Chapter 6

PARTNERSHIPS IN SPORT

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Introduction

> *"Work in partnership like never before – we are in this together"* (Sport England 2010)

These thoughts of a Sport England professional, in the wake of the announcement of the most far-reaching public sector cuts in a generation, spell out what sport and recreation development professionals have known for many years, namely that working in isolation is not an option. Since the onset of County Sports Partnerships, a more formal recognition has existed that it is unrealistic to expect resource-strapped sport development organisations to achieve all of their goals without a considerable amount of their work being undertaken collaboratively. This compulsion to pool resources is confirmed by Slack and Parent (2006: 164):

> *No sport organization exists in isolation from the other organizations in its environment, the source of the material and financial resources a sport organization needs to survive.*

The range of alliances now in existence in sport and recreation management is immense. They span the entire spectrum from major transnational consortia,

delivering the Glasgow 2014 Commonwealth Games to local authority sports development professionals, assisting the local netball team in its attempts to attract new players. A specific skill set is required of any professional seeking to initiate, maintain or join successful partnerships. This is recognised in the curricula of undergraduate degree courses in sport development as well as in the Level 3 National Occupational Standards for Sports Development (SkillsActive 2010).

Partnership working centres on the idea that agencies make a commitment in terms of what they are able to *input* into the relationship, on the basis that some or all of the *outputs* will help them to achieve their overall goals. Recently theorists have become interested in *throughputs*, the sustained benefits of staff development when working with other partners. Strategic alliances, relationships with still greater forms of interdependence, are differentiated by their capacity to enhance or foster organisational learning. According to Johnson, Whittington & Scholes (2011) organisations engaged in strategic alliances should grow in competencies as they learn from one another. This issue of mutual benefit permeates the chapter, whilst acknowledging that in some instances the rewards are not always clear or shared.

The purpose of this chapter is to explore both benefits and problems experienced by organisations working together. It provides practitioners and students with the means to analyse and optimise alliances by drawing on relevant organisation and management theories. A brief historical perspective details the recent growth in strategic partnerships. It is useful, initially, to reflect conceptually upon the term ‘partnership’, and to consider its relevance to the world of sport and recreation development**.**

Key Terms

Throughout this chapter a number of terms are used interchangeably. Expressions such as ‘alliance’, ‘collaboration’, ‘joint working’ and ‘working together’ carry the same emphasis as the key concept ‘partnership’. A satisfactory definition is offered by Service de police de la Ville de Montréal (2012: n.n.):

> *A formal agreement between two or more parties that have agreed to work together in the pursuit of common goals.*

In the context of sport and recreation development professions, this definition accommodates the gamut of alliances to be considered, although perhaps the *formal agreement* aspect is not always present. However, the definition emphasises that any coming together of organisations (through ‘qualified’ representatives) or interested individuals to further sport experiences can be considered to constitute a partnership. Yoshino and Rangan (1995: 5) assert that ‘strategic alliances’ involve two or more organisations uniting in the pursuit of common goals, to share both the benefits and the assignment of tasks. Importantly, as reinforced by Dussauge and Garrette (1999: 2), there is no loss of ‘strategic autonomy’; in other words, organisations retain their independence. They offer a ‘representation’ of an alliance for further clarification:

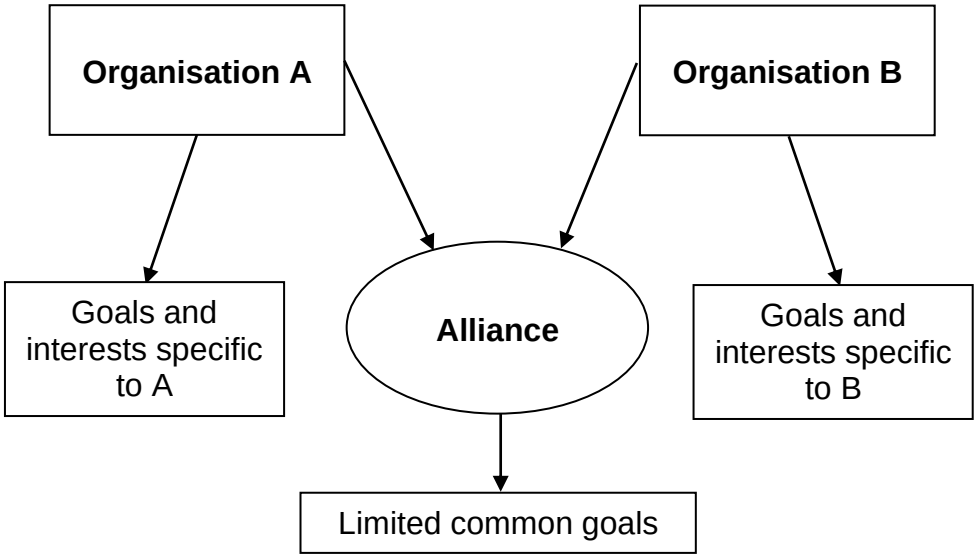

Figure A – representation of an alliance (adapted from Dussuage and Garrette 1999: 3)

Figure A clearly illustrates that a partnership or alliance is distinct from a merger, where two organisations are replaced by a single new entity. The alliance is constituted to deal with issues relevant to goals that the organisations have in common; meanwhile each organisation will be engaged in its core work elsewhere.

The nature of partnerships

Partnerships in sport and recreation take on a myriad of forms, each one as unique as a fingerprint. This section considers the main factors involved in characterising any given partnership.

The first of these factors is *timescale*. Partnerships may be temporary or permanent, and thus operate over vastly different time periods. Johnson, Whittington and Scholes

(2011) describe the evolution and lifespan of a partnership or alliance as moving through a number of phases. Table X illustrates this in relation to Sport England's Sport Makers initiative (see Sport England 2012a):

Stage	Description	Applied to the Sport Makers initiative
Courtship	This involves 'courting' different potential partners and establishing strategic and organisational 'fit'	The development of the alliance between Sport England and the National Lottery
Negotiation	Negotiation of each partner's role in the alliance	The agreement between the National Lottery to provide funding for the scheme and Sport England to oversee delivery
Start-up	This stage typically involves significant investment of resources, and often involves introducing further partners to the alliance	The involvement of County Sports Partnerships (who subsequently recruited other community partners) as regional hubs for the delivery of the scheme, and subsequent launch of the scheme nationwide
Maintenance	Ongoing operation of the alliance	Regular progress meetings between all partners and reporting on progress against targets. Continued delivery of Sport Makers training courses and recruitment of volunteers.
Termination	Completion of the alliance once aims have been fulfilled. There is the potential to extend the alliance if successful.	Funding for the Sport Makers programme scheduled to finish in September 2013.

Table X: Stages of alliance evolution

The second factor to consider is the *type* of partners. These may be drawn from any combination of public, voluntary and commercial sectors. There is also an increasing

emphasis on *stakeholder* involvement in public policies and their implementation, with a requirement to provide evidence of consultation within strategic plans and funding applications. In this sense, stakeholders such as residents or sports clubs have the potential to enjoy a dual role as customer and partner (see later section on stakeholder salience). Partnerships involving the commercial sector as a sponsor of services delivered by public and voluntary sector organisations are becoming more commonplace in sport development, such as the sponsorship of the English Cricket Board's Kwik Cricket initiative by ASDA (ECB 2012).

It is also important to recognise that partnerships effectively occur *within*, as well as *between* organisations. For instance, a sport development team, the parks department and youth services from within the same local authority might work together to run and summer sports activity programme for young people.

Power distribution is the next factor to consider in characterising a partnership. Whilst many alliances are entered into with all partners on an equal footing, others may have a dominant or lead agency. Slack and Parent (2006) introduce the term 'alliance control', the degree to which partners are able to influence and control the behaviour and outputs of other partners. In addition, partners may have control over different elements of the partnership (as shown in table X). Ideally, an alliance should exercise 'selective control' whereby organisations are given the power to undertake those tasks to which they are best suited. In the Sport Makers programme, for example the coordinating role is taken by Sport England whilst the delivery role is adopted by partners such as County Sports Partnerships.

The *scale* or size of partnerships can vary greatly. There is scope for joint working at every level from a joint venture between a table tennis club and a local school to the long-term and the aforementioned transnational venture to deliver the 2014 Commonwealth Games in Glasgow, involving multiple types of organisations from different sectors.

The scale is often determined by the *aims* of the partnership. Once again, there are as many possible motivations for entering into collaboration with others as there are projects. Johnson, Whittington and Scholes (2011) identify a number of rationales or aims for the establishment of alliances. 'Scale alliances' exist when organisations work together to gain a competitive advantage they would be unable to achieve alone, for example a number of sports clubs working together to submit a funding application for a multi-sports facility. 'Access alliances' involve using the capabilities (such as resources or knowledge) of another organisation to achieve a specific goal, exemplified by the establishment of Community Badminton Networks that operate at a local level involving Badminton England and local authorities. Finally, 'complementary alliances' exist where the alliance serves to bolster each partner's weaknesses. An example of this is the sponsorship by McDonald's of the Football Association's 'Your Game' programme (The FA 2012). Whilst this may be morally troubling for some it undoubtedly allows McDonald's to be seen to fulfil its social corporate responsibility obligations, whilst the Football Association is able to provide additional resources and support to administrators, coaches and volunteers working at grassroots level.

The Development of Partnership Working

This section offers a further update to the historical overview of sport and recreation partnerships offered in the first two editions of this book. The focus here is on developments in the late- and post-New Labour eras; readers should therefore consult the previous editions for a more detailed breakdown of the development of partnership working in the 1970s-early 2000s.

Central government's explicit role as a *partner* in major national sport and recreation initiatives is a relatively recent development which took hold during the Blair and Brown New Labour governments (1997-2010). Governmental interest has developed as the sector has gradually become more definable and organised. The extent to which one has been determined by the other is a subject of ongoing debate.

Whilst sport development has become firmly embedded in local government structures and countless formal and informal partnerships have resulted, all levels of sport have continued to wrestle with a bewildering and illogical structure that seems to confound all parties rather than offering support. In 2005 Carter bemoaned that there was

> *... no clear alignment between local and national sports delivery, nor is there a systematic, joined up approach towards community sport* (Carter 2005: 20).

With its leadership status assured by its function as distributor of National Lottery money, Sport England attempted to minimise confusion in England by instigating a

Delivery System for Sport (Sport England 2006). This focused on sub-regional strategic bodies (County Sports Partnerships) and local delivery mechanisms (Community Sport Networks). In theory, all key stakeholders should be represented in one or both of these structures. Perspicaciously the previous edition of this book advised cautious optimism at best regarding the likelihood of the Delivery System finally clarifying roles and relationships for partners across Sport in England. Sport England's priorities shifted yet again when it was decided that a greater proportion of National Lottery funding was to be channelled directly through selected National Governing Bodies and their Whole Sport Plans (Sport England 2008). Accompanying this was a diminution of core funding to County Sports Partnerships, which in response had to diversify and seek new income streams, leading to a far less standardised approach to the facilitation of strategic partnership working across sub-regional structures. Active People Survey figures (Sport England 2012b) suggest that this new funding regime did not have the desired impact upon mass participation. Consequently Sport England's (2011a) decision to refresh the four-year Whole Sport Plan funding cycle was greeted in some circles with derision and elsewhere with ironic surprise that for once the landscape was not to shift dramatically.

Partnership working in sport had become part of the political landscape of New Labour governance. The investment in School Sport Partnerships and the *de facto* sport development role of many Partnership Development Managers signalled a previously unseen level of political appreciation for the power of partnership working. The Con-Dem coalition's choice to cut public services as a response to the global financial crisis had a major impact upon this programme (Conn 2010) but galvanised support in many quarters for a continuation of its work. As with County Sports

Partnerships, the survival of many of these sporting alliances, albeit fundamentally altered in scope and mission shows that the role of partnership working has forever been upgraded from a desirable sport and recreation development tactic to its present status as a *necessity* for prosperity and survival. Thus, having hinted at the benefits and accompanying issues experienced in sport development partnerships, the chapter turns its attention to itemising these characteristics.

Benefits of Partnership Working

Political pressure for sporting organisations to work in partnership has resulted in partnerships being viewed as the accepted way of delivering services, and there is widespread acknowledgement of the benefits of collaboration. This section provides an overview of these benefits.

Pooling of resources

The previous edition of this book made reference to the relatively healthy state of resources for sport development describing it as a "golden age of increased funding". The same is certainly not true at the time of writing this chapter. The above-mentioned public sector cuts initiated by the Coalition government threatened the very existence of sport development services in local authorities and impacted significantly on the infrastructure of sport, particularly in relation to school sport. As a result, it is even more necessary for a culture of cooperation rather than competition to exist in order to for meagre resources for sport to stretch further and be utilised effectively. As such the benefits of pooling resources are even more relevant than before to professionals working within this challenging climate.

- An important benefit of pooling resources is the potential to identify and eliminate *duplication* of services between partner organisations. This reduces the financial burden on both organisations, enabling desired outcomes to be realised. The need to develop a more coordinated approach to sport and physical activity provision is identified by Plymouth City Council in its Sports Development Strategy for 2010-2013, stating that the department will

  > *actively seek to work with appropriate public, private and voluntary bodies at local, regional and national level to develop shared objectives and to deliver an integrated approach to sport and physical activity provision in the city* (Plymouth City Council 2010:17).

  In addition, Sport England, perhaps sensing competition rather than collaboration between NGBs has indicated that in order to receive funding for Whole Sport Plans for 2013-17, there must be a greater emphasis on "joint working between NGBs to achieve critical mass and grow demand" (Sport England 2011b n.n). Clearly if NGBs are to achieve the challenging targets set within Whole Sport Plans it will be essential for them to work collaboratively and develop integrated programmes.

- *Human resources* can be maximised. This can involve developing partnerships to *access* human resources, for example a sports

development team working with a further education college to source volunteers for school holiday programmes, to *creating* a new human resource, for example jointly funded staff posts. An example of this is the Rugby League Development Officer post for Rochdale, Bury and Bolton, funded jointly by a combination of the local authorities / cultural trusts and the Rugby Football League. It is unlikely that any partner would have been able to fund the post single-handedly. Elsewhere there is evidence of sharing human resources to deliver large events such as the West Yorkshire Area Youth Games. This entails the County Sports Partnership coordinating staff and volunteers from NGBs, the five West Yorkshire local authorities, schools and Leeds Metropolitan University, all of whom collaborate to deliver the regional event (West Yorkshire Sport 2011). Events such as these also provide opportunities for *workforce development* with many young volunteers gaining valuable personal development opportunities.

- *Expertise* and *knowledge* are other aspects of human resources that can be pooled. This may involve traditional alliances such as those between local authorities and NGBs or more unique partnerships which involve the pooling of expertise in innovative ways. Link4Life's Youth Sport Volunteer Engagement Officer has a remit for developing volunteering across Rochdale with a particular focus on young people from hard to reach backgrounds and deprived communities. The officer's sport development knowledge and expertise is coupled with the expertise of key local figures, not only to identify and act upon opportunities to develop volunteering but also to use that opportunity

to facilitate community development outcomes. An innovative partnership with Petrus, a homelessness charity was particularly successful in training a number of homeless young people (some of whom were also dealing with issues relating to drug and alcohol abuse) as sports leaders and then integrating them into more mainstream programmes as volunteers. Whilst the sports officer was able to provide support and guidance relating to sports leadership, staff from Petrus assisted with health and housing issues and offered encouragement.

Pooling Influence

Partnership working often facilitates realisation of otherwise unattainable goals. This is important in terms of getting favourable decisions made, such as approval for projects to go ahead, particularly in the context of sharing vital resources. From pooling influence at a national level for investment to support a specific policy agenda, to campaigning at a grassroots level to secure the continued use of facilities or provision of services, it is clear that doing so in partnership with other agencies is far more powerful than working alone. Influence can be exerted in a number of different settings and ways:

- *Personal links* between individuals at similar levels in partner organisations often 'open doors'. Productive personal relationships lead to a mutual commitment to pooling resources, sharing information or acting as a gatekeeper to enable and support access a new community setting. Barriers of technical language and professional jargon can be overcome by the presence of an advocate within an

organisation and can enhance the credibility of the intended activity. Many of the host of sport-health alliances now in operation across the UK (see Chapter X for detailed examples) owe their success to sport development and health professionals setting aside suspicion and doubt in interagency working. Once convinced of the benefits of partnership arrangements, key players are in a position to argue the case for the project within their organisations and so take the work forward collaboratively.

- *Political power* can be exercised in ways which have productive or destructive effects upon sport and recreation development. Politics and politicians are intrinsically linked to the management and provision of sport at all levels. It is always desirable, and often essential, to have capacity to influence politicians, whether they are local authority elected members, executive members in a NGB or Members of Parliament. The decision to award England the Rugby World Cup in 2015 is an excellent example of the pooling of political power. The Rugby Football Union gained support for the bid from the British Government, national sports organisations such as Sport England and UK Sport and professional clubs. Without this political backing it is unlikely that they would have been able to develop as strong a bid to put forward to the International Rugby Board (IRB).

- *Lobbying* involves interest groups making representations to politicians in order to secure support on issues of consequence. At a local level, for example, Sport Action Zones (SAZs) such as those in Liverpool

(see King (2009)) and Braunstone in Leicester (see Walpole and Collins (2010)) were particularly successful lobbying agencies for sport as a tool to tackle social issues. Funded by Sport England, SAZs were typically based in areas of socio-economic deprivation and were often established as a result of partnership working between regeneration agencies and sport and local authority leisure departments. They often had high levels of political power and were able to use this to lobby for additional resources to support their work, resulting in the delivery of sport and community development programmes and large-scale facility development.

- *Key contacts and gatekeepers:* Having access to important people is crucial both at an interpersonal as well as organisational level. Effective working together means sharing *contacts*, whereby tactical use is made of each partner's professional relationships. This is another example of the ability of alliances to open avenues to resources. Contacts range from community leaders to senior politicians. Utilising existing contacts, personnel can act as gatekeepers, giving colleagues in partner organisations access to key individuals which may otherwise be denied. Vail (2007: 575) discovered that Canadian grassroots tennis programmes had a far higher chance of success if professional staff worked collaboratively with community representatives to plan, manage and deliver activities, describing this approach as "collaborative leadership".

- *Internal lobbying:* Partnerships can also enable those in less senior, but strategically vital positions in organisations to elicit support for their extended work amongst their own senior managers and politicians – a kind of internal lobbying which embraces the notion that politics takes place in a non-governmental sense within organisations (Kingdom 2003). In the current climate of public sector cuts, sport development officers within local authorities are under increasing pressure to demonstrate that they are offering value for public money. Frequently this is done by linking their work to social objectives such as education and regeneration.

- Collaborations with other departments or local agencies can be a successful way of creating alliances and *minimising or sharing risk*. The Bury Sport and Physical Activity Alliance, developed by the local authority's Sport and Physical Activity Service provides strategic coordination of sport and physical activity across Bury (Bury SPAA 2008). Its members include the Primary Care Trust alongside the children's services and adult care departments from within the council. Mutual dependencies have been created between partners around shared objectives and programmes of activity. As a result the alliance enables the Sport and Physical Activity Service to lobby for support within the council and establish its position as an important service which contributes to a range of corporate targets. This 'position' offers some protection (albeit not immunity!) to the service from cost cutting measures.

Accessing Resources

In an era of financial restrictions, partners with a joint mission can use their combined strength and influence to attract finance for programmes. Indeed, the current financial and political climate dictates that, when it comes to obtaining major funding support, partnership working is a necessity rather than merely an advantage. Sport England's criteria for prospective applicants to its 'Themed Round' programme expressly require engagement with partners in terms of the development and delivery of a project (Sport England 2012c). This applies uniformly at all levels of sport, from participation initiatives at local level to support mechanisms aimed at developing and nurturing elite performers.

In conclusion thousands of prosperous ventures are not solely improved by partnership working, they are *predicated* upon it. There is a powerful case that the vast majority of sport development objectives can be attained more readily, and to a higher standard, through partnership working. It would be foolhardy, though to assume that joining forces with another organisation cannot also generate problems. By acknowledging what can go wrong, the professional with vision can anticipate potential difficulties and take steps to overcome them.

Partnership Problems

Ideally organisations would collaborate voluntarily as a result of a combination of those benefits outlined in the previous section, however in reality not all partnerships are entered into this way. Political and/or public pressure for organisations to work together can result in *enforced* partnerships which are often inherently problematic.

Enforced Partnerships

As two distinct organisations will undoubtedly possess different structures, cultures and methods of operation, so it follows that individuals within and between partner agencies will be inherently different. The experience of countless practitioners tasked to align significant aspects of their work to that of 'outsiders' bears this out. First consider how these issues are manifested at an organisational level:

- *Organisational priorities* may vary greatly between the players in the partnership. These conflicts can centre on such factors as financial imperatives, social objectives and political direction. Discord between organisations may be so great that, rather than overcoming the issue, at best, an *accommodation* may be achieved which enables the initiative to move forward, albeit not always satisfactorily for all partners. Sport England's funding of NGBs via Whole Sport Plans offers an example of this issue. Under the terms of their Whole Sport Plan agreements NGBs were tasked with leading the charge to increase participation in sport and physical activity at grassroots level, a challenge that required them to move away from their traditional delivery mechanisms and forge new alliances with community-based sport organisations. Early indications suggest that this was problematic for NGBs as they struggled to adapt to these somewhat 'forced' organisational priorities (Gibson 2011). It also offers an indication of the limited freedom available to partners when adhering to prescribed agendas (Lindsey 2009).

- *Political obstacles* may also be encountered in so-called enforced relationships. Elected officials may have personal or partisan agendas at the forefront of their thoughts and actions. Governmental interest in sport varies with the political cycle and the potential resulting change in political ideology of the ruling party (or parties) will impact on policy decisions. A prime example of this is the approach of successive governments to the School Sport Partnerships. Delivery of the Physical Education and Sport Strategy for Young People (PESSYP) required schools, under the guidance of Partnership Development Managers to form hubs around a Specialist Sports College and work collaboratively to increase the amount of sport and physical activity available to their pupils. Despite widespread recognition of the success of the PESSYP strategy, the change in government to the Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition resulted in funding being withdrawn from the programme. This decision was widely criticised as being driven by political ideology and not sporting need.

- *Initiative overload* is a real issue for sport development professionals, worsened by frequent changes to national policy and programmes requiring the professional to adapt, often necessitating new alliances to deliver new initiatives. This can create *partnership overload* where the SD professional's time is spent servicing a wide range of partnerships whilst undertaking only limited action as a result of them. There is a real danger of partnerships becoming nothing more than 'talking shops' especially if they have been enforced in a top-down manner (I&DeA 2009).

- *Culture* is another organisational factor that may differ greatly between partner organisations. Organisational culture can be considered to be the 'personality' of an organisation (Hoye et al 2011) or a pattern of shared assumptions that outline how an organisation behaves and how its members interact (Schein 2010). Colyer (2000) discovered that a lack of cultural compatibility between volunteer-led organisations in Western Australia (such as sports clubs) and staff-led governing bodies impacted significantly on the organisations' ability to achieve their shared objectives. This lack of 'cultural fit' (Slack and Parent 2006) can determine the strength and durability of an alliance.

Further obstacles may be encountered even in operations between willing collaborators. Historical difficulties between organisations may still have resonance, individual hostility between senior managers and/or politicians could have an impact on support offered to the partnership and key personnel changes can also have negative consequences. In many cases, mechanisms for resolving such issues have not been agreed in advance and this can be a further source of difficulties.

Planning and Relationship Problems

Management texts exhort managers to plan rationally and effectively. For a variety of reasons this does not always occur. *Bounded rationality* (see for instance Cairney 2012) dictates that individuals take decisions under a number of external and psychological constraints. All relevant information is not available and even if it were, decision-makers would be unable to process it all nor would they necessarily choose to do so. Thus, individuals involved a in sport development partnership cannot be

expected to plan effectively for every contingency. Despite the threat of emergent difficulties, in some partnership settings potential problems are rarely raised or discussed at the outset, resulting in situations all too familiar to experienced practitioners:

- A *lack of strategic direction* both nationally and locally can result in knee-jerk partnerships being established that lack a clear vision and do not have fit-for-purpose systems and structures. Charlton's (2010) research on Lancashire Sport identifies the importance of a clear, strategic vision for a partnership and the need to monitor the *external environment*, which changes constantly and may result in partners being unable to fulfil their obligations to the partnership, thereby affecting its ability to meet its aims.

- Closely related to the issue of strategic direction is that of "*routinization inertia*" (Slack and Parent 2006:138) where organisations get into the habit of working with the same partners irrespective of their appropriateness to achieving the aims of the alliance. This can result in poorly structured partnerships and possible under-representation of key stakeholders. Houlihan and Lindsey (2008) are wary of dominant partners who push through their agenda at the expense of others, and where community involvement can become purely tokenistic.

  Leadership is therefore crucial to the success of a partnership. Whilst it is often necessary for there to be a lead partner (or practitioner) who

takes responsibility for driving the partnership, it is crucial that they operate inclusively. Partnerships without a 'leader' often suffer from a lack of *management intensity* and drift haphazardly towards achievement of their goals (Shaw and Allen 2006). To work in partnership requires organisations, and more importantly the staff responsible for managing relations with partners to possess what Lindsey (2009:85) describes as "*collaborative capacity*", namely the skills needed to forge relationships and negotiate agreements with potential partners. An accountable partnership is likely to have carefully considered and conducted *delegation* of the workload. In multi-agency undertakings the nature and scope of tasks that need to be performed can be large and complex. Delegation is not merely about 'dumping' work on people but should be more to do with empowerment and development of skills and experience, whilst contributing to the overall effort (Green 1999). This is as true in multi-agency partnerships as it is in single organisations, the crucial distinction being that leaders may not have direct authority over other key individuals, who may have to surrender elements of internal organisational status to benefit the alliance.

- In the event of problems, individual and organisational *responsibility* must be negotiated, and each partner should share *accountability* for the issues within the alliance. Crucially this accountability should not be placed solely at the feet of 'lead' agency (or practitioner) in the partnership. In any event, when problems are experienced it is vital to have agreed in advance who will 'carry the can' and 'troubleshoot'

> those situations on behalf of the partnership. If a positive approach is taken to difficulties, the likelihood of a *blame culture* will be diminished. This avoids expending energy assigning liability for issues which could be better spent rectifying problems.

Within large-scale, strategic partnerships it is necessary to *operationalise* wider goals into tangible action plans that can be implemented by different combinations of organisations. This is an intense and demanding, but essential process in order that every individual at every level knows what is expected of her / him. Cultural differences and personal animosities need to be set aside for the 'greater good'. To conclude, it is as well to restate that it would be unusual for any sport and recreation partnership not to experience some form of obstacle at some stage. Consequently, partners can plan for contingencies and tackle them maturely and productively as and when they arise. Relationships built on trust are far more likely to thrive than those where a hidden agenda or a mood of suspicion is allowed to prevail. The next section considers how academic theory can inform partnership processes in sport development and enable collaborators to experience a greater proportion of the benefits of collective working.

Partnerships and Organisation Theory

Numerous disciplines offer themselves for academic scrutiny of sport and recreation partnerships, for example, psychology, sociology, economics, and political science as well as fields of study which include management, business studies and policy studies. As Cousens et al. (2006: 33) suggest discourses about partnerships are often vague:

> *It appears that the term partnership is used by leaders and managers of local governments to describe virtually all interactions with organisations with which they are involved, regardless of the strength or pattern of the relationships.*

This section therefore illustrates how key components of one field of study can help develop a sharper understanding. *Organisation theory* encapsulates key debates underpinning strategic partnerships and joint working. Theories of organisation offer "abstract images of what an organization is, how it functions, and how its members and other interested parties interact with and within it" (Hatch and Cunliffe 2006: 7). This notion of organisation theory provides for the study of partnerships, particularly at the level of examining interactions between people. Due to restrictions of space the focus of this section will be on one central issue: the management of stakeholder interactions. Although this topic will be dealt with discretely, as with most aspects of organisational life, it is interconnected with a host of other factors. Prior to considering this in detail, by way of setting the scene brief consideration should be given to the sport development organisation's interactions with the external environment (for a fuller discussion see earlier editions of the book).

The Organisation and Its Environment

Every organisation is located within an environment in which are situated all 'other organisations and people with whom transactions have to take place' (Pugh and Hickson 1996: 52). The organisational environment for a sporting body incorporates national and regional governing bodies, government and other political institutions,

the public, commercial and voluntary sectors, current and potential sports participants, suppliers and so on. The environment is subject to changes to which the organisation needs to be able to respond. Relationships with the environment are complex and include ways in which the organisation copes with uncertainty and turbulence; how it seeks to influence the environment; and the extent to which it behaves proactively or reactively (Pettinger 2000). From this it can be inferred that all inhabitants of the external environment are potential partners.

Hatch and Cunliffe (2006) place the organisation at the centre of an interorganisational network which includes suppliers, competitors, partners and others with whom daily interactions take place. Wider forces also impact upon the organisation or partnership, categorised by Hatch and Cunliffe (2006) as the *general environment*, incorporating demographic, economic, cultural, technological, political, and related factors. The sport development practitioner can conduct an *environmental analysis* such as PESTLE (see for instance Rapid BI 2012) to assess forces outside of the partnership which cannot be directly controlled but need to be accounted for. Such an appraisal helps managers to locate the place of the partnership within the environment and to identify issues to be addressed.

Partners as Stakeholders

Everyone within the interorganisational network, as well as bodies and individuals within the general environment with an interest in a sport development organisation's work can be thought of as *stakeholders*. In a general sense stakeholders may have a commonality of purpose. For example the vast majority of organisations with an interest in swimming would subscribe to the view that it is desirable to increase mass

participation, but there are likely to be many, diverse opinions as to how this might be achieved. It follows that the members of a partnership can be thought of as stakeholders whom, whilst entering the alliance in order to play a collaborative role in achieving its mission and aims, are carrying individual viewpoints and organisational 'baggage' which will have a significant impact upon their behaviours in the partnership setting. Understanding the politics of stakeholder interactions is therefore vital to the successful management of strategic partnerships in sport development. A keener appreciation of the motivations of potential partners, allied to an understanding of the likely value of their contribution to partnership working can aid practitioners in pursuit of the benefits of collective working. This section therefore considers the relevance or *salience* of potential partners to the organisation's work and shows how the insightful mapping of all stakeholders within a partnership can enable it to move forwards.

Stakeholder salience

Mitchell, Agle and Wood (1997) were among the first to propose the notion of *stakeholder salience*, simply put the relevance to the organisation of individual or institutional actors. Summarising earlier literature they identify that those engaged with the organisation in joint value creation and those with the ability to influence or be influenced by the organisation have a legitimate claim to be considered stakeholders. Unlike many commercial relationships, organisations and individuals in sport development are brought together by shared social objectives. This can lead to a blurring of the boundaries between relevant stakeholder-partners and those whose contribution may be marginal. Equally, the previously discussed threat of hidden,

political agendas is ever-present and can lead to a strain on scant resources, so it is vital to reliably identify the salience of potential partners.

Mitchell, Agle and Wood (1997) categorise stakeholder salience as a combination of three factors: power (A has the ability to get B to do something which B which would not otherwise have done), legitimacy (a relationship already exists or the stakeholder is affected in some way by the organisation's actions) and urgency (the extent to which the organisation has pressing business with the stakeholder). The authors therefore propose that:

> *Stakeholder salience will be positively related to the cumulative number of stakeholder attributes – power, legitimacy, and urgency – perceived by managers to be present* (Mitchell, Agle and Wood 1997: 873).

Stakeholder types can be categorised as follows:

Type of stakeholder	**Power**	**Legitimacy**	**Urgency**
1 Dormant stakeholder	✓	X	X
2 Discretionary stakeholder	X	✓	X
3 Demanding stakeholder	X	X	✓
4 Dominant stakeholder	✓	✓	X
5 Dangerous stakeholder	✓	X	✓
6 Dependent stakeholder	X	✓	✓
7 Definitive stakeholder	✓	✓	✓
8 Nonstakeholder	X	X	X

Table Y: Stakeholder typology (adapted from Mitchell, Agle and Wood 1997: 874)

With limited resources available to address organisational objectives, practitioners can use this model to identify and prioritise the key relationships without which they will be unable to move forwards in the desired fashion. Categories 1-3 identify 'latent' stakeholders whom, whilst possessing one of the three specified attributes and thus a certain measure of importance and relevance to the sport development organisation, might not be given priority, particularly in lean times. For example, from the point of view of a local authority sport development professional, a local football club which is already at or near to capacity in terms of membership and is succeeding in providing opportunities to diverse audiences may be viewed as a discretionary stakeholder, as there will be similar clubs in greater need of support. These other clubs would be categorised therefore as dependent stakeholders and emphasise the greater salience of the group of 'expectant' stakeholders: those with two of the three attributes. Mitchell, Agle and Wood (1997) suggest that these are of moderate salience, but in the politically-charged arena of sport development it may be neither desirable nor possible to afford them lower priority. Dangerous stakeholders, for instance, may include predatory property developers seeking to build on land currently used recreationally (eg green belt land used for orienteering or playing fields). Creating partnerships with such stakeholders may lead to the immediate threat being staved off and new opportunities created as a consequence.

Self-evidently the most useful application of the stakeholder salience model is the identification of definitive stakeholders. Dominant stakeholders will already be 'on

the radar' of the sport development manager due to their power and legitimacy, so when a new development lends urgency to the situation they command immediate and detailed attention. Clearly it would be highly undesirable for an antagonistic relationship to exist with a definitive stakeholder, so once again partnership working is the key to success. For example, from the point of view of a Whole Sport Plan-funded NGB, Sport England's role is that of a dominant stakeholder in terms of the day-to-day operations of the NGB, but at key times when outcomes are reviewed and funding cycles determined, Sport England becomes a definitive stakeholder to be kept satisfied with the NGB's performance. (There are a variety of useful stakeholder analysis tools to enable practitioners and scholars to gain deep insights into actual and potential stakeholder relationships – see Simpson and Partington (2012) for example.)

Contingency theory

Organising in response to the demands of the environment is clearly a crucial part of the sport development professional's work; much of this activity relates to stakeholder interactions and partnerships. Ackermann and Eden (2011: 234) confirm that "stakeholder management is invariably more complex, problematic and uncertain in the public sector". *Contingency theory*, a body of academic work which prescribes options for *how* to deal with the uncertainties of the environment is dealt with more fully in previous editions of the book, but it is useful in the tight space available to consider its applicability to stakeholder relationships.

Sport development professionals will identify with the notion of *resource dependence*, which assumes that organisations are controlled by their environments due to the need for resources such as knowledge, labour, equipment, customers and

political support. Pfeffer and Salancik (cited in Pugh and Hickson 1996), who developed this theory, determined that an organisation should attempt to create a 'counter-dependency'; in other words, it should endeavour to render elements of the environment dependent on it. From a sport and recreation perspective, the power of definitive stakeholders is often connected to *resources*, in the tangible form of funding and the less concrete form of political influence. Modern sport development professionals have become adept at identifying ways to match their own strategic agendas to those of definitive stakeholders, creating counter-dependencies which temper the effects of their organisations' vulnerability to the environment.

Environmental theory also provides for managers to defend the organisation against the uncertainty inherent in most environments. One response to uncertainty is *isomorphism*, when the organisation attempts to match the complexity of the environment. Scott (cited in Hatch 1997: 91) suggests *buffering* and *boundary spanning* as two essential techniques in achieving this. Both emphasise the skills and characteristics necessary for successful partnership working. Buffering entails an individual acting as a 'shock absorber' to ensure that abrupt, external changes to not destabilise the sport development organisation (Slack and Parent 2006). The Partnership Development Manager of a surviving School Sports Partnership may provide a buffer between the operational staff delivering coaching and subtle or sweeping changes in the priorities prescribed by central government, which would otherwise serve to distract coaches from their objectives. The boundary spanning role, meanwhile, is at the heart of partnership working. Individuals working in partnership settings provide decision-makers within their 'home' organisations with information relating to the environment whilst also representing the organisation in the partnership

setting. The human aspect of managing partnership relations is highlighted in National Occupational Standard 'A324 Develop productive relationships with colleagues' (SkillsActive 2010), which exhorts colleagues to "clearly agree what is expected of others and hold them to account", "seek to understand people's needs and motivations" and "consider the impact of your own actions on others" (all 2010: 3). The behaviours apply equally to intra- and inter-organisational dealings, and remind us that even in a resource-starved era partnership working is about negotiation rather than submission and collaboration rather than coercion.

Conclusion

The foregoing discussion has shown that partnership working continues to occupy a critical role in the strategic development of sporting opportunities. Partnership working is predicated upon intelligent, respectful but challenging interactions between professionals from a range of disciplines. Sport development professionals often demonstrate an extraordinary flair for shifting seamlessly between the parochial setting of the organisation and the vibrant and diverse partnership environment. This commitment to the spirit of collective effort characterises modern sport development professionals as outward-looking and oriented toward wider goals that benefit a broader cross-section of society than just those s/he is paid to serve.

Learning activity

From the point of view of a sport development organisation with which you to are familiar, conduct an analysis of stakeholder salience in respect of one of its key

partnerships. In particular you should seek to identity any definitive stakeholders and suggest actions the organisation might undertake in order to strengthen relationships with them.

Web resources

Rapid BI PESTLE analysis toolkit: http://rapidbi.com/the-pestle-analysis-tool/

National Occupational Standards for Sports Development: http://www.skillsactive.com/skillsactive/national-occupational-standards/level-3/item/3260/3260

Sport England County Sports Partnerships guide: http://www.sportengland.org/support__advice/county_sports_partnerships.aspx

Stakeholder analysis tool: http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newPPM_07.htm

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