

Article

Public Administration and Governance for the SDGs: Navigating between Change and Stability

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Abstract: This article highlights four key reform challenges regarding the quality of public administration and governance (PAG), aimed at increasing ‘SDG-readiness’ at all levels of administration, in a nexus characterized by complexity, volatility, pluriformity and uncertainty. Based on others’ research into how EU Member States institutionalize the implementation of the SDGs, a critical review of SDG-governance approaches, as well as a review paper on the management of the SDGs, it is concluded that that four priority areas could guide research and policy development to accelerate implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Firstly, to recognize that creating an effective public administration and governance is an important strategic policy area. Secondly, to begin with mission-oriented public administration and governance reform for SDG implementation, replacing the efficiency-driven public sector reform of the past decades. Thirdly, to apply culturally sensitive metagovernance to design, define and manage trade-offs and achieving synergies between SDGs and their targets. Fourthly, to start concerted efforts to improve policy coherence with a mindset beyond political, institutional, and mental ‘silos’.



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1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed the strengths and weaknesses of a public sector under stress. The pandemic has shown that well-functioning public administration and effective governance frameworks are preconditions to respond appropriately to a crisis of this magnitude, although other factors also play a role, such as public trust in government or the existence or absence of a tradition of ‘whole of government’ and ‘whole of society’ collaboration. It could be argued that the pandemic might have had less impact and been less likely to occur if all Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) had already been realized, since this would have increased the resilience and long-term orientation of public administration and governance structures and mechanisms.

Some general lessons on the relation between the pandemic and the quality of public administration and governance were already drawn in the beginning of 2020 [1]. Firstly, it seems that countries with a functioning public sector that caters for essential health services for all are better equipped to deal with the pandemic than those with privatized health care systems. Market-based health care uses the same strategies as retail companies, including just-in-time delivery, limited stock, and high reliance on logistics. This is not an adequate strategy when a pandemic emerges, and it is important to have an emergency stock of protective clothing and facial masks. The privatization of health care is an example of the general undervaluing of the role of the public sector which, according to Mazzucato [2], has resulted in a less effective public administration and service, as well as a disregard of the public value that it may create. Even the World Bank, who has promoted privatization for a long time, now advocates a “whole of society” approach with a prominent role for governments to tackle the health care problems during the pandemic [3]. In April 2021,

the European Commission published for the very first time an analysis of the critical role of public administration and governance, focused on stimulating a recovery from the COVID-19 crisis and achieving resilience against future crises [4].

Secondly, governance should be contextual, adaptive, and resilient. Successful COVID-19 measures are different in each country. Hence, governments need to be sensitive to national values and traditions [5]. For example, people in China accept strict rules more easily than in countries such as the Netherlands, where governance traditions are less hierarchical. Governments are making use of this cultural dimension, which was extensively researched some decades ago [6]. They concentrate on collective responsibility in Asian countries and on individual responsibility in the Netherlands. In the Netherlands as well as in Sweden, the relationship between citizens and public authorities is based on a high level of trust, and governments may rely on recommendations rather than needing legislation to achieve compliance of citizens with COVID-19 crisis measures [7].

Thirdly, the pandemic has shown that rapid and unprecedented systemic transformation is possible in each country, provided that a problem is framed—and broadly felt—as a crisis. Messner [8] links this to an observation made by Cohen et al. in 1972 [9], that “as long as everything appears to be working, decision-makers have few incentives to embark on radical change. In a crisis, however, hand-wringing efforts are made to find new solutions”.

Recent publications have highlighted the impact of federalism, decentralization and fragmented authority on government responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. Decision-making in federal states in Europe was not centralized per definition: this depended on the distribution of powers as well as political and economic factors [10]. In Germany, a decentralized and fragmented health system “oscillated between decentralized and centralized solutions”; it turned out that key factors included an increase in coordinated, cooperative, and collaborative collective action early on in the pandemic, driven by “a common sense of urgency and a shared cognition based on reliable information” [11]. Another study, also conducted in Germany, found that heterogeneous policy responses across states in a federal system trigger public skepticism, and that citizens seem to prefer coordination and a homogeneous containment strategy [12].

It can be concluded that the pandemic has illustrated the importance of strong public institutions and of effective partnerships between governments and other key actors, which is also essential for attaining the SDGs. It has been confirmed that the 2030 Agenda is a good compass for sustainability, and that it is necessary to integrate mechanisms to increase resilience in institutions and governance to implement all Sustainable Development Goals, in particular, for enabling Goals 16 and 17, without which implementation of Goals 1 to 15 would not be possible.

However, a good compass alone does not help if there is not a progression toward Goals taking place. In 2020, the United Nations stated that the attainment of these Goals by 2030 is not possible with the existing speed and acceleration that the implementation of the UN 2030 Agenda and all its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is moving at. Indeed, this was the central theme of the annual high level political forum (HLPF) [13]. Discussions at the (virtual) HLPF of 2020 showed that policymakers, political decision-makers, societal stakeholders as well as scholars tend to look for causes of the delays first and foremost in policy failure. Indeed, governments and their societal partners often fail to take the correct course of action, however, this is only part of the problem. At least as important, is the fact that the quality of public governance for the SDGs (in other words, doing things the correct way) is not matching the high ambitions of policies. Moreover, many public institutions who should play a leading role in governance, and are themselves part of the institutional governance framework, are not equipped (financially, in terms of human resources, as well as in terms of the mindsets needed) to lead the implementation of the Agenda. Governance failure is therefore at least as much a cause for lagging with the SDGs as policy failure. The increase of global crises, including but not limited to the COVID-19 pandemic, risks further slowing down or even causing a standstill for the 2030 Agenda if effective governance

and effective policies are not implemented. The UN Secretary-General addressed this at the virtual Climate Summit in April 2021, stating that the COVID-19 recovery money cannot be used to lock in policies that burden next generations “with a mountain of debt on a broken planet” [14].

On the positive side, the fear of many that COVID-19 crisis management would push sustainable development from the political agendas, has not broadly materialized. In the EU, implementation of the 2030 Agenda has emerged stronger, with a reconfirmation that the 2019 European Green Deal [15] remains the EU’s growth strategy, and with the establishment of an EU Recovery and Resilience financial Facility of 672.5 billion Euros in loans and grants, focusing on a twin “green and digital” transition [16]. In addition, the 2021 EU report on the importance of public administration reiterated that public administrations have a key role for the achievement of the 2030 sustainable Agenda, which is at the heart of EU policies [4]. In many other countries, however, the pandemic has not stopped unsustainable infrastructure, mobility, production, and consumption.

On the negative side, the attention on governance failure is generally still weak. Although UN Member States have been asked to report, in their Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs), about the governance SDGs 16 and 17, governance failure is rarely mentioned. Governance failure (the ineffectiveness of governance goals, a governance framework or the management thereof, to achieve policy goals [17]) is part of, but not the same as government failure: government failure also includes policy failure.

An advanced draft of the annual Ministerial Declaration at the HLPF 2020 dedicated only one sentence to the quality of PAG in a strict sense, stating “We will also upscale our efforts to build and strengthen more effective, accountable and transparent institutions, and ensure equal access to basic services and opportunities, with a special emphasis on people in vulnerable situations”, although more ambitions were presented on financial and technological support, and combating corruption was mentioned. Due to procedural discussions—and some disagreement on substance—the Declaration was not adopted.

A 2019 study into institutional mainstreaming of the SDGs in the EU Member States gave a mixed picture when it comes to SDG implementation processes in these countries [18]. The study reported on the state-of-play regarding seven governance themes. Some main conclusions are summarized below.

1. With regards to commitment and strategy, only two countries had no overarching cross-sectoral strategy, six countries did have one, but without a recent update. Most of these countries planned to revise their sustainable development strategies or development plans with the SDGs. Seventeen countries already had updated national strategies. In around half of all the Member States, these strategies appeared to be operational.
2. Only a few countries linked their overarching strategy to the national budget. SDG budgeting is indeed an area where crucial progress could be made [19]. This is crucial because it would link the SDGs with the implementation power of ministries of finance and their instruments.
3. Regarding leadership and horizontal coordination, 50% of the countries had visible coordination mechanisms with clear engagements across all departments, and had often moved SDG implementation leadership to the center of government.
4. Stakeholder participation varied widely between Member States. In most countries, making SDG implementation processes inclusive was a priority, but in only eight countries, it was highly institutionalized and frequent. Still, it can be said that involving stakeholders in sustainable development processes, governance and strategic decision-making has become a somewhat mainstream norm across the EU Member States. Often, it is institutionalized and done on a regular basis. However, the study concluded that the fact that stakeholder consultation on strategic developments is not a baseline for all countries means that this is a key area for improvement.
5. Concerning monitoring and review, most countries had regular progress reports and had updated their indicator set with the SDGs. Only a few countries had defined,

- quantified, and time bound targets to achieve the SDGs nationally, and even fewer countries had put in place an independent, external review mechanism.
6. Countries were the least advanced on the theme of knowledge and tools and institutions for the long-term. Only a few countries had put more than one tool in place to support the input of scientific knowledge through a science-policy interface and tools like sustainability impact assessments or sustainability checks for national budgets. Most countries had only created very limited versions of it. Institutions for the long-term were not a priority in most EU countries. In poorer countries, such as least developed countries and landlocked developing countries, the science-policy was generally structurally weak, which affects the ability to respond appropriately to both SDG and challenges presented by COVID-19 [20]. Elsewhere, the health diplomat Colglazier argues that “Catastrophic failures of the science-policy interface in many countries and globally have led to disastrous outcomes for public health, the economy, and international collaboration” [21].
 7. Finally, regarding activities of parliaments for the 2030 Agenda, there was approximately an equal number of countries that had so far only organized parliamentary debates on SDGs, and those that had one or two committees dealing with the Agenda 2030 or had created new institutional arrangements. It remains a challenge to include the SDGs in all core parliamentary functions: to scrutinize implementation of the SDGs nationally, to integrate them in legislation and in the budget.

Based on, among other factors, the above-mentioned research into how EU Member States institutionalize the implementation of the SDGs [18], a critical review of SDG-governance approaches [17], and a review paper on management of the SDGs [22], it is assumed that governments need to work on the following priority areas (Figure 1) in any order that works best, including addressing them at the same time:

- Recognize that creating an effective public administration and governance (PAG) is an important strategic policy area;
- Begin with mission-oriented public administration and governance reform for SDG implementation, replacing the efficiency-driven public sector reform of the past decades;
- Apply culturally sensitive metagovernance to design, define and manage tackling trade-offs and achieving synergies between SDGs and their targets;
- Start concerted efforts to improve policy coherence with a mindset beyond political, institutional, and mental silos.



Figure 1. Four priority areas to improve institutional capacity for implementing the SDGs.

The scope of the article is in principle global, with the caveat that most examples presented are from EU countries, and such examples cannot be generalized to other countries. But as the analysis is also based on global literature and taking into account the positive feedback on the selection of the four themes during a number of online webinars and

workshops with representatives of mostly developing countries, the four suggested reform priorities are probably also useful in countries in the other global regions.

2. Public Administration and Governance as a Strategic Policy Area

2.1. Challenges

The first priority area concerns the quality of public administration and governance (PAG) as a crucial means to steer, guide and stimulate the attainment of the SDGs. This concerns the quality of plans and strategies, resources, skills, competences, agility, and mindsets, as well as about how to create a match with existing traditions and cultures of governance, or more generally, societal problem-solving. SDGs 16 (institutions) and 17 (means of implementation) are the main governance Goals, but all other SDGs have enabling governance targets. Still, SDGs 16 and 17 can be considered as the enabling Goals of the 2030 Agenda. These are important motivating factors without which nothing happens.

Creating an effective public administration and governance is more than a technical matter linked to an administrative ‘overhead’. PAG is an important, strategic policy area, linked to SDG 16 as it relates to the quality of public institutions, SDG 17 with its concern for policy coherence for sustainable development, and the cross-cutting SDG 11 on sustainable cities and communities. On the one hand, we generally consider debates on the size of public administration, devolvement of tasks to subnational authorities, and on the nature of public tasks as well as what can be privatized, as being deeply normative and therefore, political. For example, the level of privatization of the health system in a country is the result of a specific political ideology. On the other hand, we usually do not consider attaining adequate quality of public administration and governance as a strategic policy area. As Pollit and Bouckaert have argued in their seminal book on public management reform, although “public administration reform is usually thought as a means to an end, not an end in itself” (...) “it may also serve a number of intermediate ends, including those of strengthening the control of politicians over the bureaucracy, freeing public officials from bureaucratic constraints that inhibit their opportunities to manage and enhancing the government’s accountability to the legislature and the citizenry for its policies and programs” [23]. The paradox, that PAG is political and strategic, and at the same time rather a means rather than an end, needs to be looked at, since the SDGs will not be attained by 2030 without well-functioning public institutions and effective governance at all levels.

Public officials responsible for governance and administration often consider themselves as not being part of the 2030 Agenda policy framework. Nonetheless, they should be essential partners in national inter-ministerial committees on the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals if they should develop adequate institutional mechanisms and ensure competences and skills of the workforce directed to enable mainstreaming of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Policies tend to attract more political and media attention than issues around public administration and governance. This results usually in a disbalance in terms of strategic priorities, in which administrative quality and governance are the weakest part. In addition, governance is more than a theory about the relations between government and non-governmental actors. Governance is about the quality of the institutions, processes, tools, skills, etc., which should enable effective policy making and policy implementation (see Section 4).

2.2. Key Elements

Making PAG a strategic priority could begin with applying a set of principles. In 2018, the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) and the UN Committee of Experts on Public Administration (CEPA) developed a set of 11 ‘principles of effective governance for sustainable development’. The 11 principles are clustered along the three criteria mentioned in SDG 16 for institutional quality: effectiveness, accountability, and inclusiveness (see Table 1). With five of the eleven principles covering the inclusiveness dimension, the principles stand out compared to other similar sets, from e.g., OECD

or World Bank. The principles are accompanied by 62 commonly used strategies, for some of which strategic guidance documents have already been published online, on budget transparency; public sector workforce diversity; monitoring and evaluation; risk management frameworks; and on coherent policymaking [24]. Since the UN Member States, through their ECOSOC Council, have endorsed the principles in 2018, they are being used to analyse existing and/or design new governance frameworks in a growing number of countries. The African Peer Review Mechanism of the African Union is preparing a study on the use of the principles in a selection of African countries which should be published in mid-2021 [25].

Table 1. Principles of effective governance for sustainable development [24].

Principles	
Effectiveness	1. Competence
	2. Sound Policymaking
	3. Collaboration
Accountability	4. Integrity
	5. Transparency
	6. Independent oversight
Inclusiveness	7. Leaving no one behind
	8. Non-discrimination
	9. Participation
	10. Subsidiarity
	11. Intergenerational equity

In addition to getting the governance principles right, improving the quality of PAG is also about better cooperation across political, institutional, and mental ‘silos’ (see more in Section 5), which requires rethinking institutions, instruments, skills, human resources development and governance processes at all levels. This requires better horizontal and vertical coordination mechanisms, including mechanisms such as self-organizing governance institutions who aim to mitigate problems arising from fragmented authority [26], multiple forms of leadership, and inclusiveness with co-creation and co-responsibility.

In the mindset of many public officials, being responsible for the internal ‘hardware’—institutions, governance, and human resource management—of the administration is not very attractive, predominantly because it is about managing the internal business and thus has little external exposure, criticism or praise. This image exists also in the general public’s mind. It is no coincidence that the famous satirical BBC TV series ‘Yes, Minister’—which is after more than three decades still relevant as critical mirror for public administration—evolved around a ‘Ministry of Administrative Affairs’.

Finally, those who coordinate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda at the national level often do not consider their ‘administrative affairs’ Ministry as a logical and needed partner. Quality of public administration and governance is seen as belonging to the overhead of governmental organizations. All in all, the quality of public institutions can either slow down or accelerate SDG implementation, but is still not considered as a strategic policy area.

2.3. Recommendations on Position and Status of PAG

To address the challenges outlined, it would be recommendable to:

- Apply the guidance developed by the UN Committee of Experts on Public Administration in the form of 11 principles of effective governance for sustainable development, which were endorsed by the UN ECOSOC Council to do a SWOT analysis and develop a strategic policy to support the SDGs.

- Make Departments of 'Administrative Affairs' part of e.g., national inter-ministerial committees on the implementation of the SDGs. Only then can they develop adequate institutional mechanisms and ensure competences and skills of the work force directed to enable mainstreaming of the SDGs.
- Make the monitoring and progress assessment of SDGs 16 and 17 more focused on the quality of public institutions, policy coherence and partnerships; start using, for example, the new UN composite indicator for policy coherence (SDG 17.14.1).
- Ensure that all policy documents on the implementation of SDGs 1–15 contain a section on the required quality of public institutions and governance to ensure effective implementation.

3. Mission-Oriented Public Administration and Governance Reform

3.1. Challenges

The second priority area concerns public administration and governance reform. Reform and innovation in the public sector are not straightforward. For decades, the sometimes implicit reform objectives originated from New Public Management, focusing on, among other things, decentralization, but always on improving efficiency, even to the detriment of effectiveness. Many public sector reform programs have been inspired by this type of thinking, which is primarily based upon literature derived from the private sector [27]. Such reforms have been carried out globally, starting in Anglo-Saxon countries, spreading across Europe, and inspiring many Asian countries. Conversely, Pollit and Bouckaert [23] have observed a resistance to NPM in France, Germany and the Mediterranean countries because it was considered as not matching with their cultural, ethical and political features.

NPM has introduced slogans that sound simple and attractive but should be handled with care. Some of them are known to have resulted in governance failure in areas relevant to the 2030 Agenda [17].

Firstly, the expression 'best practice' is not value-neutral. The 'best practice' ideology is the opposite of the principle of the SDGs that there is no one-size-fits-all and that the best solutions are contextualized. It is related to the market governance value of competition ("who is the winner, who is the best?"). It suggests that every alternative practice has been considered and rigorously evaluated based on some agreed criteria. Alternative wording would be 'good practice', 'successful practice', or 'inspiring example'; the latter was systematically used by the European Commission in its Toolbox Quality of Public Administration [28].

The phrase 'less is more' is inspired by efficiency thinking, which would normally be a secondary objective of an organization. As soon as the primary objective suffers from efficiency measures, something is wrong. Therefore, it is not a universally sound principle. 'Less is more' is often used to suggest that governmental organizations should be smaller, actually meaning 'Less state, more market'. Related to the 'less is more' mantra is the idea that governments should be 'steering, not rowing' [29]; they should make policies but utilize other sectors to deliver public services. 'Less is more' has stimulated privatization of, for example, health services in many countries. The Covid-19 crisis has shown some negative impacts of this on SDG 3 (good health and well-being), such as the lack of stock of medical equipment in hospitals, as mentioned before.

Another NPM slogan is 'evidence-based policy making' [30]. On the one hand, it is the opposite of policy being based on prejudices and populism. It is sometimes interpreted as a claim that policies need an indisputable, 'true' knowledge base. This claim is in contrast with the low level of certainty that social sciences consider realistic regarding the politics of complex, disputed, so-called 'wicked' problems of the sustainability Agenda. Hence, it is being overtaken—in academic publications; not yet in public administration practice—by the more nuanced term 'evidence-informed policy making' (e.g., [31]).

The NPM concept 'better regulation' has in the past been used as a euphemism for 'less regulation' and had the connotation of 'cutting red tape'. The downside of breaking

down regulation can be less reliability, legitimacy, and steering power of government. Used in a more literal sense, the impact can be very positive in terms of effective governance. The European Commission's Better Regulation initiative [32] includes, besides a 'refit' exercise of existing EU legislation, a philosophy which is pluralist and close to the concept of metagovernance (see Section 4).

New Public Management also introduced public-private partnerships (PPP), resulting in both benefits and flaws. On the positive side, it has provided governments with investments, technology and innovation options beyond their budget and capacities. The downsides of PPP as blueprint for partnerships between governments and societal partners include that PPP—for the administration—is mainly about cost-saving, that the business partner in the partnership is often dominant, and that it is not designed to include civil society organizations as a partner on equal footing. The first is against the 2030 Agenda's effectiveness principle, the second against accountability and the third against inclusiveness.

Finally, the slogan 'breaking down the silos' has become almost a mantra in debates on governance for sustainable development and the 2030 Agenda, as requirement to fulfill its comprehensive, holistic, and systemic approach. As addressed in Section 5, an adaptation here is 'teaching silos to dance', relating to the need for capacity-building and skills development in the public service.

3.2. Key Elements

It is a positive development that the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in many countries rediscovering the crucial role of the values created by the public sector. An increased political priority for quality of public administration and governance (as argued in Section 2) could make it more feasible than in the past to use 'mission-oriented' public administration and governance reform for better implementation of the 2030 Agenda, as promoted by Mazzucato [2] for research innovation. What the Agenda requires is in the first place effective and tailor-made governance instead of efficient and standardized modernization recipes. The mission would be to achieve the SDGs by 2030 and would be open to use all available tools and resources that can help acceleration, including the budget, the tax system and public procurement. Such a mission would be compatible with the principles of effective governance mentioned in Section 2.

Mission-oriented public sector reform would include both horizontal and vertical coordination, and collaboration within a 'whole of government' and a 'whole of society' concept. Looking through a multilevel lens brings about new perspectives and ideas for more interconnected and mutually reinforcing actions, thus 'dynamising the multilevel governance for SDGs' [18]. Coordination of governance across administrative levels has been researched already from a cultural perspective, showing, for instance, that multilevel governance can be characterized by hierarchical governance in a legalist or centrist culture, and by voluntary agreements in a consensus democracy. Generally, it may take years before a national strategy becomes local practice; in the EU, a new piece of legislation may be implemented by local authorities only six or seven years after the initiative was taken by the European Commission. The same slowness occurs when innovative local ideas could benefit from being to higher levels. A third approach has emerged in some countries, referred to as a 'real-time collaborative multilevel governance' approach [33]. In the Netherlands, with its centuries-old network governance culture, for certain important and urgent challenges of national interest, all levels of government get together in so-called 'inter-administrative dossier teams' ('interbestuurlijke dossierteams'). In other countries, the approach could be different: comparative research on urban sustainability transitions has shown that multilevel relations may differ according to national governance cultures [34]. In Figure 2, the logic of adding this third approach becomes clear when analyzing multilevel governance practices within three basic governance styles (hierarchical, network and market governance): the network style was underused and adding the 'real-time collaborative' approach is an example of what in Section 4 will be introduced as a 'metagovernance' response to close the gap. As Köhler et al. have shown, multilevel gov-

ernance challenges can differ widely between policy sectors, because actor constellations and path dependencies, to name two factors, are not the same [35].

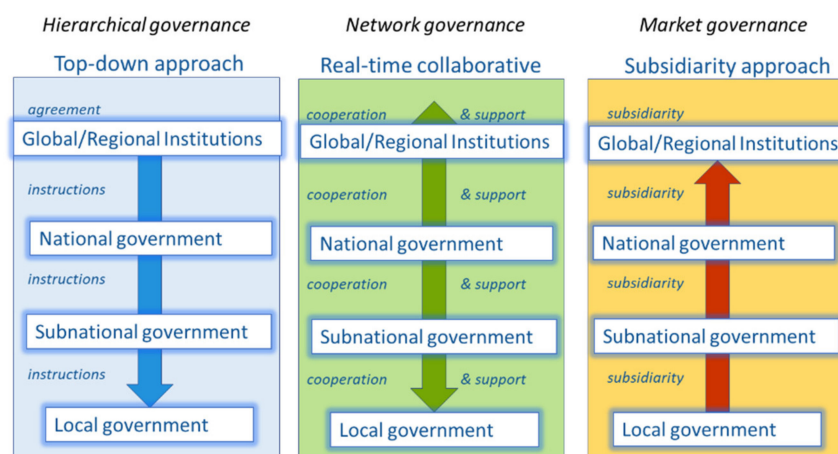


Figure 2. Three views on multilevel governance (based on [33]).

Another topic to be addressed in mission-oriented reform is how to make public institutions agile in how they address different problem types. This is about how to align policies and governance with the different types of problems in terms of what kind of systems are underlying the challenges. For public policy as well as governance, it makes a huge difference whether a system is simple or complicated, where the links between interventions and results are relatively clear, whether it is complex or even chaotic. Such differences are important for administrative organization and governance design. Sustainability challenges are often embedded in complex systems, which typically entail so-called wicked problems [36]. While this is not new for public administration experts, sustainability experts may add new insights from their experience. The presentation of different management responses, linked to different problem types by Snowden and Boone [37], is highly relevant for both sustainability policy and governance. They suggest as primary management response for simple problems which have clear cause-and-effect relationships, to sense, categorize, and respond; for complicated problems to sense, analyze and respond; for complex problems, leaders need to probe first, then sense, and then respond; and for chaotic problems, the order would be to act first, then sense what works and what not, and respond.

These different approaches could also be linked to the three basic governance styles, with market governance performing best on simple problems, hierarchical governance on complicated problems, and network governance on complex and chaotic problems. This could become part of internal training on PAG—e.g., on issues such as policy coherence, inclusive policy making or scenario exercises.

Existing tools can be re-addressed or advertised to support mission-oriented reforms. The EU has a financial Technical Support Instrument (TSI) which supports public sector reforms in the Member States, among others, in mainstreaming the SDGs [38]. A recent OECD approach (the Public Sector Innovation System Scan) helps countries to analyse their PAG innovation and make implicit objectives and priorities explicit, and thus mapping the ‘innovation journey’ of the public sector in a country: where has it been, where is it now, and how it might evolve and change in the future [39]. Various UN bodies have developed toolboxes, training courses and guidance to help administrations become more successful in enabling sustainable development.

3.3. Recommendations

It would be recommendable to:

- Test public sector reform programs before they start, on (a) the sensitivity for governance style interactions and metagovernance, (b) the appropriateness of the normative

assumptions—which model or mixture, and (c) on having a sense of direction which should, at least, not be detrimental to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, but which should preferably promote this [17]. Such a test could be integrated in ex ante impact assessments of reform programs—however, such programs do not require ex ante assessments in most countries, unlike policies, strategies and legislation in other areas.

- Implement concrete mechanisms for policy and institutional coherence for the SDGs, which should be inclusive, well-coordinated in e.g., national programs, based on a range of available approaches, supported by dedicated reforms, and accompanied by peer learning programs, training and networks of practitioners.
- Start pilots using ‘real-time collaborative multilevel governance’ for selected policy challenges which are both important and urgent.

4. Governance beyond Governance: Metagovernance to Tackle Trade-Offs and Benefit from Synergies

4.1. Challenges

The third priority area concerns the ‘management’ of governance. As argued above, the political and societal debates on sustainable development tend to focus on the ‘what’: the policies, strategies, laws. Thinking about the ‘how’—which is the governance question—seems to attract less attention. This is a problem, in particular with regard to implementing the SDGs, because “sustainable development is really all about governance” [40]. To fulfill such a key role, we need to use a broad definition of governance, in which governance is about the question of ‘how to get things done’, not on ‘what should be done’. This goes back to the classical distinction in political science between polity, politics, and policy. Governance is about polity (institutions) and politics (processes), and not about policy (the substance). Governance is not an end, but a means to an end. A definition expressing this, also utilized by the European Environment Agency [41] (p. 39) is: “Governance is the totality of interactions in which government, other public bodies, private sector and civil society participate (in one way or another), aimed at solving public challenges or creating public opportunities” [42]. A concrete governance framework is then “the totality of instruments, procedures and processes designed to tackle a societal problem”. Governance frameworks should be “adapted to legal, cultural and physical conditions of the problem environment and be internally consistent; the normative assumptions (values, hypotheses) should be clear” [43].

The fact that public administrations and political sciences are populated with a wide range of definitions of governance, including very narrow ones, does not help to promote the visibility of governance as a priority of government organizations. This discussion is not futile: governance for sustainability is special because it is—to a substantial extent—about complex problems, which take place in a context with a multi-sector, multilevel, and multi-actor character. In addition, different governance styles are important for SDG implementation in different contexts. Hence, those who define governance narrowly, e.g., as management of networks, or as anything else than hierarchy, to some extent maneuver themselves away from practical applicability of sustainability governance as part of the tasks of governments.

Governance failure can delay the achievement of the SDGs substantially. Where such failure can be linked to insufficient public administration quality, or governance frameworks which are not optimized for the context and the problem types, this can, in principle, be prevented. Successful governance requires leaders to have an open mind for emerging windows of opportunity, and a sense for using those opportunities successfully. An open mind for using opportunities is a prerequisite of effective governance for sustainable development. For example, the political attention a few years ago to plastics presented a window of opportunity to address this important environmental problem. It arose due to a rare combination of factors: NGO pressure and public awareness played a role, but also the fact that China closed its borders to the EU’s plastic waste, while the European Commission at

the same time was looking for new revenue options to fill the budget gap caused by UK's decision to leave the Union. A plastic tax suddenly became a politically feasible idea.

Having an open mind is not enough. Even if we do not realize it, each of us has an inclination for governance by either rules (hierarchical governance), partnerships (network governance) or market-based solutions (market governance), or a specific combination of these. This preference can be personal, organizational, part of a national culture, or all the above. Generally speaking, German, French, and Eastern European policymakers tend to favor legal instruments, the Scandinavians and the Dutch prefer network tools, and British and Irish officials may be inclined toward market-based solutions. This means that, tentatively, skills and traditions to tackle certain types of SDG challenges may be better developed in some countries than in other countries; this implies a need for peer-to-peer learning on PAG between countries.

The three basic governance styles (hierarchical, network and market governance) are each defined by specific values, mindsets, and preferential tools. Table 2 shows some characteristics of each style.

Table 2. Three distinctly different governance styles (after [44]).

Governance Style	Example of Typical Features of the Styles
Hierarchical governance	Rationality, reliability, stability, legitimacy, justice, accountability, risk averse, government-centred, centralized, planning and design, authoritative, instructions, one-way communication, dependency, subordinates, obedience, rules-based, command and control
Network governance	Partnerships, collaborative learning, co-creation for innovation, informal arrangements, trust-based, harmony, communication as dialogue, process management, diplomacy, mutual dependence, mutual gains approach, consensus, voluntary agreements, covenants
Market governance	Rationality, cost-driven, flexible, competition as driver for innovation, price, marketing, decentralized, bottom-up, individualist, autonomy, self-determination, empowering, services, contracts, incentives, awards and other market-based instruments

It is easy to see that each style has its own, strong internal logic. Not surprisingly, the styles are compatible with three main 'world views' distinguished in cultural theory (hierarchism, collectivism and individualism) [45]. They can be linked to the dimensions of national culture of Hofstede [5,6]. Moreover, the two-dimensional cultural concept of tight and loose links in societies [46,47] can, when slightly adapted, be related to hierarchical governance (tight) and the looser network and market governance styles. In practice, the styles are usually combined, with one style dominating the mix.

4.2. Key Elements

Research has shown that many decision-makers do not stick to one governance approach but—by intuition or calculation—use a broad toolbox that draws on multiple approaches (see references in [16,42]), thinking beyond the governance style that their organization or culture may be used to. A successful approach that deals with such governance challenges is metagovernance or 'governance of governance'. It is not governance itself (just as meta-physics is not physics), but an approach and method to manage conflicts between hierarchical, network and market governance styles, and create synergetic combinations. The term was coined in the 1990s by Jessop [48] and Kooiman (e.g., [49]). In the early 1990s, a similar concept had already emerged: 'collibration' [50]—an approach to managing tensions between opposing forces in a social arena [51].

The European Commission's Quality of Public Administration Toolbox mentions metagovernance of hierarchies, networks, and markets as a way to promote public officials

to be open-minded about how they interact with each other and external stakeholders. It defines metagovernance as a term which “encapsulates the concept of public servants being able and encouraged to select, blend or switch between the most suitable governance style, according to circumstance, each having pros and cons” [28]. Or put in different wording: “Metagovernance is a means by which to produce some degree of coordinated governance, by designing and managing sound combinations of hierarchical, market and network governance, to achieve the best possible outcomes” (adapted from [42]). It is context-related, in a dynamic way. This approach is not just theory, but good practice.

Those who apply metagovernance (‘metagovernors’) use various strategies when they design and manage a governance framework [17]:

- Framing of problems to make the solvable in an existing governance environment.
- Designing a framework by combining elements of different governance styles into compatible arrangements.
- Switching from one to another (main) governance style.
- Maintaining a chosen governance framework or arrangement, for example, protecting it against perverse/undermining influences in the governance environment.

Of course, policymakers are not completely free to apply metagovernance the way they prefer themselves. There are key context factors that co-determine what is feasible. The political reality and politics may lead to a different governance style mixture than originally seemed logical. As a director in a national Ministry, I once designed a network governance-style policymaking process with close involvement of key societal actors, when my minister forbade me to interact with stakeholders because of the sensitivity of the theme. I have described elsewhere how this resulted in an autonomous interactive societal process where views first diverged and then converged, without the Ministry being able to influence the process [52].

Metagovernance is often used as an analytical tool. Recent examples are the analysis of the governance of the SDGs during the Covid-19 in Denmark, Japan and Vietnam [53] and to compare strategic environmental assessment practices in Denmark, the Netherlands, Portugal, China, Vietnam and Chile [54].

Being able to develop and implement tailor-made solutions to complicated and complex challenges posed by the SDGs requires appropriate out-of-the-box thinking. Many scholars have found that the EU level, and in particular the European Commission as its executive organization, is an excellent place to practice metagovernance (see for example [42,55–59]). In 2009, Jessop [60] noted that the EU had developed “a wide and deep array of both governance and metagovernance capacities that enable it to influence economic and social policy in most areas and on most scales”. One of the first expressions of metagovernance at the level of the EU was the Open Method of Coordination (OMC), an approach established by the Lisbon European Council (March 2000), to implement the Lisbon Strategy [61]. This was an attempt to combine effectively the classical hierarchical governance of the EU with ‘new modes of governance’ [62]. According to Jessop [60], this had instituted permanent reflection about the nature of problems; monitoring of different approaches to coordination; a flexible repertoire of responses that can be deployed on different scales, with different scales for different sets of problems; and an orientation which includes intertemporal as well as inter-scalar aspects.

A concrete example of SDG-relevant OMC-type two-level collaboration is the two-yearly Environmental Implementation Review (EIR) process. Weak implementation of EU environmental policy and law results in economic, social, and environmental costs. In 2015 it was concluded that the dual approach of ‘stick’ (i.e., legal enforcement procedures and fines: a hierarchical governance approach) and ‘carrot’ (i.e., EU funding of environmental infrastructure on e.g., waste and water: a market governance approach) were not sufficient to close the existing implementation gaps and to create a level playing field across the European Union. In 2016, a new tool was announced, the two-yearly Environmental Implementation Review (EIR), which would add a third approach of analysis, dialogue and collaboration on the ground (i.e., network governance). In February 2017, the first EIR

package with country reports was published; the second edition in April 2019. As a result, the European Commission now possesses a broader and more flexible toolbox to monitor and stimulate environmental implementation in the Member States, which can be used situationally, e.g., by switching from one to another style when appropriate. When legal tools are not effective because they cannot address systemic problems, dialogue and/or funding can be used. Where there is no appetite for dialogue, legal procedures may create the necessary pressure. When a national dialogue shows that a problem can be solved with reallocation of funds, this could be explored at the EU level.

The three classical governance styles—hierarchical, network and market governance—can be compared along 50 dimensions, across which they each take different operational forms [17]. This means that the full “metagovernance toolbox” that can be used for implementation of the SDGs has at least 150 operational forms. This toolbox (Table 3) can be used to support design and evaluation of a governance framework in a specific situation.

Table 3. The metagovernance toolbox: 50 features × 3 operational forms (after [17]).

1. Ways of life.	11. Strategy styles	21. Control mechanism	31. Accountability styles	41. Values of civil servants
2. Relational values	12. Reply to resistance	22. Coordination mechanism	32. Context	42. Key competences of civil servants
3. Theor. background	13. Organiz. orientation	23. Transaction types	33. Process and project management	43. Objectives of management development
4. Key concepts	14. Actor perceptions	24. Degree of flexibility	34. Public sector reform approaches	44. Dealing with power
5. Mode of calculation	15. Selection of actors	25. Level of commitment	35. Innovation	45. Conflict resolution types
6. Primary virtues	16. Stocktaking of actors	26. Communication styles	36. Relation types	46. Suitability for problem types
7. Common motive	17. Institutional logic	27. Roles of knowledge	37. Societal interactions	47. Reframing
8. Motive of actors	18. Dealing with organizational silos	28. Science-policy interface	38. Roles of public managers	48. Typical governance failures
9. Roles of government	19. Policy instruments	29. Impact assessments	39. Leadership styles	49. Role of public procurement
10. Metaphors	20. Decision making unit	30. Access to information	40. Degree of empowerment inside organizations	50. Typical output and outcome

For the SDGs, the metagovernance approach can be useful guidance for coping with the different governance traditions in different policy areas. For example, energy governance is currently dominated by market governance in many countries. It is linked to climate action, which often leans toward hierarchical solutions (legally binding agreements). Air pollution policy is also rules-based, while transport policies are often market-based. The circular economy is fueled by bottom-up network-style innovation, but needs to be in synergy with industry policy, which frames rules for markets. Another example is science diplomacy. This is an area “on the interface between foreign policy, problem articulation (e.g., concerning SDGs) and science that is characterized by fluidity and multi-interpretability”, for which Aukes et al. developed a metagovernance framework [63].

The last three or four decades have shown that speed, flexibility, change, and efficiency, promoted as part of the New Public Management (NPM) movement, require a trade-off with accuracy, legitimacy, stability and predictability, and effectiveness. The COVID-19 pandemic made clear that integration of NPM-type business principles in public administration and governance has decreased the effectiveness as well as the authority of public institutions in many countries. This has made the trade-off between change and stability, to name a crucial dynamic, very challenging. This challenge has until now largely remained outside the scope of debates about implementation of the SDGs. Ministries of the Interior, usually responsible for the quality of the public work force, its institutions, and the governance capacity, including the capacity at subnational administration, are either not invited to co-coordinate the SDGs, or do not see an important role for themselves.

The trade-off between change and stability is a key example of the choices that must be made as part of the management challenges of implementing the SDGs. Many governance failures can be directly linked to the mindset embedded in each of the three classical governance styles (hierarchical, network and market governance): they are the result of, or part of the logic of each style. The co-existence of different manifestations of the same governance dimension brings about many paradoxes. According to Hesse et al., “mechanisms for paradox resolution may include shocks, policy reversals, or simply the passage of time” [64]. Paradoxes often require trade-offs to solve them.

One of the features of governance in the metagovernance toolbox that illustrate the conceptual and practical differences between governance styles best is the paradox that we need both flexibility or differently said, change, and stability. Under hierarchical governance, flexibility—as a condition for change—is low, and stability high. Under market governance, readiness for change is generally high. Competitive innovation is a highly valued competence. Network governance can also be flexible, depending on the level of agreement that can be achieved within the relevant networks or stakeholders.

The COVID-19 crisis has disturbed governance style mixtures that may have been relatively stable for many years. In countries where hierarchical governance had been dismissed as old-fashioned, the return of hierarchy was celebrated as a rediscovered treasure. Market governance became less the panacea it had been considered to be, and some of the limits of network governance became exposed. This new imbalance resulted in metagovernance interventions. The aforementioned comparative study on government responses to the pandemic concludes that “the need to act resolutely may be better accommodated by using a more balanced mix of governance styles, wherein hierarchic types of governance are employed to complement the market” and “supplemented by the transparency and accountability that open network governance styles can bring about” [7].

4.3. Recommendations on Governance and Metagovernance for PAG Quality

- Make the understanding that governance styles are normative and metagovernance is a method to manage conflicts, failure and synergies, a starting point for improving administration and governance quality;
- Develop a contextual, flexible, and adaptive ‘metagovernance mindset’ fit for implementing the SDGs, to tackle trade-offs such as between change and stability;
- Integrate in PAG course programs for policymakers the relevant knowledge about the whole metagovernance toolbox—not only about the conventional governance style or style combination.

5. Mindsets, Policy Coherence, and ‘Dancing Silos’

5.1. Challenges

The last priority area concerns the need to start concerted efforts to improve policy coherence for sustainable development, and developing a mindset beyond political, institutional, and mental silos.

Readying public administration for the 2030 Agenda is very much about changing mindsets: many governance failures can be directly linked to the mindset of one of the three governance styles: they are the result of, or part of the logic of each style. The logic of hierarchical governance, for example, leads to specific weaknesses, such as the tendency to create “red tape” (too much bureaucracy), to not being able to deal with complexity and uncertainty (for example because the idea is based on a clear and fixed division of tasks), and to create opposition (for example because actors who have something important at stake are not listened to).

The mindset of network governance can lead to typical deficiencies, such as having endless talks with no results. Another common problem is the lack of clear lines of responsibility; in a multi-party process, everyone can blame the others if it fails. The key value of trust is also a risk; as a Dutch saying goes, “trust arrives by foot but leaves by

horse”, meaning that trust can be lost quickly and takes time and effort to be restored. A related weakness is that network governance is sensitive to manipulation.

A market governance mindset has historically aimed to create a smaller and smarter state but resulted in many countries in a highly complex and fragmented public sector which operates beyond the direct control of elected politicians. The use of market mechanisms in public policies has resulted in a loss of democratic control over independent agencies, prioritizing efficiency rather than effectiveness, and in private monopolies. Market governance slogans have become part of our ‘software’: mental ‘apps’ that are always running in the background. They have in common that they are often believed to be universally applicable. In Section 3, some of these NPM-related slogans were already mentioned: best practices, less is more, evidence-based policy making, better regulation, public-private partnership, and breaking down the silos.

5.2. Key Elements

5.2.1. Negotiation Skills for Sustainability Challenges

Implementation of the SDGs while considering principles such as inclusiveness, is difficult to achieve with classical win–lose negotiation methods, where governments and other actors try to create a compromise. However, in a compromise, everybody loses a little (or more than a little). A compromise often results from a situation in which there is little trust between parties. This is normal in a hierarchical governance approach; some partners (in this case: governmental actors) are ‘more equal’ than other partners. In a market approach, trust is a delicate issue. Involved parties are, in principle, autonomous and will strive for their own interests. If one chooses a more participatory approach, then building trust is required. Networks rely on mutual understanding of interests, and on the notion that actors are interdependent. This context requires a type of negotiation that concentrates on creating a consensus (everybody may win, to a certain extent).

In the early 1990s, Harvard University developed the so-called Mutual Gains Approach (MGA), which does exactly this [65]. This approach is especially suitable for complex issues in which many stakeholders are involved, such as sustainable development. A core concept of MGA is to make a distinction between positions and interests which are lying behind these positions. Knowing each other’s interests opens a wider range of possible actions than positions/standpoints. Another difference with the classical ‘compromise’ approach is that one starts not with trying to simplify the issue, but on the contrary, to make the problem more complex. Looking at the interests of stakeholders outside the direct focus of the policy issue may provide more interesting package deals in the end. Negotiating techniques for a multi-stakeholder environment, such as the MGA approach, require excellent communication skills of the involved public officials.

This is clearly an area where training is essential. In the 1990s, the Netherlands’ Environment Ministry organized a mandatory three-day training on the MGA approach for all policy officers and their managers. In addition, a group of middle managers was trained to become in-house trainers. This resulted in a strong common vision, language, and methodology about how to deal effectively with stakeholders with conflicting interests. It is probably no coincidence that this joint mindset and corporate spirit coincided with a decade in which Dutch environment and sustainability policies became exemplary and inspired many other countries. The transition approach in sustainability, for example, emerged in this period.

5.2.2. Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development

Improving horizontal and vertical coordination has always been promoted as a key governance element for implementing sustainable development policies. In parallel, there has been the concept of ‘policy coherence for development’ (PCD), which aims to consider the impacts of domestic policies (of northern countries) on countries in the global south. With the 2030 Agenda, this concept was widened to include ‘policy coherence for sustainable development’ (PCSD), which on the one hand qualifies the original directionality

(northern—southern impacts) with sustainability aspects, but which conversely has become a broad term and addresses the need for coherent policies in general. The OECD is very active in this Agenda (see for example [66]).

Experience shows that efforts to promote policy and institutional coherence should focus on: (a) horizontal challenges across sectors, by, among other things, overcoming silo-thinking; (b) vertical challenges across levels of administration; and (c) involving civil society and the private sector in all stages, from policy design to implementation and evaluation (see Figure 3).

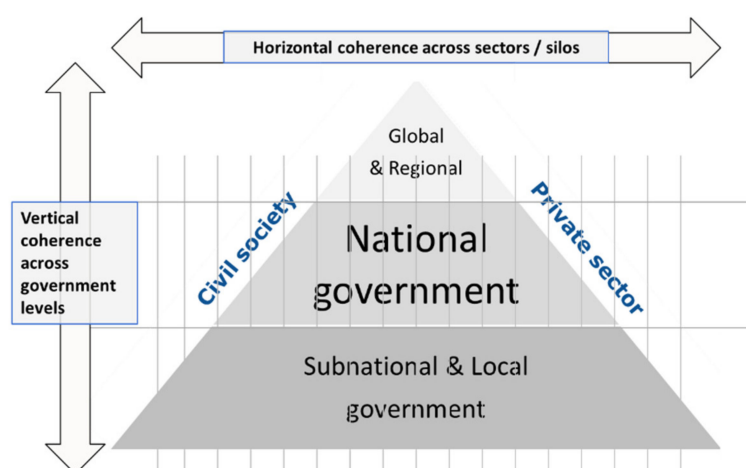


Figure 3. Policy and institutional coherence for the SDGs: horizontal, vertical and inclusive [67].

Fostering policy and institutional coherence is a great challenge for implementation of the SDGs. Tackling air pollution in cities combines SDGs 3 (health), 7 (energy), 9 (industry and infrastructure), 11 (cities), 13 (climate), 16 (institutions) and 17 (partnerships), and requires action at local, regional, national, and even international levels. The nexus approach of interconnectedness, such as the well-researched water-food-energy nexus, requires excellent communication between different policy areas with their own culture: resource management decisions in water, energy, and food are siloed [68]. Incoherence can result in governance failure with high social, economic, and environmental costs. Improving policy and institutional coherence are different but represent two sides of one coin: implementation of the SDGs. Coordination and integration are usually the approaches people mention first, but there are many more “means of implementation.”

There are various concepts and mechanisms that can contribute to coherent implementation of the SDGs, such as coordination, integration, alignment, multilevel governance, compatibility, reconciliation, capacity-building, public sector reform and empowerment [69]. Existing good practices include promoting policy coherence in synergy with promoting institutional coherence. In addition, the metagovernance approach can be used of combining different concrete tools that promote coherence, using toolboxes from different governance styles: hierarchical (regulatory), network (collaboration) and market (efficiency/incentives) governance. Another good practice is to use international peer-to-peer learning tools for the promotion of coherence. It could be based on existing peer-to-peer tools such as established by the European Commission on environmental implementation [70].

UNEP, as custodian of the SDG indicator 17.14.1 on policy coherence for sustainable development, has developed a composite indicator with eight dimensions which is currently tested in many countries, using a self-assessment tool [71]. The OECD has published a series of reports with good practice examples, a conceptual model with eight building blocks which are close to UNEP’s dimensions, and a political Recommendation to help prioritizing the theme. Recently, UNDESA has developed an online training toolkit on “Strengthening Institutional Arrangements and Governance Capacity for Policy Coherence in Implementing the SDGs”.

5.2.3. Political, Institutional and Mental Silos

Working in silos is a main cause of ineffective cross-ministerial collaboration. They comprise barriers to achieving organizational goals and pose a threat to internal cooperation [72]. A silo is an isolated grouping, department, etc., that functions apart from others especially in a way seen as hindering communication and cooperation. Three types of silos can be distinguished. Besides political silos created and maintained by political appointees, and organizations silos grown and nurtured by top bureaucrats, a third type should be distinguished that is at least as influential as the other two. The existence of mental silos or formulated differently, having a silo mentality, is a very common phenomenon, both in governmental and non-governmental organizations. Silo mentality is “the aversion of sharing e.g., talent, data, and know-how beyond one’s immediate functional and hierarchical environment” [73].

Elsewhere we have argued that all three types of silos bring benefits besides costs [74]. This is an important point. The popular call for “breaking down the silos” reflects the long-standing call for policy integration and policy coherence and recognizes the comprehensive, holistic, and systemic approach of the 2030 Agenda. However, this call deserves a closer look.

- Institutional silos: Most governmental organizations (and in fact most large organizations) work as classical bureaucracies. They organize their work by dividing complex problems into more simple, partial problems, which are dealt with by separate sectoral or functional bureaucratic entities, which we tend to call “silos.” Employees become a civil servant in one silo, and typically stay within it. Exceptions apply in administrations where civil servants rotate across silos, as this is beneficial for careers (e.g., England, European Commission). Such institutional silos give people the room to work undisturbed, but may effectively prevent them from working with others, both within government and with stakeholders. Because of the latter, the term silos generally has a negative connotation.
- Political silos: In democracies, politicians need to win majorities. This comes with different degrees of competition and power struggles. Individual politicians tend to focus on their file and defend it, to raise their own profiles. This can lead to political silos. As political silos are almost inherent to the democratic system, there are limits to tackling them, which also depends on the political culture of the country. Some have constitutional arrangements that reduce or eliminate the decision-making power of individual ministers (as in Sweden), or give a relatively strong (but still limited) “steering power” to the Prime Minister (as in Germany). In some countries, governments have experimented with so-called project ministers for cross-cutting issues that involve more than one Ministry (e.g., the Netherlands).
- Mental silos: In addition, and often related, there are mental silos; people have a firm belief that their problem definition and solution are not only the best, but even the only way forward. Different policy sectors like agriculture, transport and environment have their own world view and tend to operate in isolation. There are cultural, political, power-and career- related, cognitive and other reasons why people have ‘tunnel views’ and argue against change. However, for the comprehensive SDGs, for moving toward sustainable development with a need for policy integration and coherence, we need to step out of our comfort zones.

Without institutional silos, there is no focus, no structure, no accountability, and no transparency. Institutional mergers to break down silos may create new governance failures and threaten SDG implementation. Institutional silos therefore have several benefits:

- Institutional silos represent positive features of government organizations such as clear lines of command, responsibility, focus on a given target and having internal “hotspots,” where expertise, memory and learning are concentrated. With respect to the SDGs, an accountable “silo” is needed in each country for, inter alia, reporting progress at the national level.

- They have a different function and meaning in different administrative cultures. In *Rechtsstaat* cultures like Germany, and hierarchical ones in general, opening up silos has turned out to be more difficult than in consensus cultures like the Netherlands and Denmark, or in public interest models of government like in Australia, New Zealand and the UK [23]). Hence, a closer look is required into how they operate, and a general verdict that silos are bad is culturally insensitive.
- They provide clear, reliable, and stable contact points within a Ministry for partners and stakeholders. Without them, it can be difficult to develop enough trust that is needed to make a network approach work. Partnerships and participation increase the challenge of coordination, and thus require clear anchor points. Hence, the common assumption that silos prevent stakeholder participation is questionable.

Table 4 brings some of the downsides and benefits of silos together.

Table 4. Silos for good and for bad [75].

	What Is Bad?	What Is Good?
1. Political silos (macro level)	Competition between political leaders/ministers Legal right/duty of ministers to be the sole responsible	Political silos reflect the different values of political parties in a democratic system
2. Institutional/ organisational silos (meso level)	Lack of trust between the silos Contacts/communication between silos may be prohibited or must go via hierarchy	Institutional silos provide structure, focus, protection against other departments; clarity, responsibility, transparency, accountability
3. Mental silos (micro level)	Lack of: common goals, joint responsibility, interest in other colleagues Not taking responsibility beyond the own job description Let ‘monkey’ (task) jump from your shoulder to another	Mental silos provide identification (‘this is who we are’); a ‘safe’ work environment, a ‘home base’ protected from external interventions

It is recommended that we keep silos because there is no perfect alternative, and there may never be one. As Ulrich Beck developed in his “second modernity”: our time is so complex that we need to move from thinking in “best” tools, i.e., “either A or B,” to the approach of “A and B” [76]. Such redundancies are also good for institutional resilience: if one tool does not work, it is easier to switch to another.

Institutional silos can be tackled by using existing concepts such as matrix organizations. Merging of organizations sometimes helps overcoming silo-thinking, but not always, for example when the organizational cultures are too different.

Starting with connecting mental silos is likely a good idea in most cases. It requires communication and collaboration skills, but these can be learned. Every individual employee in an administration can take part and make a difference. This kind of change can start anytime, informally, and bottom-up. A focus on facilitating dialogue, interaction and learning is at the core of opening mental silos. It will likely also require different leadership styles, e.g., switching from commanding to coaching, and capacity-building for such adaptive leadership. Leaders will also need to allow and even stimulate mistakes, as making mistakes is a normal feature of innovation. Important for opening both mental and political silos are new narratives, such as sustainable production and consumption as presenting business and investment opportunities (see also [77]) New narratives, as well as mutual gains approaches, widen the perspective and enable awareness of synergies.

Finally, changing mindsets toward sustainability (meta)governance and transitions needs a sufficient number of people who have the creativity and the courage to try new ideas which are only seemingly impossible under existing silo-thinking. Such cross-silo entrepreneurs have been nicknamed bureaucracy hackers or boundary spanners. They know the ‘rules of the game’ but also understand that there are always cracks, potholes or

even unused roads that can be explored. They also know that there is no single “best” way to make silos more collaborative: each culture has unwritten rules about how people can work together.

To conclude, silos are features of institutions, mental comfort zones and political rationales, and they can be very change resistant: it is difficult to “teach elephants to dance” [78]. Tackling SDG implementation challenges requires that we “teach silos to dance” [74]. This represents a necessary shift, and is a capacity-building programme in itself.

5.3. Recommendations on Mindsets and Dealing with Silos

- Increase the awareness of existing PAG mindsets and their strengths and weaknesses;
- Consider offering a Mutual Gains Approach training for all policy officers and their managers;
- Integrate informal cross-silo working in basic training programs for civil servants, for example combined in a package with communication and collaboration tools.

6. Conclusions

Looking at implementation issues of the SDGs from a public administration and governance perspective, it can be observed that acceleration is necessary.

One of the first actions may be to recognize that creating an effective public administration and governance (PAG) is an important strategic policy area. PAG is an essential enabler and lever for sustainability transitions. It is recommended to use the UN-principles of effective governance for sustainable development as a strategic tool; to strengthen the position of ministries responsible for administration and governance; to adapt monitoring and assessment of progress; and to streamline public administration and governance quality across all SDG implementation documents.

Secondly, modernization of PAG is often efficiency-oriented, but evidence shows that this has sometimes weakened its role in attaining Goals. Mission-oriented public administration and governance reform for SDG implementation should replace the efficiency-driven public sector reform of the past decades. It is recommended to test reform programs *ex ante* on their missions; to develop comprehensive mechanisms for policy and institutional coherence for the SDGs, and to pilot ‘real-time collaborative multilevel governance’ for selected policy challenges. The April 2021 Communication on Better Regulation from the European Commission [79] expresses the need to mainstream the SDGs and, generally, a long-term foresight dimension, in impact assessments. IAs are usually not required for public administration reform programs, because they are not considered as policy or legislation programs. However, effectiveness of PAG would probably increase if *ex ante* IA were made obligatory for PAG reforms. The only step to make to make this a reality is to decide that PAG is a strategic policy priority, as advocated for in Section 2 of this article. Such a reframing would make IA automatically applicable.

Thirdly, to find appropriate and effective ways through the complexity of the governance challenges, it is recommended to apply metagovernance to design, define and manage tackling trade-offs and achieving synergies between SDGs and their targets, in a culturally sensitive context; to develop for this a contextual, flexible, and adaptive ‘metagovernance mindset’; to integrate the full metagovernance toolbox in PAG course programs.

Fourthly, it is important to speed up concerted efforts to improve policy coherence for sustainable development, with a mindset beyond political, institutional, and mental silos. Instead of breaking down the silos, we will need to make them work together across political, organizational, and mental boundaries. It is recommended to increase the awareness of existing mindsets; to consider a general Mutual Gains Approach training for all policy officers and managers; to integrate informal cross-silo working in existing training programs.

The analysis in this article has highlighted the need for ‘common but differentiated governance’ for SDGs, as suggested in an earlier publication in this Journal [80]. To succeed on this pathway, it is necessary to combine stimulating diverse approaches that consider

their contexts, while keeping the broad view and being able to link Goals and targets, to revise concrete governance frameworks when existing ones are not effective, by using various metagovernance strategies.

Further research would lead to a better understanding the broad and interlinked themes addressed in this article. I would like to suggest four research questions:

- How do the strategic tasks and position of the national department responsible for the quality of public administration and governance relate to the overall quality of public administration and governance in a country, and how does this relate to the culturally preferred main governance style(s) in that country?
- Mission-oriented reform makes the ‘ends’ central and leaves the ‘means’ open. But does the end justify any means? Research to help deciding about an appropriate balance in specific cases would be useful.
- Although there is a rich and growing academic literature concerning metagovernance, it seems that there is a need for more empirical research on the application of metagovernance as a design and management approach for (sustainability) policies. The fact that metagovernance is a heuristic concept—the practice was there before the theory—should lead us to assume that there is ample empirical material for such research.
- Research would be welcome on conditions that influence the success of collaboration across ‘silos’, and how such conditions vary with different (administrative) cultures and traditions.

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