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SYSTEMS GOVERNANCE: TOWARDS EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIP WORKING

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1. THE FAILURE OF GOVERNMENTAL SYSTEMS

1.1 Disjointed Government

Tackling health inequalities poses many of the same challenges that confront all those policies and practices which address the cross-cutting social problems. These challenges include conflicting understandings of cause and effect, multiple organisational engagement, failure to mobilise and integrate programmes, and imperfect communication between policy and action. They reflect the 'wicked issues' (Rittel and Webber 1953) which have confounded all the efforts of fragmented government to address the most intractable social issues. At the heart of this intractability lies the recognition that most organisations work to their own agendas, make the best use of their own resources and perform to standards and targets which inhibit joint working.

The absence of 'joined-up working' raises long-standing issues. British public administration has been organised on vertical functional lines since the outcome of the 1918 Haldane report (Haldane 1918), and local government has in general mirrored central government in establishing functional departments as the basis of organisation. This has regularly been recognised to work against integrated policy development. The analysis of the Joint Approach to Social Policy (CPRS 1975; Challis et al 1988) was in many ways similar to that of the Social Exclusion Unit (2001; 2002) and a look at the history of joint working points to the lasting nature of the key obstacles - 'Ministerial ambition, departmental survival, rigid boundaries, public expenditure inflexibility' (Stewart 2000). All the most recent evidence is that the leopard has not changed its spots, whether one looks at whether at central, regional or local level (Stewart et al 1999 Cabinet Office 2000). The establishment of the Regional Co-ordination Unit together with implementation of the local government modernisation agenda all reflect recognition of the need for improvement in integrated working. The proposals for Community Strategies embodied in the Local Government Act 2000, together with the establishment of Local Strategic Partnerships (DETR 2001a, 2001b), give concrete expression to these long held concerns about the fragmentation of policy and practice.

1.2 The Implementation gap

There is thus a powerful evidence-base of decades of disjointed working. The fragmentation of planning and delivery systems, accentuated in the 1980s by the institutional proliferation of the Thatcher governments, but reinforced in the 1990s by the Labour Government's pursuit of special initiatives, weakens both the local capacity to deliver integrated services and the ability of the centre to control. What emerges is an implementation gap between intention and outcome. Failure to integrate and to close this gap allows - often encourages - individual planning and providing agencies, central and local, to follow their own priorities, and a complex battle of organisational politics occurs with everyone pursuing single and selfish goals. Well-used methods for controlling implementation begin to break down, and compliance with policy intention is less rarely observed. In such a situation the centre attempts to retain or regain control, whilst localities attempt to gain autonomy.

There now exists a multiplicity of government and non-government agencies accountable to different government departments for different targets, each with different professional cultures and theoretical frameworks, with different systems of accountability, different financial regimes and all with considerable operational autonomy. It is difficult to overstate the organisational complexity that results, since while there are not only a large number of important organisational actors involved in the policy process, there are also different combinations of these actors involved in the delivery process at local and neighbourhood levels, giving rise to problems of both vertical and horizontal integration.

The inbuilt momentum of departmentalism and sectional interest is enormous; joined up talking is easy; joined up working apparently intractable. The government's aspirations to

integration, together with its widespread experimentation with new local initiatives, inevitably poses questions about the effectiveness of the cultural, organisational, and administrative mechanisms which are in place to bring about the necessary new capacity building for integrated governance.

The existence of this disjointed government can be understood in the light of three strands of literature - the literature of central-local state relations, the literature of implementation, and the literature of organisational (and inter-organisational) political sociology.

Much of the literature on central-local relations in the last twenty years has focussed on the centralisation of state functions and on the dilution of local autonomy and democracy in the face of the quangos of the 1980s and the 'new' public management of the first half of the 1990s. This literature has emphasised the extent to which the capacity of local government was weakened by the loss of statutory powers and duties and by a reduction in financial autonomy. The shift of functions to a range of non-local governmental bodies altered the local balance of power in terms of implementation, and this was matched by an increasing role for the centre in terms of planning and control. A related, although in some ways contradictory, theme has been that of the hollowing out of the nation state. Faced with the growing influence of Brussels, the shift to agencies of much central government executive activity, and the decentralising tendencies evidenced by a re-emergent regionalism, central government is increasingly focussing on 'core executive' functions. As the centre loses its functions, if not its budgetary control, so it becomes more reliant on other organisations for implementation (agencies, local authorities, partnerships etc.). So while the institutions of local governance have lost their autonomy, central government has lost some control. The field has become more unmanageable and less susceptible to consistent management from either centre or periphery. In this changed environment of central/local relations the traditional mechanisms of control and compliance model do not work.

At the same time, new models of implementation are emerging, and there is greater diversity of delivery systems relying on a mix of market, hierarchy and network. The hierarchical administrative modes associated with a central and local state bureaucracy have been challenged (although not replaced) by reliance on a market mode of governance. This embodied a shift to competitive bidding combined with contractualisation, contract compliance, and increased market regulation. The later new local governance purports to rely on networks, social capital, trust and partnership to draw together the variety of actors. Implementation, however, is not simply a matter of control of agencies with greater or lesser autonomy. There is a large literature which argues that the 'implementation gap' emerges for a host of reasons. The top down flow from policy is imperfect - poor communication, inadequate resource allocation, poor policy specification. The implementation gap may also occur, however, because there is a separate implementation culture which derives from the bottom-up. This is a function of the inevitable freedom of action and scope for discretion which lies with those who implement and who are beyond the reach of the centre. Thus implementation structures, street level bureaucracy, and the discretion open to front line staff, may all distort policy intention.

A literature of organisational sociology emphasises power in organisations and looks to structure rather than agency as the determinant of organisational behaviour and hence successful implementation. Organisations are endowed with the power of their key interests (professional, political, administrative, occasionally users) and the delivery of policy is a function of the power struggles which flow through the 'circuits of power'. Within complex, multi-organisational delivery systems, government policy is not the sole driver of change, and the behaviour and actions of regulators, monitors, civil servants and others in private and not for profit sectors directly impact on the policy/delivery system.

Co-ordination is thus hard to achieve. There is a significant literature on co-ordination. Webb (1991) identified three broad drivers for co-ordinated action - rational/altruistic drivers, mandated or imperative drivers, and bureaucratic political drivers. Rationality and altruism

produce voluntary collaboration, and the conditions under which such collaboration can emerge, and collaborative advantage extracted, have increasingly been researched in the context of partnerships, coalition and strategic alliances (Huxham, 1996). Voluntary collaboration relies in large respect upon trust, however, and where trust does not exist more formal methods to ensure co-ordination need to be employed. In practice UK governance has been characterised by a culture of contractualisation and contract compliance as the method of enforcing conformance in the past twenty years (Oatley 1999), an approach to co-ordination which reflects the mandated mode identified by Webb. But this mode has in turn been overtaken by an approach driven by the belief that holistic governance is essential and that partnership driven change can overcome the problems of fragmentation.

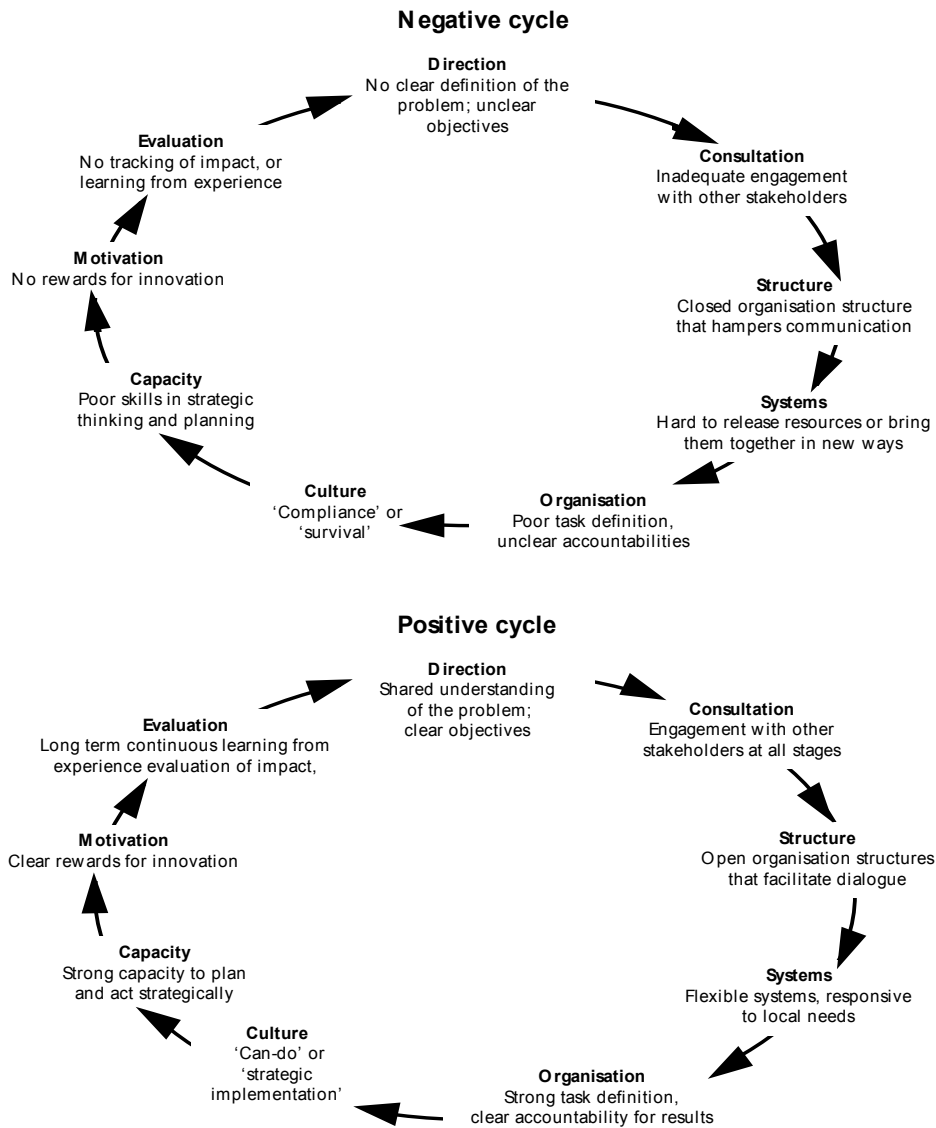
1.3 Whole-systems

Countering the tendencies to fragmentation and disconnectedness requires shifts both in the vertical relationships between centre, region, locality and neighbourhood, and in the horizontal linkages between organisations at different levels of the governance system. There is increasing advocacy of 'whole system' approaches (Stewart et al 1999; Wilkinson and Appelbee 1999; Pratt et al; Six et al 1999). These approaches are useful in offering an alternative way to understand and plan intervention within a complex set of interactions. They are based on the premise that complex systems need to be understood in terms of the interactions between parts of the system and its environment. These interactions involve feedback loops, whereby elements in the systems feed influence and information to each other over time. Outcomes are the result of the interaction of a large number of organisations and agents each of which is attempting to respond to a changing environment, by adapting behaviour and by shaping the environment itself. The system is 'open' in the sense that there is constant interaction between each organisation or agent and all the other agencies that make up the environment they find themselves in.

In the context of joined-up working, the 'system' must be thought of as the totality of players, including public, private, voluntary sectors and citizens. Effective policy implementation requires effectiveness within each component of the system and effective links between them. If one element in the system is not working well, this can have adverse consequences for other elements in the system, negative reinforcement or a vicious circle. Conversely virtuous circles can be set up in which effective working in one domain reinforces effective working in others. Figure 1 illustrates – in a rational orderly cyclical fashion – the elements which contribute to the working of an interorganisational system – direction, consultation, structures, systems, organisation culture, capacity, motivation and evaluation. What really matters, however, is the extent to which different elements reinforce, complement and strengthen each other, and conversely the extent to which they dilute and undermine each other. Weakness in one area may not matter if it is counter-balanced by strength in another.

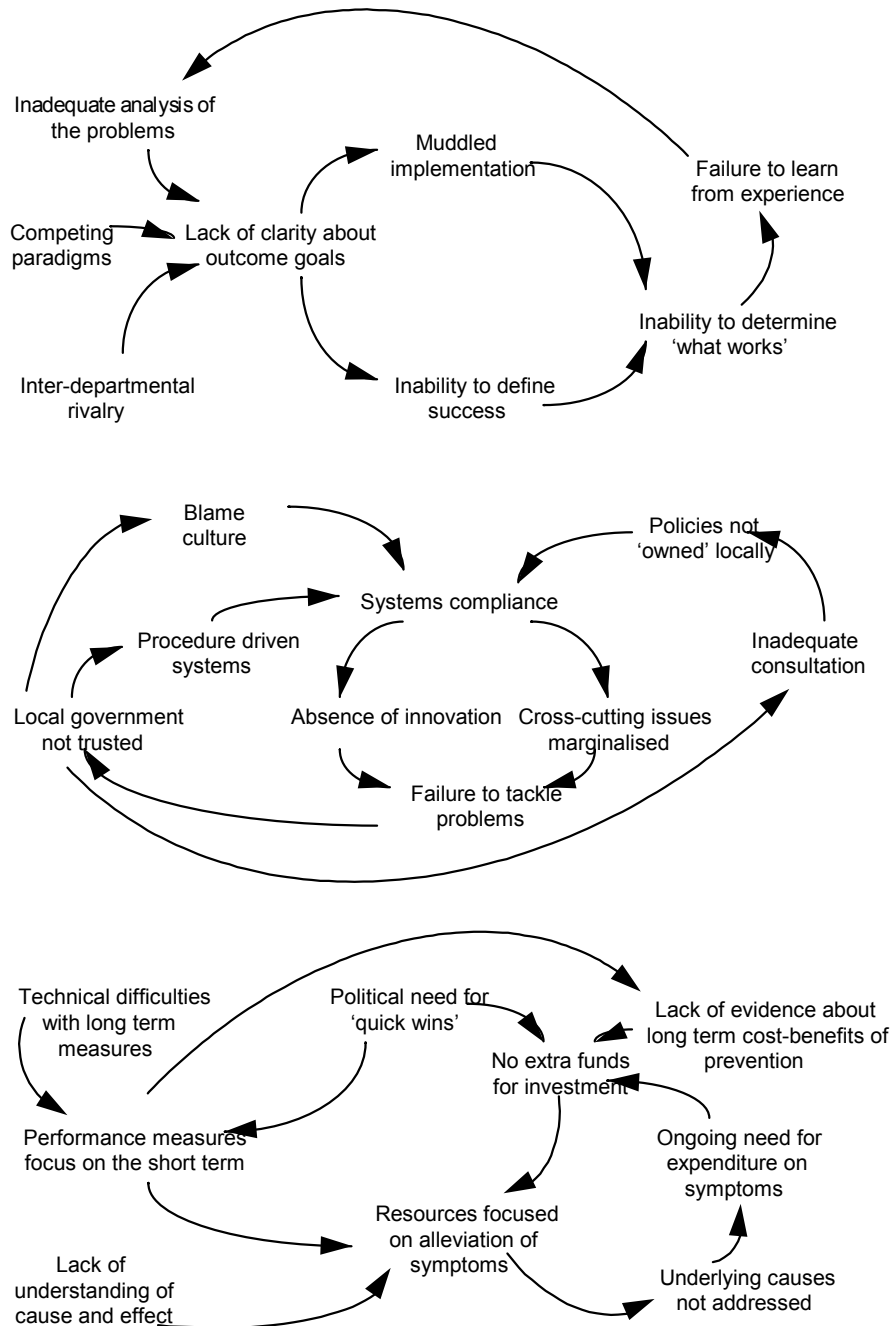
However, if the absence of defined problems and outcomes is compounded by weak management, a culture of systems compliance, poor motivation and no effective feedback systems, the likelihood is that new central government initiatives will lead to a lot of rushing around like headless chickens, and the 'rebadging' of current activity, with little attempt to refocus resources or to evaluate progress. Figure 2 illustrates the potential for negatively reinforcing drivers to produce failure in policy design and/or implementation.

Figure 1 The whole system - negative and positive



From Stewart, Goss et al (1999) Cross-Cutting issues affecting Local Government. London DETR.

Figure 2 Negative cycles of reinforcement



Whole systems models are useful in recognising the interdependence of parts of the system of governance, but are less helpful in deciding precisely where to intervene. Systems models are inherently liable to failure as disequilibrium sets in. Holism is desirable in principle, difficult to achieve in practice. In effect, as argued above, all systems have particular drivers which maintain the system in motion and mediate the relationship between the parts and the whole. One of these drivers is the stance taken by central government towards system management, compliance, control and co-ordination. Equilibrium is achieved, or at least sought, through the imposition by government of a dominant administrative perspective which

imposes itself on the institutions, norms and practices of governance and establishes common the roles and rules which must be applied to interagency working. Historically hierarchy dominated; then markets. Currently the dominant perspective is that of partnership, the view that the meeting together of stakeholders with differing contributions to make to the solution of the 'wicked' problems is the way forward.

2. PARTNERSHIPS

2.1 Understanding Partnerships

Over the years there have been numerous studies looking at partnership working (Roberts 1995; Macintosh 1993; Hastings 1996a, 1996b; Geddes 1997; Harding 1998; Skelcher and Lowndes 1998;). There is evidence about regeneration working (Lawless et al 2000) There are equally a number of good practice guides pointing to the attributes of a successful partnership and a number of evaluations of partnership effectiveness – from the City Challenge evaluations, from The Scottish Office of the New Life for Urban Scotland Partnerships, from the DETR national evaluation of SRB, from Health Action Zone evaluation (Judge et al 1999; Barnes et al 2001; Bauld et al 2001). The early work of Macintosh (1993) remains helpful. She distinguished between transformation (working in partnership to convince the other partner(s) of your own values and objectives), synergy (working to produce added value beyond what would have been achieved separately) and budget enlargement (achieved when partnerships generate extra resources).

The impact of partnership working is a function of a number of features of joint working, and it is possible to categorise partnerships along a number of descriptive variables – membership, status, structures, leadership, agendas, organisational cultures. Central to these is membership, with success a function of which stakeholders are allowed to participate. Partnerships can be distinguished by whether their membership is open or closed, and also by whether their members are chosen, appointed, selected, elected or invited. 'Participatory' groups (Joldersma 1997), and heterogeneous participatory groups in particular, are more likely to be open, thus increasing the scope for diversity and for generating wider understanding, but reducing the likelihood of agreement about aims and objectives. It is in more traditional areas of public policy responsibility, where strong and established professional groups exist, that co-operation, acceptable policy options and convergence are more likely to be evident. In newer areas of public policy - environmental protection, economic development, cultural development, the new public health for example - where professionalism is less entrenched, and where the norms and values of policy remain ambiguous, there is much more scope for open groups and participatory policy-making. Thus in many Local Agenda 21 forums or alliances there are to be found a wide range of public, private and community groups debating the nature of the appropriate environmental policy response.

Such broad based groups have been termed 'facilitating partnerships' (Stewart 1998), so called because their primary role involves negotiation of contentious or politically sensitive issues and facilitation among partners with differing perspectives. Debate may arise either in relation to the ends to be achieved or the means to attain them. They tend to have wide-ranging objectives which are difficult to measure because they encompass macro-level goals or because the programme of specific objectives remains unclear and is subject to ongoing negotiation. They deal with long-standing issues of concern and attempt to address deeply rooted problems. A number of powerful stakeholding partners may be involved and sensitivities relating to the balance of power must be carefully addressed and respected.

Developing trust and accommodating relationships within facilitating partnerships is imperative to the attainment of partnership goals, and issues of process are therefore highly important building blocks to 'success'. Success is difficult to measure and related more to

breakthroughs in process than in tangible outputs. It is also difficult to attribute successes to the partnerships which try to bring about broader shifts in strategic relationships.

'Facilitating' partnerships contrast with 'co-ordinating' partnerships which relate primarily to the oversight, in both strategic and practical terms, of initiatives to which a wide range of organisations have committed themselves to make a contribution. Activities are either hived off to task-based bodies or are delegated to departments or sections within one or more of the partner authorities. Such partnerships deal with less politically sensitive and controversial issues and partners generally agree quickly on a broad agenda for the partnership. Co-ordinating partnerships deal with issues which are relatively new to the agenda for the locality but which are not particularly problematic or contentious. The lead is often taken by a dominant partner but the balance of power within the partnership is not especially delicate.

Finally there are 'implementing' partnerships, specific in focus and time-limited in nature. They are responsible for the implementation of pre-agreed projects which are neither contentious nor highly politically sensitive. Project delivery is acknowledged as of mutual advantage to the key partners and the means by which it is to be effected is fairly clear. A key function of the partnership is to secure funding and resources for the projects and to manage the implementation process. Success is clearly defined and easily measured. These partnerships are concerned with pragmatic solutions and specified outputs and partner relations are neither problematic nor highly prioritised on the agenda.

Whilst many people would agree with the simple typology offered of three models of partnership, there is much less agreement about which partnerships fall into which type. Thus some participants in a particular partnership would perceive the structure as being primarily a facilitating one whilst other members of the same partnership would view it as an implementing partnership. This creates ambiguity in discourse within the group and places a premium on creating better understanding of the assumptions and starting points of different members of the participatory group.

Starting points are crucial. Few partnerships start from scratch. They build instead on past relationships and these foundations matter. In any locality - region, city, town or neighbourhood - there is a very particular past, and a unique geography. Every successful local intervention has to be based within the context of unique local circumstances. Research on area-based initiatives argues that there are five important dynamics that affect successful collaboration (DTLR 2002).

- Where the **political geography is clear** - boundaries long established and at least some common boundaries between partner areas of responsibility - it is easier to create the basis for collaboration at a strategic level.
- It is easier to build collaboration where there is a sense of shared **identity** and common interest.
- While new initiatives assume a blank canvass, in reality each area is already marked over and over by the **history** of previous initiatives.
- The problems facing local agencies have changed over **time**, and their capacity to deal with them has changed.
- **Personalities** are crucial and collaborative working depends on the role of individuals. Time and again it is said that 'people matter'.

2.2 Key Elements in Partnership Working

2.2.1 Transaction Costs and Social Capital

Common to all approaches to collaborative working, co-ordination and partnerships are transaction costs. All modes of governance involve transaction costs. Under market rules there are the costs of negotiation and exchange; in hierarchies there are the costs of

establishing rules and of ensuring compliance. In network modes of governance (typified by partnerships) the costs are of time expended in meeting, communicating, and sharing. The burden of transaction costs under any mode of governance can be lightened if the parties know, like and trust each other. Granovetter (1985) argues that economic and/or administrative actions are embedded in social relations. Social norms substitute for the rules which hierarchy demands, the contracts which markets demand, and the interaction which networks demand, and produce a context within which compliance occurs without high transaction costs

Central to the operation of systems of governance, therefore, are issues of trust (Kramer and Tyler 1996, Coulson 1998, Hardy, Phillips et al. 1998, Vangen and Huxham 2000). Indeed trust is the key concept raised in all discussions about the attributes of a good partnership. It is less clear, however, whether trust is a necessary input to partnership or is an output from it. That is, can trust be assumed or does it have to be built, earned, won, or given. There are different definitions of trust. For some (Hardy et al 1988) trust is a proxy for predictability. The greater the degree of trust the more likely is it that actions will be predictable. In this sense trust underpins economic transactions, endorses the principal/agent relationship and reduces the need for binding legal and costly contracts. Vangen and Huxham (2000) observe that trust needs to be both formed and fulfilled to generate bilateral trust. They also remind us that trust can both be rooted in expectations (that something predictable will occur) and in experience (that something has occurred). Granovetter (op cit) reinforces this view in commenting that trust does not arise 'when the transactors are previously unacquainted, where they are unlikely to transact again, and where information about the activities of either is unlikely to reach others with whom they might transact' (Granovetter 1985, p.496). Trust is therefore generated by both experience and reputation. Trust also lies at the heart of two other features of partnership working, risk and power. In situations where no one partner has the will, resources, or capacity to carry through some task on his or her own, then trust in others minimises risk-taking, since the possibilities of failure or resource wastage are spread. Trust ensures that risks are genuinely shared as opposed to being off-loaded in the case of failure. Furthermore trust reduces the risks of partisan interest group activity, partner disempowerment, or leadership domination.

2.2.2 Leadership

Collaborative and partnership working might appear to diminish the importance of leadership (because partnership may involve the suppression of strong leadership in the interests of consensus building). In practice leadership is as necessary in collaborative ventures as in single organisational development. Thus 'good leadership of a Local Strategic partnership would inspire vision, enthusiasm and commitment, and command the trust of other partners' DTLR (2001). In relation to regeneration partnerships a threefold categorisation of leadership can be identified (Hambleton et al 2001).

- *Designed and focused* leadership provides a clear vision of future direction, a firm manifesto, and a dedicated budget. The leader is high profile, imposes influence and leverage on others, relies on a dedicated staff, offers patronage to supporters, holds office by virtue of personal election/appointment, derives authority from position, and is directly accountable to a constituency of followers. In the directly elected mayor model this leadership is personal and individualised, although it is possible to also envisage designed and focused leadership by a small group.
- *Implied and fragmented* leadership provides a consensual (and often confused) view of direction, operates on an implicit rather than explicit forward plan and puts together packages of resources through joint funding arrangements. Leadership is virtually invisible, depends on a team of secondees/temporary staff, has delegate and often shifting membership, derives authority from collective sanction, and is less transparently accountable.

- *Emergent and formative* leadership relies on implementation to shape policy, reflects pragmatism in developing future direction, uses ad hoc resources to make progress, emphasises learning as the basis for further action, derives authority from getting things done, is accountable for what is done not what is said.

The conclusions to be drawn from practice is that designed and focussed leadership (the mayoral model?) can offer a more autonomous leadership dependent on style and representational legitimacy. The fragmented, multi-organisational model, which implies a collaborative approach to leadership, may offer a weak leadership which is subservient to external policy influence and dominated by bureaucratic arrangements. The concept of formative leadership confirms this view of the fragility of partnership structures and processes to procure desired ends.

The tasks associated with leadership in partnership change according to the maturity of partnership working in an area or sector. The promotion of partnership working as an idea in order to create a culture in which partnerships are acceptable is a necessary task in facilitative partnerships or where previously partnerships have been rare or non-existent. The establishment of the partnership, by identifying areas of common interest and sounding out prospective participants, carries the culture of partnership to the operational level of collaborative working and to the tasks of co-ordination. Leadership in co-ordinating partnerships is evident in support for the practice of working together – assembling funding packages, establishing joint teams, aligning objectives.

Nevertheless even those in ostensibly powerful leadership positions (those designed into focused leadership roles) find themselves only partially able to control events, and are susceptible to other influences in the formative stage. Because partnerships are collaborative, directed in practice largely to building consensus, strong leadership can be perceived to be inimical to joint working. In such cases 'strong' leaders are suspected to be taking over. Thus leaders can carry apparently contradictory roles, on the one hand generating collaboration, inclusiveness and consensus, while on the other hand exercising pragmatic but powerful manipulation of diverse interests. There can, however, be a retreat from leadership with those in potentially influential or powerful positions choosing not to exercise their power. The consequence can be a leadership vacuum and slippage into a position where there is effectively no leadership driving forward either strategy or action. This is implicit rather than explicit, fragmented rather than integrative, leadership and can lead to chaos and confusion in interorganisational relations. The systems of joint working break down.

2.2.3 Power

Trust and leadership lead to considerations of power. Power is a central - if often unacknowledged - feature of partnership working. Partners bring different degrees of power to partnerships – skills, expertise, local knowledge, human resources but above all money. Those with resources carry most power and the evidence is that the big battalions prove to be the big players. Conversely those for whom many contemporary community or neighbourhood partnerships are intended to benefit, have less power and once more there is much evidence of the marginalisation of community sector interests in partnership working (Hastings 1996a, 1996b; Skelcher et al 1996; Hoggett 1997; Purdue et al 2000; Taylor 2000).

Power may also be exercised in the conduct of partnership business. Location of meetings, agenda setting, chairing, dress, behaviour all matter. Once more the evidence is of the marginalisation of some interests with minority ethnic participants and women often being relegated in importance simply by the operation of a system within which traditional, white, male habits are the norm. Once more we should look to the literature of power to understand what is happening in partnerships. There is the established theory of the faces of power (Lukes 1974). This points to the obvious manifestation of power in decision making (the first face), but also to the second face (that influences non-decision making and the ability of some interests to keep matters off agendas as well as to get decisions taken on

what does go on the agenda). The third face exercises power through the unspoken assumptions, values, and consciousness which are held but neither spoken nor sometimes understood by the partnership players. Thinking about power also leads to questions as to whether the arrangements for partnership reflect the emergence of a 'regime'. A wide US based regime literature has now crossed the Atlantic and is increasingly, if hesitantly, being applied to European politics (Bassett 1993; Harding 1994; Stoker and Mossberger 1994; Peck and Tickell 1995; Stewart 1996; Lauria 1997; Di Gaetano 1999). Regime theory originally argued that private sector interests, in conjunction with public authorities, created some form of growth coalition (Logan and Molotch 1987; Stone 1989) which pushed forward the interests of the development sector. It is clear that in the UK situation growth, or at least economic development and/or regeneration, has proved a major driver of the partnership movement in the UK over the last decade, but there is also evidence that there are significant variations in the form and behaviour of the UK coalitions, not least in the extent of their local autonomy and their ability to act independently of a centralised state.

2.3 Local Strategic Partnerships

It is interesting to reflect whether the creation of Local Strategic Partnerships represent some form of regime formation. LSPs seek to engage all local stakeholders in the development of a shared vision and a shared action approach both to meeting central government's service delivery targets and to addressing local issues and problems (DTLR 2001a; 2001b). LSPs are being loaded with a number of tasks – developing community strategies, preparing neighbourhood renewal strategies, overseeing the neighbourhood renewal fund in 88 areas, and are being seen as the vehicle for planning and implementing integrated working at local level. Evaluation of LSPs has just begun. In depth case study and action research work is expected to be under way from late autumn 2002¹, but initial work begins to give a little of the background. Most clearly LSPs are not simply visible in the 88 neighbourhood renewal areas. There are now LSPs developing across the country in the expectation that functions will be rolled out from the 88 to all areas and that some form of accreditation/performance review system will be introduced by central government. While over 80% of partnerships cover just one local authority area, there are a number of LSPs which cover more than one local authority, the largest covering 12 districts. In an early survey which drew responses from around 200 LSPs a slight majority (56%) started as a new LSP within the past two years, while 40% developed out of another partnership or an informal grouping. Amongst partnerships in NRF areas a higher percentage (60%) had developed out of another partnership. Several respondents mentioned government guidelines and the presence of NRF funding as a spur to setting up the LSP. The mean number of LSP members is 41 (including both the executive core and a broader membership) although the mean is affected by a few LSPs with a very large number of members. 14% of LSPs have more than 50 members and 3 have more than 100. Clearly the concept of 'member' is a very variable one.

65% of respondents distinguish between 'core' and 'non core' members. The mean number of core members is 20, while the mean number of non core members is 82. Again, the mean in each case is affected by a few LSPs with a large number of members - four LSPs have more than 40 core members, and four have more than 200 non core members. It is pointless to make too much use of this. Many LSPs are going through processes of adjusting membership, of thinking about relationships with existing partnerships, and of setting up meeting protocols to govern what can be complex inter-organisational relationships. Some LSPs are beginning to discuss substantive business, reviewing plans, joint resource planning (even if pooling or shared budgets are few and far between), identifying key issues (e.g. key

¹ The two and a half years national evaluation is being undertaken for the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister by the University of Warwick, John Moores Liverpool University, the Office for Public Management and the University of the West of England, Bristol.

worker housing, youth, rural transport problems). Neighbourhood renewal has dominated in the 88, but building capacity is a common challenge across all localities.

Building partnership capacity through the creation of trust cannot be done overnight and it is important that new partnerships take time to assess their strengths and weaknesses, that partners get to know one another and that there is a clear and shared understanding of what can be achieved through partnership. What is evident, if perhaps as yet poorly recognised by central government, is that partnerships take time to bed down for a host of structural, procedural and cultural reasons. As was pointed out at the start of this paper, vertical, functional, silo based working has characterised British public administration for nearly a century. The development of a more horizontal model which recognises the importance of territory and locality will be slow to develop, especially where central and local practices need to be realigned. If there is one lesson for systems governance and a move towards more effective partnership working, it is that ten years is the most appropriate (indeed minimum) time within which one can expect results.

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