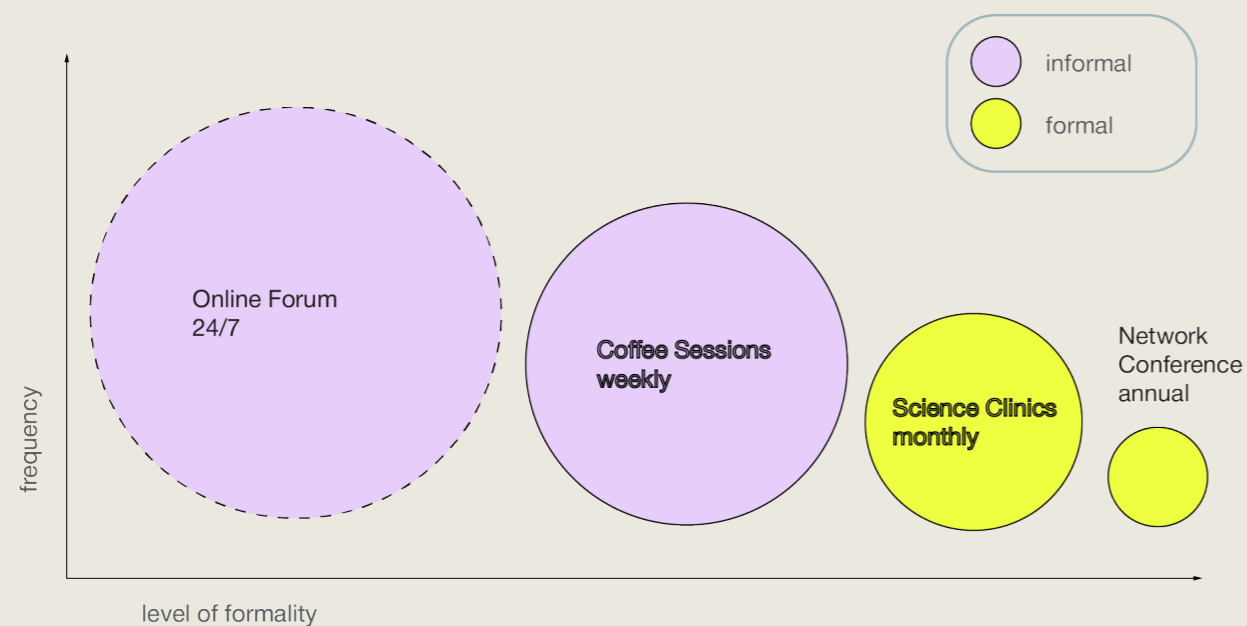
↑  **Figure 9**
The Three Keys to
Unifying the Pathway



STEP 3: Create the Links

How does it work?

Creating links involves establishing contact points for change agents to interact within the community and receive guidance on integrating biodiversity into their work. This linkage emphasises interpersonal interaction without overburdening the change agents. Drawing from the existing coffee sessions in the central government, which highlight the value of informal connections, we propose a four-tiered approach to linkage creation (Figure 10).



↑ **Figure 10**
Four Points of Contact
for Creating Links

- Online Forum:** This is the base-level linkage creation approach, where questions and comments can be raised with minimal barriers to entry. An online contact channel is open 24/7, with a contact list within the network, assisting direct and private (if desired) conversations.
- Coffee Sessions:** These sessions are organised and hosted weekly by a different ministry on-site. During these informal gatherings, change agents can share their experiences and seek guidance from their peers, in a light coffee-time atmosphere.
- Science Clinics:** To educate the community of change agents, the Strategy Department of PMO organise monthly science lectures and clinics. External scientists (for example, experts from the National Science Panel), are invited to join. These voluntary sessions provide a vital connection to the scientific community within the Change Agent Network. In this way, these sessions address the problem of the unclarified roles of scientists, reducing unnecessary compromises in the policy-making process.
- Network Conference:** An annual formal conference for the change agents community, facilitated by the board and Strategy Department. Only in this session, is attendance compulsory for all change agents, allowing communication across all levels to reflect on shared goals and other matters.

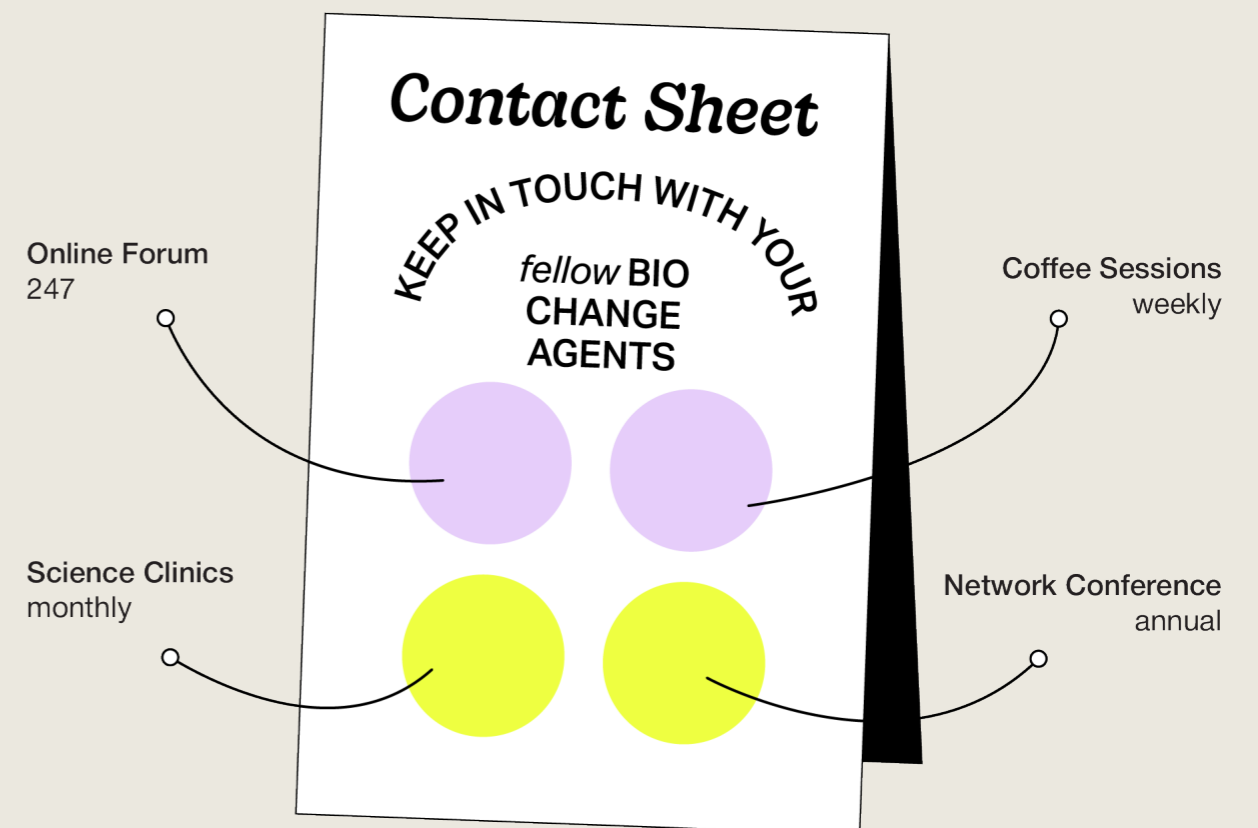
This four-tiered linkage creation approach sets different levels of format, frequency, and number of attendees, with the bottom three tiers rooted on a voluntary basis. In practice, the productivity and activity level of these sessions should be of paramount importance. Finding suitable meeting times within already busy schedules to ensure maximum availability requires careful pre-planning by the board and Strategy Department.

Where to start?

To initiate these connections, a template of a contact list has been created (Figure 11). This tool visualises the contact details from the PMO to the vertical agencies and includes the schedule for the four-tier connections. BIO Change Agents can be kept informed about their points of contact through a simple sheet, which they receive when joining. Besides, this serves as an introduction to the community. Equipped with this contact list, we intend to create efficient and active connection links between today's ministries' silos.



Figure 11
Contact Sheet for
Creating Links





STEP 4: *Assess the Strategy*

↓ For more information
about this step
see **Appendix 3**

How does it work?

Strategy assessment is the evaluation of the Change Agent Network, led by the Strategy Department at PMO. Although placed at the end of this four-step process, assessment occurs at three key times during the 12-month term: the first month, the third month, and the twelfth month. These regular assessments and reflections enable timely adjustments in the Change Agent Network, directly influencing the first two steps, network building and pathway mapping.

Moreover, how the assessment results are communicated is even more crucial than the assessment itself. We recommend using the previously mentioned four-tiered approach to provide feedback to participants and gather additional information. During the network conference at the end of the 12-month term, these results should be documented and used as input for the upcoming year.

Where to start?

The tool for this step is an assessment checklist for the Strategy Department (see Appendix 3 for the content). The intention, target, and vital criteria of each assessment can be traced in this checklist. Additionally, all change agents are encouraged to use this checklist for their self-reflection.



Critical Reflection

This proposal introduces a network of change agents aimed at addressing three identified problems: fragmentation in policies, “Biodiversity Bubbles,” and the unclear role of science. After 14 weeks of research and design, a four-step pathway is presented to integrate this network into the existing central government system. Two key advantages of this proposal stand out. Firstly, practicality is placed in the priority during this research and design. This proposal, rooted in the existing system of central government, identifies small leverage points with the potential to effect systematic changes. By detailing how each step works and where to start, we lead stakeholders through the process from building the network to assessing strategies and offering tangible tools along the journey. Secondly, flexibility and iterative nature are emphasised. Recognizing the dynamic nature of government systems, our proposal allows for continuous improvement and adaptation to a consistently changing context.

However, our work is aware of the limitations within the scope of research and design. Some limitations come from the subjective factors of this research process. This twelve-week research journey only allows our team to propose one possibility without practical testing. Also, there are only four members in this research team and the interviewee samples are limited, compared to the large population of public servants and stakeholders. Therefore, personal bias is inevitable in this process.

Moreover, we further recognise the limitation in the social background, namely the resistance to change in practicality. There are two significant resistance forces. The withdrawal of the Finnish government is the

primary one. According to our interviewees, the Finnish government is now trying to decrease the financial budget for biodiversity recovery, limiting the financial support and human resources for changes in practicality. Additionally, the contradictory voices against biodiversity-benefit action are still recognisable. One proof is the consistent protest from the Finnish farmer community (Hodgson, 2024). Though there are a lot of compromises in the policies, the negotiation for mutual benefit is far from enough. With these resistance efforts, our final proposal would have to be refined further to be implemented.

Regarding all these advantages and limitations, what this report wants to state is that the change is necessary. We do not aim to provide a one-time-to-all solution for policy coherence, but a preferable future for the central government and a potential direction. Through this journey of depicting this future, it is definite that some changes in mindset are already happening in the government house. Though we are not optimistic about the practical outcome of our proposal, we are confident that the efforts towards the proposed future are definitely worth a try!

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Appendix

Evidence

1. Some ministries do not share the same understanding with YM and the objectives of their individual policies vary. For example, the Ministry of Economy and Social Affairs, and the Ministry of Agriculture and Forest have a conflict with the Ministry of Environment's biodiversity goals. (2 interviewees, Built Environment Unit & Researcher Representative at YM)
2. Core players of policy-making have an unconscious assumption that all participants have a shared goal (the "bubbles"). (Round table discussion, PMO & YM)
3. "Foresight work (biomonitoring) is a continuous mission. These outcomes might serve as science backing in policymaking". (1 interviewee, Community Department at YM)
4. "Far-sighted vision": Expertise in sustainability and sustainable development must be strengthened in the long term by various means. (Resource: Assessing the implementation of the Agenda2030 in Finland by PMO)
5. "In the common scenario, the policy-making process takes up to 1–2 years." (Round Table discussion, YM)
6. "The pilot is voluntary at the regional level to leave more freedom for the local actors." (1 interviewee, PMO)
7. "Currently, we have the city of Tampere and Lahti for piloting, which are led by municipal governments." (1 interviewee, PMO)
8. "Radical transformation is acceptable when it is necessary to reach policy coherence." (1 interviewee, PMO)
9. "The policy cycle is an ideal concept (...) but in reality, it is more multilinear and chaotic". (1 interviewee, Built Environment Unit at YM).
10. Mechanism transformation is one efficient solution to policy coherence. An "Executive non-departmental public body" can play a subjective "monitor and enforcement role".(Environment Act 2021, 2021)
11. The development of supporting tools is a vital step for policy coherence to help experts "outline policy assessments". (OECD, 2022)
12. "An education approach is required by the government for better decision-making to strengthen experts' collaborative skills." (1 interviewee, PMO)
13. "There is not enough time for dialogue." (1 interviewee, Communication Department at YM)

Design Method

Discover.

“The first diamond helps people understand, rather than simply assume, what the problem is. It involves speaking to and spending time with people who are affected by the issues” (Design Council, 2024).

We started by immersing ourselves in the secondary research, the data that was provided to us. This step gave us a basic understanding of what the work was about and we started to understand the causes of the fragmented policy.

After the desk study, we started to broaden our understanding through primary research. Our first joint meeting, a round table, was held at Aalto University, where we were able to meet our contacts from the ministries. During the meeting, we discussed four themes: biodiversity, cooperation, policy implementation, and future and change. We continued our desk research in search of more information on issues relevant to our work.



Figure 14
Picture from the round table at Aalto University



Figure 15
Picture in front of PMO

Define.

“The insight gathered from the discovery phase can help you to define the challenge differently”(Design Council, 2024).

During the development phase, we built up a basic understanding of how the policy process works. We planned and facilitated a working session at the PMO, aiming to explore the current status, gather insights and identify key issues and challenges in current policy design and communication between different ministries. During the working session, we wanted to understand the different steps in the policy process, both what worked and where there was room for improvement. In addition to our team, the workshop was attended by a civil servant from the PMO and the Ministry of the Environment.



Figure 16
Picture from the work session in PMO

After the meeting, we sat down with the team, went through the results of the session and considered which findings were important for us to focus on. Halfway through the course, between diamonds, we presented the key insights and opportunities we had found to our stakeholders.

Develop.

“The second diamond encourages people to give different answers to the clearly defined problem, seeking inspiration from elsewhere and co-designing with a range of different people” (Design Council, 2024).

The second part of the work started with a lot of ideating. We met again with our contact person in PMO for a coworking session. The day aimed to reflect on the opportunities we presented, to define the mission of our work and to define a long-term vision. During the session, we also considered how we can build on the work that is already being done in the PMO.

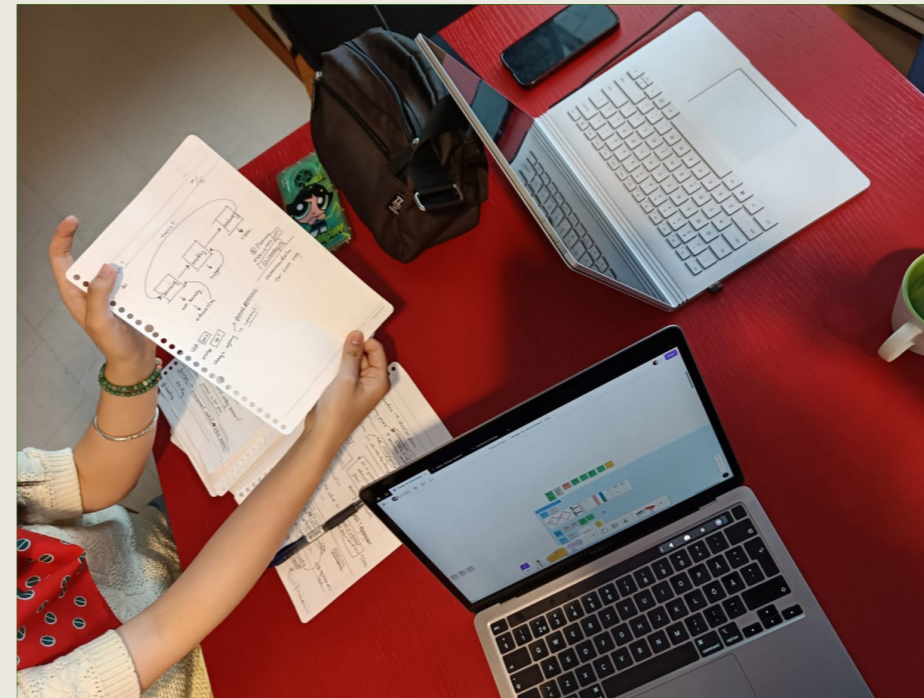


Figure 17
Picture from after the work session

To avoid silos between our teams, we put a lot of effort into communication within our teams as well. We reviewed our perspectives so that our work would benefit the ministry as a whole in the future, and formed a common vision among the three working groups.

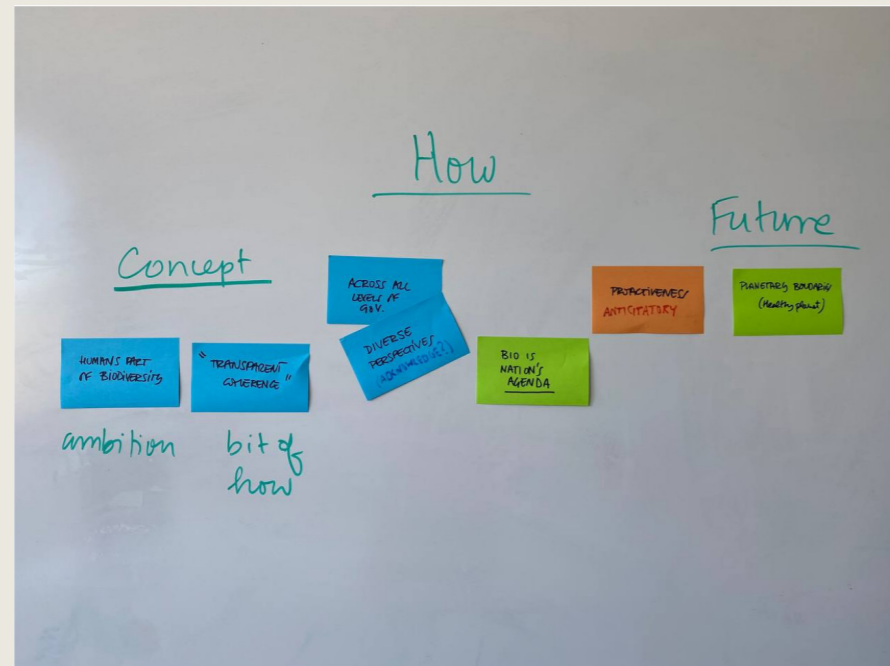


Figure 18
Skeleton of the super group's vision

Deliver.

Delivery involves testing out different solutions on a small scale, rejecting those that will not work and improving the ones that will (Design Council, 2024).



Figure 19
Ideation Session with Partners

At the beginning of the final phase of the work, we had a complete idea of the opportunity that would form the basis for a proposal for the outcome, which we shared in a working session in Aalto. We received constructive feedback at the event, which we considered when designing our work's final result. We sat down to refine the final proposal and work on the final presentation and this report.

Checklist for Strategy Assessment for Strategy Department at PMO

Clockwise	Intention	Target	Check-list
1 Month	Attracting all change agents who are highly motivated to get involved	Assessing the current status of Change Agents Network	How many change agents joined the network and their representation across 11 ministries?
			Do change agents feel they can impact and progress with the work?
			Do they feel they have enough information available, and they can access it? (barometry)
3 Months	Attracting all change agents who are highly motivated to get involved (ministries + inter-departments + science panel)	Assessing whether targets set and shared within the network	How many change agents joined the network and their representation across ministries, inter-departments and science panels?
			Do change agents feel they can impact and progress with their goals (barometry)?
			Are their actions identified/ done?

Clockwise	Intention	Target	Check-list
12 Months	Expanding the network of change agents to cities, municipalities and abroad (EU level).	Assessing whether targets set by each ministry are completed	How many change agents have joined from all levels of organisational structure?
			Do change agents acknowledge they have the control, information, and responsibility to progress?
			Do change agents feel they can impact and progress with the work?
			Do they feel they have enough information available, and they can access it? (barometry)

