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## **Strategic sport development**

### **Chapter 7 Strategic partnerships**

**Kirstie Simpson and Janine Partington**

#### **Introduction**

Although this is a chapter about partnerships, no one definition or model of this well-used term is supported over another. As Ballach and Taylor (2001:6) propose this concept is “variously identified as interagency, interprofessional, collaborative or joined-up working, joined-up thinking or a whole systems or holistic approach”. In the interest of clarity, this chapter will analyse strategic partnerships and alliances where two or more organisations collaborate; sharing resources and activities to pursue a strategy (Johnson, Scholes and Whittington, 2006:353). Organisations involved in sport development may also form strategic alliances internally, for example cross-departmental working within a local authority, and informally, for example, communities of practice (Wenger and Snyder 2000). Ultimately, however, the view taken in this chapter is that partnerships are about people, regardless of how many individuals are involved and whom they happen to work for. This is justified by Gilchrist (2003:35) who comments that policy needs partnerships and partnerships require people. Inevitably relationships between those SDPs responsible for managing partnerships is crucial, and therefore the *people* aspect of the 4Ps model is particularly relevant to this chapter as we consider the importance and variety of stakeholders in the sport development *process*. We argue that the *practice* of partnership can be as important as the *product* that emanates from said partnership. The nature of partnership in sport development is complex and multi-facteted and can be linked to Checkland’s (1999) notion of layered thinking, identified within the Introduction chapter. Due to a paucity of existing material, this chapter applies academic material from the strategic management body of knowledge to relevant sport development examples. Amongst other theoretical frameworks, the Power / Interest matrix (Scholes 2001) will be used to help understand the complex relationships evident in sport development, and the PiiSA framework proposed by I&DeA (2009) will be considered in relation to a case study example. But first it is necessary to consider why and how partnership working has become so embedded in sport development practice.

#### **Why work in partnership?**

Numerous authors have written about the benefits of partnership working in relation to sport development (e.g. Frisby, Thibault and Kikulis 2004; Shaw and Allen 2006; Robson 2008; Parent and Harvey 2009). These benefits are neatly summarised by I&DeA (2009) as: a more connected and better connected service delivery, more effective service delivery to local communities, opportunity to participate in wider discussions about improving quality of life, enhanced profile and credibility, increased and effective use of resources, access to wider expertise, potential for learning and sharing

knowledge and a greater opportunity to inform and influence decision-making. Partnership working has become increasingly common in sport development over the last twenty years as a result of social, economic and political pressures, along with increased competition for resources both internally and externally (Frisby, Thibault and Kikulis 2004). Partnerships within sport development have become a potential solution to a lack of resources, and a way of fulfilling organisational goals. They are also frequently underpinned by positive expectations, as Kanter (1990:99 quoted in Shaw and Allen 2006:204) states:

Partnerships are initially romantic... their formation rests on hopes and dreams – what might be possible if certain opportunities are pursued.

With such emotional and financial investment, it is therefore crucial to understand how organisations can work together effectively through people in order to successfully achieve the intended outputs and outcomes identified in strategy documents. There may be a clear tension between the document's producers and the document's implementers, which can impact upon the type of partnerships formed and their subsequent success. Aspects of this tension have been discussed in previous chapters on implementation and performance measurement.

In addition to the benefits of partnership working, Frisby, Thibault and Kikulis (2004) highlight several negative consequences of poorly managed partnership such as staff dissatisfaction, an inability to deliver quality services to the public, a loss of credibility and future difficulties in retaining and attracting partners. Partnerships also cost money to develop and maintain, therefore unsuccessful partnerships do not offer value for money, thus alliances not be entered into without due consideration. In the same way that there has been widespread recognition of 'initiative overload' in sport development, it can be argued that SDPs have also been affected by 'partnership fatigue' (Houlihan and White, 2002), partnership working becoming the main focus of their role, thereby over-extending capacity and resource. It is crucial that SDPs are provided with the skills, knowledge and power to create effective and appropriate partnerships and are empowered to walk away from ineffective ones.

### **The business of partnership**

Coulter (2008) describes how organisations can establish strategic relationships with suppliers or distributors (vertical integration); with a competitor (horizontal integration); or with an organisation in a related industry (related diversification). Colleagues in sport development regularly establish these types of relationships. For example SDPs often work with suppliers (such as adidas, one of the official sponsors for the London 2012 Olympic Games, who provided the kit for 2012 Olympic Games but also the kit for the SportMaker volunteer initiative, a 2012 Legacy programme); with competitors via activities such as the StreetGames network where national governing

bodies (NGBs) work together at regional festivals; and organisations in related industries such as the collaborations that exist between many local authority sport development teams and local health care professionals.

All three of these types of relationship could be deemed to be strategic partnerships, albeit with each one having a different structure and purpose. Furthermore, Coulter (2008) goes on to describe three types of strategic partnerships, these being joint ventures, long terms contracts and strategic alliances. In sport development all three of these types of partnership exist though would not, possibly for political reasons, be described in this formal, private sector-'speak'. **Joint ventures** are formalised alliances where two or more individual organisations remain separate but set up a new organisation which is jointly owned or governed. An example that exists in sport development is County Sport Partnerships (CSPs). Over the past ten years, each county in England has developed these independent charitable organisations following funding and political support from Sport England and the cooperation and agreement of associated local authorities. Typically CSPs are managed by Boards that have representation from each 'member' local authority and provide governance for the CSP.

**Long term contracts** lock a supplier into a long term relationship that benefits both organisations, for example Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council and their cultural trust Link4Life. A fifteen year agreement exists between these two organisations in order for Link4Life to provide services in four main areas: arts and heritage; entertainment, fitness and health; and sport and leisure. An annual 'contract charge' is paid by Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council to the trust for delivery of these services against an agreed standard of performance (Link4Life 2011).

Coulter (2008:212) considers **strategic alliances** as separate to joint ventures in that a new organisation is not formed: "instead the partnering organisations simply share whatever they need, in order to do whatever they want to do", for example formal networks such as local or regional development forums attended by representatives of local authorities and NGBs as required. Community Badminton Networks are a prime example of this. They operate in local areas and involve the strategic coordination and development of badminton opportunities between partners such as the NGB, local authority, clubs, facility providers and any other interested parties (Badminton England n.d.). In addition, Johnson, Scholes and Whittington (2008:360) describe strategic alliances as a method by which strategies can be pursued; this can include formal, inter-organisational relationships (such as Coulter's joint ventures) but may also be very informal with "loose arrangements of cooperation." The complexity of partnership working is demonstrated here as sport development officer posts (often an example of a joint venture) can be developed through informal networks such as those that exist between local authorities and NGBs. This may involve pooling of resources or joint funding applications, but crucially the arrangement has occurred as a result of informal networking rather than through a formally structured, politically endorsed network.

A fourth type of partnership can be identified as **communities of practice**. Wenger and Snyder (2000:139) describe these as “groups of people who are informally bound together by shared expertise and passion.” Typically, these congregations are self-organised and form their own leadership as opposed to being formed to fulfil a specific goal and operating within formal working procedures or hierarchies. They are flexible and formed to suit the specific purpose for which they were developed rather than being structured around existing organisational alliances or synergies. Communities of practice can range from something as simple as a group of SDPs meeting regularly to discuss work activities, to more complex networks of organisations, for example sports clubs from within the same geographic area meeting regularly to discuss club development. Communities of practice can lead to the development of more formalised partnership arrangements as described above, but fundamentally the emphasis is on individuals and organisations learning together and making their work more effective. As Wenger and Snyder (2000:143) argue,

... the strength of communities of practice is self-perpetuating. As they generate knowledge, they reinforce and renew themselves. They give you both the golden eggs and the goose that laid them.

Clearly, the range of partnerships in existence within sport development is broad. What is unclear however, is the degree to which partnerships are viewed by SDPs as either an effective mechanism for working or an inconvenience. Are, for example, SDPs drawn towards partnership working because of its benefits, because of political pressure, or through the motivation to be part of a team and share responsibility for the achievement of targets?

### **A political tool or an innate sense of team?**

Houlihan and Lindsey (2008:225) indicate that the emergence of

more formal partnership working can be seen, to an extent at least, as a development of existing delivery practices which were given substantial additional momentum from the Labour government elected in 1997.

However, it could be argued that sport-related partnerships became politically important after the publication of Game Plan (DCMS / Strategy Unit 2002), written and developed by two government departments, the Strategy Unit and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), fulfilling New Labour’s ‘joined-up thinking’ philosophy. As former Prime Minister Tony Blair suggests in the Foreword of the document (DCMS / Cabinet Office 2002:5):

It [Game Plan] highlights the central importance of Government working closely in partnership with those that provide sport – national governing bodies, clubs, schools, local authorities, the voluntary and

the private sectors – to help deliver key outcomes. We cannot drive that step change in participation alone.

Not only was this a political endorsement, but it set out a clear framework for delivery of national sports objectives, namely partnership working. As Friend (2006:261) suggests, there is an expectation that different government departments (and by extension those QUANGOs funded via exchequer resources) should collaborate rather than compete wherever their agendas converge or overlap in order to act in the best interests of the public.

Over the course of the last two decades, it can be said that partnership working has become a tool that has been promoted through policy and duly used by sport development professionals to address participation nationally, regionally and locally. This way of working is so deeply ingrained that SDPs who do not engage in partnership working are often viewed as unorthodox or a 'loose cannon'. The public funding of the majority of initiatives was, and is, based on the premise of working with others so the focus on developing 'teams' of professionals within partnership frameworks has been to a degree inescapable. Crucially, the trend towards partnership working is not unique to sport development and has become a central tenet of local government activity too. Whilst joint working between departments is nothing new, the development of Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) under New Labour was a significant shift towards joint working at a strategic level locally, and further embedded partnership working as *the* way to do things. It is also possible to argue that broader local government structures such as LSPs were major influences on the subsequent Community Sports Networks (CSNs), a Sport England-led initiative to create structures, or what Lindsey (2006) describes as inter-organisational networks, that would advocate for and on behalf of sport and physical activity at a local level. CSNs would also seek to encourage more collaborative working between agencies and departments through jointly delivered projects and initiatives. Not only did CSNs take on board the bureaucracy of LSPs and their structure (typically being organised around themes), they perhaps more significantly embraced all agencies operating at a local level that had an interest in sport and physical activity. For the first time this took the emphasis away from local authorities as the only local driver of sport development and CSNs sought to seek alliances with other major organisations such as Primary Care Trusts who often had compatible goals. The challenge for many CSNs was not only to ensure adequate representation from community organisations in order that community needs became as integrated into their strategic plans as those of the larger organisations, but also that the CSN itself was integrated in the strategic planning of LSPs, and was not left isolated with little influence or opportunity to bid for resources.

One of the issues manifested in CSNs was varied commitment levels between partners. Friend (2006:265) discusses the differences between 'symmetrical partnerships' (where all organisations are of a similar size and ilk, for example a number of schools working together to deliver and coordinate the National School Games at a local level) and 'asymmetrical partnerships' (where a diverse range of organisations of different size, structure and resource work

together, such as a CSN). This difference highlights the difficulties experienced in the latter where differing organisations are expected to subscribe to a set of shared objectives, yet often have to manage “competing motivations from other sources, limiting the extent to which these declared partnership goals can be realistically pursued.” Lindsey’s (2006) research on local partnerships, focusing upon the New Opportunities for PE and Sport programme, argued that political pressure to form partnerships often resulted in short timescales for their establishment. This pressured those overseeing the development of the partnership to select convenient and reliable partners, rather than those who might offer greater reward but with whom a relationship did not exist. Whilst this arrangement might result in agreement, it will not result in effective implementation.

The driver for the establishment of CSNs was not necessarily the opportunity to bring key stakeholders together to rationalise and coordinate provision of sport and physical activity or to reduce risk, but to draw down resources in the form of funding from Sport England. This is yet another example of policy rather than need driving the formation of partnerships. Whilst Frisby, Thibault and Kikulis (2004) argue that partnerships offer a reduced risk when resources are pooled, the relationships between members of the CSN (and similarly within other partnership types) could become soured when those resources are redistributed, creating potential competition amongst partners for a share of those resources. Ironically political support for CSNs has subsequently waned, and they are no longer endorsed by Sport England. It is unclear how many CSNs are still active as some local partnerships considered the often complex structures a useful way of strategically planning provision, however numerous CSNs have slid into oblivion and are now no more than a distant memory. This ‘disposability’ of partnerships once they are deemed to have served their purpose often comes at a cost, leaving community partners disillusioned and frustrated. Despite this, the political pressure for partnership working was continued under the Coalition government, although the financial climate created by public sector budget cuts has resulted in partnerships becoming resource-driven rather than outcome-driven. As Asthana, Richardson and Halliwell (2002) argue, resources are a necessary ingredient of partnership working but the provision of financial resources is an insufficient condition for establishing partnerships.

This focus on securing resources has served to further disempower SDPs from utilising partnerships to create and implement strategy, instead creating an environment where partnerships are crucial for survival. Clearly, policy is still driving partnerships, but not necessarily for the right reasons! There is also an increasing political pressure on ensuring community involvement in partnerships and service delivery. The ‘Big Society’ policy espoused by the Coalition government seeks to redistribute power from the state to local communities, encouraging the development of new partnerships between the state and those organisations funded by the state (such as NGBs) with communities (Conservatives 2010). Whilst this offers the potential to consider and integrate local needs and issues into service delivery, it also creates potential for tokenistic gestures of cooperation and bottom-up working.

## **'Community voices'**

All of that said, the rhetoric of much policy since the 1960s claims the inclusion of community voices with local residents being involved in decision-making. The reality of this is that communities have often been marginalised or 'consulted' via third sector officers or other paid professionals (Hastings et al., 1996; Taylor 1998; Anastacio et al. 2000 in Banks et al. 2003). Partington and Totten (2012) argue that this tokenistic approach only serves to further disenfranchise local communities, as the information they provide is rarely considered when making strategic decisions, which subsequently become about the needs of the organisations (and the staff within them) rather than the needs of the community that the strategy or intervention is targeted at. Frisby and Millar (2002) caution against community partnerships where the pretence of devolved power becomes a way of 'off-loading' services to communities as a cost saving measure. This serves as a warning to the Coalition government and their focus on developing a 'Big Society' and verges very close to what Berner and Phillips (2005:20-1) describe as a "neo-liberal wolf dressed up as a populist sheep" boosting "the self esteem of the poor by letting them take care of themselves." This could be seen as a somewhat cynical use of partnerships to reduce the burden on the state.

Conversely, Vail (2007) describes a successful partnership in Canada focused on developing grassroots tennis participation between Tennis Canada, local tennis clubs and local community champions that successfully utilised principles of community development to identify community needs and involve community members in decision-making, management and delivery of the intervention. Whilst not without its problems, the partnership resulted in significant increases in participation and much improved relationships between the clubs and their local community. Gilchrist (2003) describes this process of 'building bridges' across community boundaries as an important part of community practice. Informal networking is crucial to ensuring indigenous participants can articulate community needs within a partnership setting. These informal practices enable local people to develop confidence and status both within and outside of the community. However, as Skinner (1997) warns, in order for genuine community involvement to occur, communities may need help to become organised and establish democratic and inclusive structures to ensure that community representatives are actually accountable to their 'community' and possess the skills necessary to contribute fully to the partnership. This not only requires the SDP to recognise the importance of undertaking capacity building work and possess the requisite skills to do this, but also to have the ability to establish appropriate and equal relationships with community representatives. An inappropriate approach coupled with the use of specialist language and jargon can build barriers between staff and community members, and can result in community members feeling excluded and disempowered (Turner 2009), a situation that is clearly not conducive to effective partnership working. As such, it is important at this stage to consider the skills necessary for partnership working within the sport development sector.



## **Skills for partnership working**

It could be argued that the political environment in which the sport development professional operates is considered secondary to the personal or cultural ideology that surrounds the industry. As Nesti (2008) indicates

...sports development is for lovers of sport. It is not a safe and sensible career option like accountancy or law. This is personal. Employers should not recruit or promote anyone looking for a career in sport, only those still in love with it.

Certainly, there is a presumption that SDPs inherently possess the necessary skills to effectively work in partnership. This is reflected in job descriptions available online and, for example, in the summary job description available via Graduate Prospects, a typical work activity for a Sport Development Officer is described as “developing a range of partnerships” (Graduate Prospects 2011). By taking the view that sport development practitioners have an innate sense of ‘team’, it would seem that taking a partnership approach would be second nature to those attempting to create real change within a community; however, personality aside, one way of managing change has been to utilise partnerships, real or otherwise, in order to secure scant resources in a (naturally) competitive field. An opposing view of this would be that SDPs are passionate about sport because they enjoy sport themselves and value the (competitive) nature of it, therefore the consideration of others before oneself would not be something that would be natural to this type of SDP. There is also a tendency, perhaps due to the ‘team’ element of working in partnership, to purposely develop partnerships with other agencies and staff with whom you have an established personal relationship or shared philosophy (in a similar vein to the development of communities of practice), whilst avoiding those with whom you have little personal connection, irrespective of the strategic value of that partnership.

Being objective in partnership working is clearly a desirable aspiration, but unrealistic as personal values inevitably impact upon and possibly cloud judgement (Lindsey 2006). Indeed criticisms of the ineffectiveness of past partnerships allied to the “fragmentation, fractiousness and perceived ineffectiveness of organisations within the sport policy area” (Houlihan and Green, 2009:678) adds to the doubt about SDPs’ ‘natural’ abilities to work collaboratively. It is argued throughout this book that core sport development skills orient around team work, leadership and communication. In order to be strategically effective, SDPs need to be able to talk to colleagues within and outside of their organisation in an appropriate way, i.e. an empathic understanding or appreciation of the colleague’s environment is needed to ensure that the two individuals (let alone the two departments or organisations) are working together with the same purpose. The ability of SDPs to foster “win-win thinking”, where alliances contribute to the strategic aims of each partner organisation, hinges on a SDP’s ability to communicate, influence and negotiate sometimes complex alliances (I&DeA 2009:10).

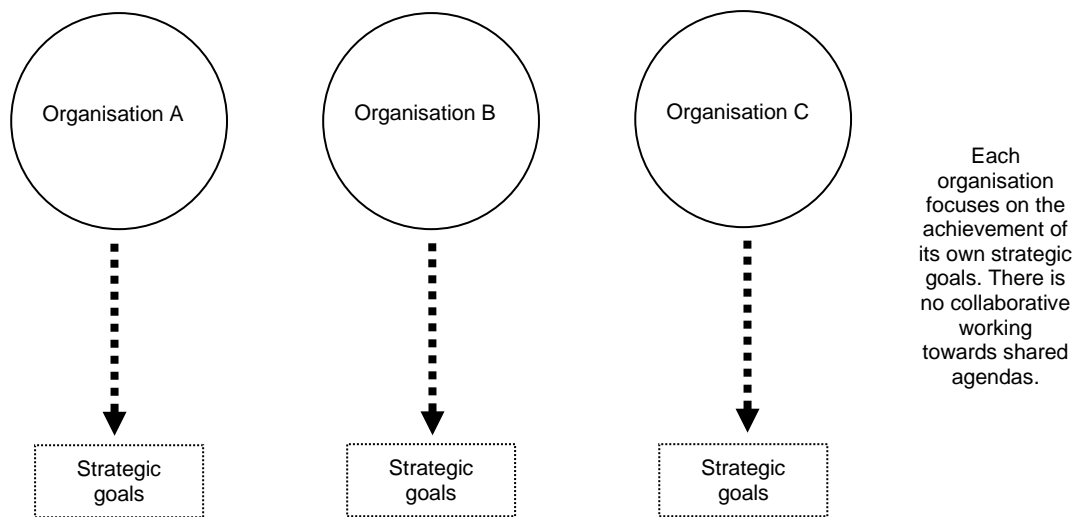
There is a clear role here for the utilisation of National Occupational Standards (SkillsActive, 2010), the most relevant in this case being A324, Develop productive working relationships with colleagues. This Standard concerns the development of working relationships with colleagues, both within the SDP's own organisation and with external colleagues, and the associated outcomes, behaviours and knowledge necessary to fulfil successful relationships. Higher education also has a key part to play; specifically the way that students engage with external organisations and the extent to which the degree or any work experience undertaken prepares them for communicating with individuals who may well have a very different set of core values. This leads us to consider the pedagogy of partnership working. Is this more about the art of leadership than partnership *per se*?

### **The pedagogy of partnerships**

When developing strategy it is crucial that a shared purpose is developed between partners as without this a shared vision and relevant aims and objectives cannot be devised. A lack of planning and strategic thought can lead to poor performance and misunderstanding between partners. Therefore, for the partnership to be effective the shared agenda (of the two colleagues and therefore the two or more organisations) has to be more important than any individual agenda. This is different to thinking about the activities undertaken by the partnership, as the intrinsic value of good partnership working should be rated highly in and of itself. In practical terms, this means that the sharing of information and expertise, possibly leading to long-term communities of practice and co-operation, is often more valuable than short-term agreements to access funding or resources.

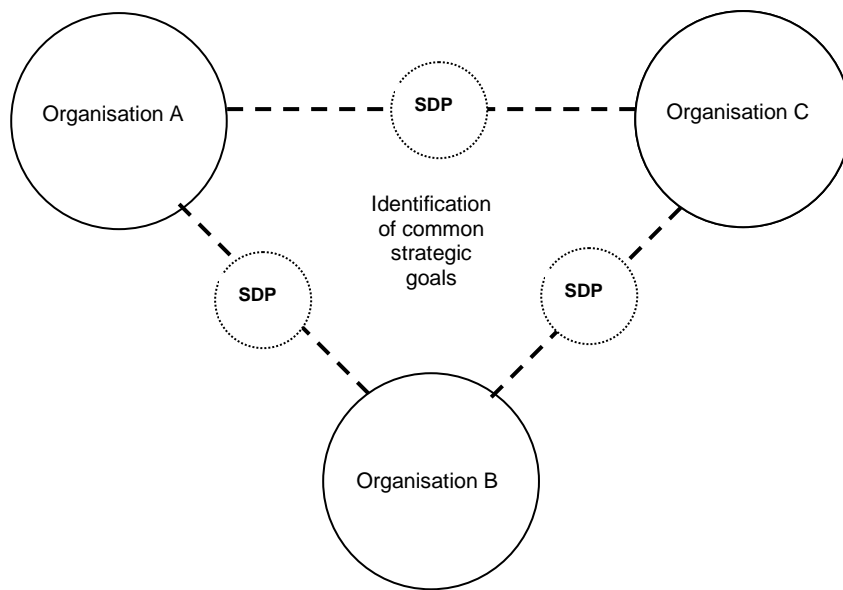
Robson (2008:136) identifies what he describes as “boundary spanning” which deals with the transfer of information between organisations. SDPs themselves are in fact boundary spanners and assume the role of key communicator and leader; this can only work well when this individual has the requisite skills in leadership, communication and negotiation. If an organisation is insular in its approach to strategy and no form of external analysis is undertaken, then it is likely that a ‘silo’ mentality will be reflected in their work. If this approach is taken, the SDP will work alone in the delivery of the proposed strategy, metaphorically placing themselves and their organisation in an ‘implementation silo’. See figure 7.1 below.

Figure 7.1: Silo mentality in practice

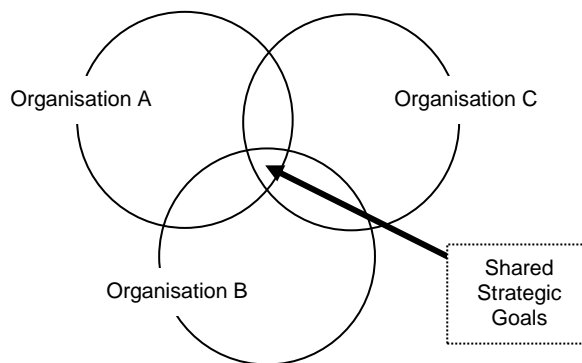


The ability to bring organisations together and promote partnership working is increasingly important in sport development as there is an implied requirement to create change through sport; this change can only occur if and when SDPs are able to cross organisational boundaries to create effective, strategic partnerships and act as boundary spanners, as shown in figure 6.2 below. This approach lifts the SDP out of the metaphorical silo and enables their thinking and delivery to be collaborative.

Figure 7.2: SDP as boundary spanner, working towards collaboration



**Stage One:**  
The SDP acting as a boundary spanner; bringing multiple organisations together to identify common strategic goals

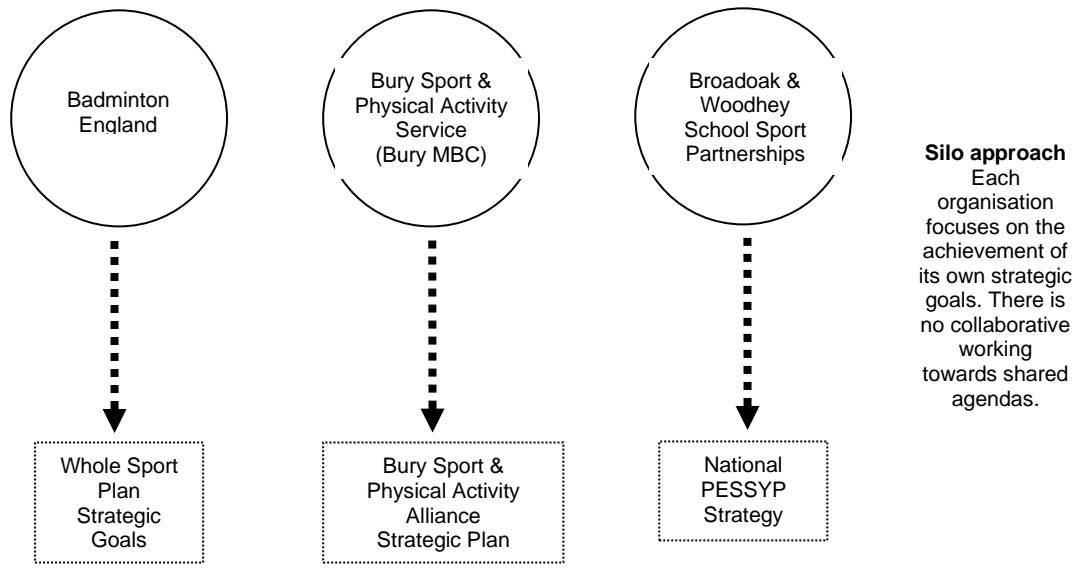


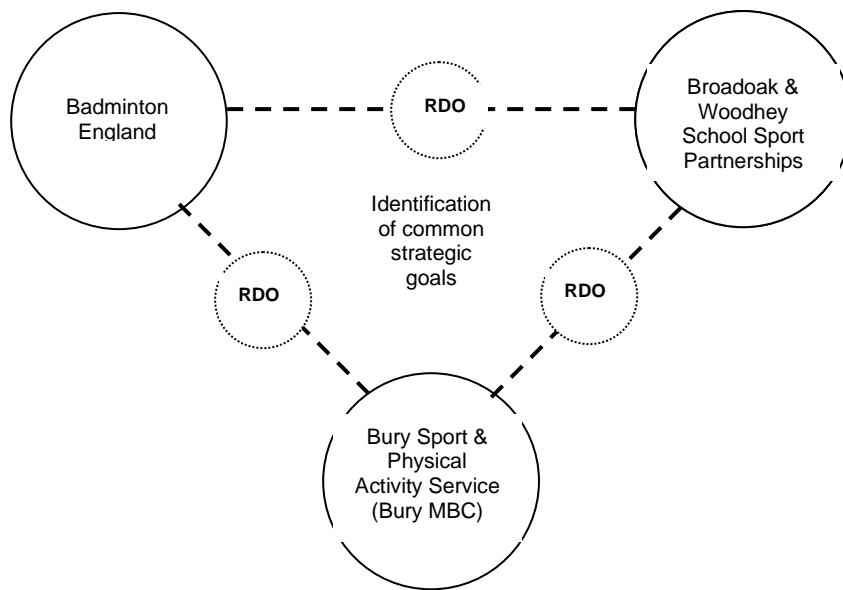
**Stage Two:**  
Collaborative working between organisations in pursuit of shared strategic goals.

Figure 7.3 demonstrates the principle of boundary spanning in relation to the development of badminton at a local level. In this example, the Regional Badminton Development Officer is acting as the boundary spanner to create a strategic alliance between Badminton England, a local authority (Bury Metropolitan Borough Council) and the local school sports partnerships. The outcome of this strategic alliance was the establishment of a new junior badminton club within Bury. This development contributed towards the achievement of strategic goals common to all three organisations, namely the creation of opportunities for increased participation, improvement and development of the local sporting infrastructure (specifically in relation to Badminton) and the development of school-club links. Without the input of the boundary spanner, acting as an initial bridge between the organisations, it is unlikely this outcome would have been achieved as each organisation would have been constrained by working within its self-imposed silo.

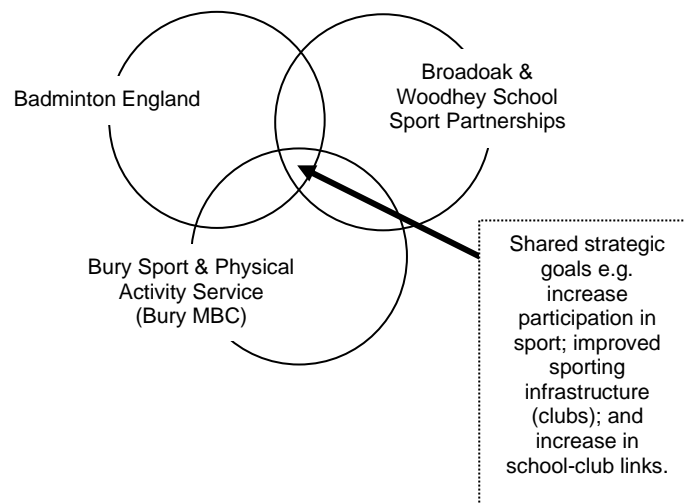
Strategic Goals

Figure 7.3 Boundary spanning in action





**Stage One:**  
The Regional Badminton Development Officer acting as a boundary spanner to identify common strategic goals between the NGB, local authority and SSP



**Stage Two:**  
Collaborative working between organisations in pursuit of shared strategic goals resulted in the establishment of Bury Topflight Junior Badminton Club

It is important to note that any organisation could follow any one method of strategy development, either taking a silo approach or working collaboratively, or a combination of these. The approach taken would firstly depend on organisational culture (see chapters 2 and 5 for a more thorough analysis of this), and secondly on the philosophy of the individual (the boundary spanner) charged with that area of work. The methods indicated in the figures above may not be mutually exclusive, i.e. SDPs may develop collaborative partnerships over a period of time, either having started from a silo mentality themselves or having worked with organisations with historically embedded silo mentalities.

Given that sport development has evolved into a graduate 'profession', most SDPs are middle-class either by origin or by education (Pitchford and Collins,

2010) and therefore will need to work very hard to ensure colleagues in local communities see them as equals not as middle-class do-gooders. Certainly, the skills required to work in collaboration with local communities using a community development approach requires SDPs to be embracing, empowering, involving and mobilising (Vangen and Huxham 2002 cited in Vail 2007:575). An 'I know better than you' attitude is certainly unlikely to generate trust between stakeholders or foster a mutually beneficial partnership. SDPs working in this way could be described as boundary builders rather than boundary spanners. Shaw and Allen (2006) stress that trust is vital to the success of partnerships, particularly in terms of having confidence in a partner to undertake work or act on behalf of that partnership. A lack of trust often breeds a lack of action, rendering the partnership ineffective and no more than a talking shop.

### **Types of strategic sport development partnerships**

In order to act as a successful boundary spanner, SDPs require an understanding of the purpose and structure of partnerships in order to support the development of effective alliances. This requires them to possess 'critical consciousness' which as Shor (1993:32) describes is the "dynamic between critical thought and critical action." Placed along a continuum of critical consciousness, partnerships with a high level of this commodity may be expected to have a focus on outcomes (for example joint venture where partners are equally engaged with mutually agreed outcomes). Partnerships with a low level of critical consciousness, meanwhile, will be process oriented and may well, for example, be termed 'paper' partnerships (partnerships in name only, in which organisations have come together purely because they need to be seen to do so in order to complete a funding application or simply gain access to a community).

There has been an increase in academic theorising around partnerships in sport development, which has resulted in several attempts at the classification of different partnerships (such as Lindsey 2006 and Parent and Harvey 2009). A potential typology of strategic partnerships is provided for debate in table 7.1 below.

Table 7.1 Potential typology of strategic partnerships

<b>Critical consciousness</b>	HIGH ←-----→ LOW		
<b>Culture (based on Reid &amp; Iqbal 1996)</b>	Collaborative ←-----→ Competitive		
<b>Focus</b>	Outcome based on a jointly developed sense of purpose	Output with a specific sense of purpose for at least one 'partner'	Process focus with a superficial sense of purpose
<b>Approach</b>	'Bottom-up' and 'endogenous' (McQuaid 2000) with genuine dialogue between partners resulting in a sustainable partnership that leads to 'thoughtful action' (Ledwith 2005) being undertaken.	Some dialogue occurs between partners, but this is likely to be unequal and does not always result in successful collaboration or implementation  neutral	'Top-down' and 'exogenous' (McQuaid 2000). A paper trail is created as 'evidence' of the partnership, but collaborative working is tokenistic and often results in 'thoughtless action' (Ledwith 2005)
<b>SDP leadership style</b> (see chapter 9 on Strategic Leadership)	Authentic-transformational leader	Transactional leader	Pseudo-transformational leader
<b>Resulting partnership type</b>	- Joint Venture - Community-led	- Presumed - Mutual appreciation - Delivery partnerships	- Paper - Enforced

The SDP may well be operating or involved with a number of different types of partnerships, as identified above, at any one time, depending on the work they are undertaking. This exemplifies the complexity of the work of the SDP, the essential requirement being the ability to spin lots of plates at the same time!

**Managing partnerships: A framework for discussion**

The I&DeA (2009) specifies four factors for successful partnership working. These are P – purpose, ii – to influence and be influenced, S – structure and systems and A – action. PiiSA then forms the basis of a balanced scorecard approach to evaluating the quality and likely effectiveness of partnerships. It also provides a useful tool for the management of partnerships which will enable SDPs to create and develop effective working relationships.



### *Creating Partnerships:*

This concerns the P of the PiiSA framework and the extent to which the partnership has a clear sense of purpose. Effective partnerships will continuously work to clarify the nature of the relationship, ensuring a shared vision / purpose at all times. This is enhanced when colleagues are able to express specific constraints, what they and their organisation wish to achieve as well as the level of commitment to shared objectives. In relation to Figure 6.4, it could be argued that partnerships with a highly developed sense of purpose are more likely to have a high level of critical consciousness, assuming that all partners are working collaboratively. Asthana, Richardson and Halliday (2002), writing about Health Action Zones argue that partnerships are frequently established due to political pressure, rather than 'real need'. This can subsequently impact upon the commitment of partners towards that partnership, and can compromise the willingness of stakeholders to input resources to support the work of the partnership. Clearly, there must be a consideration of why the partnership is being formed and its purpose to avoid the establishment of 'thoughtless' partnerships. Parent and Harvey (2009) suggest a model of partnership working which encourages practitioners to consider three stages of partnerships: partnership antecedents, partnership management and partnership evaluation. Partnership antecedents are essential to partnership success and include amongst other factors the organisation's culture, motives for involvement, and the external environment.

### *Understanding and Influencing Partnerships:*

The ii of the PiiSA framework relates to how colleagues are influenced and can be influential. This has to be linked to the skills SDPs have in negotiation and basic communication, as well as the extent to which they are capable boundary spanners. It is important in effective partnerships that all parties are able to communicate in an environment of trust so that genuine dialogue can take place; as I&dEA (2009) states dialogue should be characterised by honesty and authenticity, with individuals seeking to understand each other's position and identifying courses of action that meet the needs of all those present. In practice, however, partnerships often become dominated by one or two partners who have control of resources, with strategic decisions about the use of those resources being undertaken outside of partnership meetings (Asthana, Richardson and Halliday 2002). Clearly this does not make for an open and honest dialogue between all stakeholders, and would impact on levels of trust between partners. The use of informal networks to share information outside of the formal partnership once again results in the exclusion of stakeholders who sit outside of these networks. It also means that information used to make decisions is incomplete and potentially biased, resulting in poor decisions being made which ultimately impair the effectiveness of the partnership.

It is difficult to see how a partnership that is developed in a top-down fashion can be effective in this sense. Again, an individual's skills are at the heart of success. This relates neatly to the Power / Interest matrix (Mendelow 1991), a

management tool that can be used by organisations to ascertain the relative power and interest of key stakeholders in a strategy or intervention.

Stakeholder mapping allows practitioners to understand the political interplay between stakeholders and be better prepared to manage the impact of changes in one stakeholder on the other stakeholders (Johnson, Scholes and Whittington 2009). The matrix should be used to first map out the current positions of stakeholders to show they line up in terms of the extent of their power and interest, before a second map is produced showing the desired positions of stakeholders in order for the strategy or intervention to be successful. Sources of power include the control of resources, charismatic leadership and possession of knowledge, status and hierarchy (Scholes 2001). Indicators of interest are harder to define but within a sport development environment may include verbal expressions of interest, shared organisational goals and objectives, common geographical focus, and political pressure or status. Interest should be represented by (+) for, against (-) and neutral (0) in terms of how the stakeholder may feel about the strategy or intervention. For example, whilst a community group may have interest in local authority plans to develop a community sports project in their area, they may have low power in relation to the strategy or intervention, so their interest would be negative (due to feeling initially excluded from the development of the project). However the local authority, if following community development principles would have a desired position where the community group has high power (and is actively involved in establishing community need and in decision-making regarding the project) and subsequently positive, rather than negative interest (due to increased ownership and involvement of the project).

Figures 7.4 and 7.5 below show both the initial and desired power/ interest matrix applied to the previously discussed badminton development group in Bury, Greater Manchester. Figure 7.4 below shows the power / interest matrix applied to this situation, specifically at the point before the establishment of the Bury badminton development group. An explanation of each organisation’s interest levels is also provided

Figure 7.4 Initial power / interest matrix pre-establishment of the Bury badminton development group

		Interest	
		Low	High
Power	Low	<i>A (monitor with minimum effort)</i>	<i>B (keep informed)</i>
		Participants (0)	Adult and social badminton clubs (+)
		Primary Care Trust (0)	Individual coaches (+)
		Bury MBC sport and leisure facilities (0)	

		<i>C (keep satisfied)</i>	<i>D (key players)</i>
	<b>High</b>	Broadoak and Woodhey School Sport Partnerships (0)	Bury Sport & Physical Activity Service (+)
		Greater Sport (+)	Badminton England (+)

- Badminton England and Bury Sport & Physical Activity Service have both high interest and power. The establishment of a development group fits with both organisations' priorities and they currently hold the resources (in terms of staff time and local knowledge) to drive the establishment of the development group.
- The two School Sport Partnerships at this stage of development have low interest but high power. They are not formally involved with the establishment of the development group but retain high power due to their role in providing competitive sports opportunities, school-club links and identifying talented young people. They are neutral about the development group at this stage as their priorities remain focused on the achievement of the (now defunct) PESSYP strategy rather than broader sport development objectives.
- Greater Sport (County Sports Partnership) also has low interest and high power, but is 'for' the establishment of a development group as it helps address the strategic objective of driving up opportunities for participation in sport across the sub-region. It has high power due to its role in channelling potential resources to local authorities and its role as the organiser of the regional Youth Games event which forms part of the badminton talent pathway.
- The adult and social badminton clubs and individual coaches have high interest due to their commitment to and participation in the sport, but low power as they do not possess the resources or power to influence how the development group is established. The individual coaches are 'for' the development group as it may create opportunities for work, whereas the interest level of the club is unclear as there may be suspicion attached to the formation of a formal network, with it being viewed as a potential threat.
- At this stage, participants, Bury's sport and leisure facilities and the Primary Care Trust have low interest and low power. They have not yet been formally involved in the establishment of the development group and are concentrating on their own strategic objectives.

Scholes's (2001) analysis of stakeholder maps identifies nine 'typical' power / interest matrices. These identify where the weight of the dominant stakeholder influence lies and Scholes acknowledges that in many cases in the real world there will be a combination of some of these nine typical maps. Scholes argues that the maps are useful ways to identify political priorities and potential support for an initiative or activity. The map shown in figure 7.4 provides an example of a 'lone champion' or in the case of Bury Sport & Physical Activity and Badminton England two 'lone champions'. As Scholes

(2001) states there are many strategies which succeed through the support of one or two powerful champions who drive through the implementation phase. In this situation, it is important that the interest of these champions is maintained. Potential threats to the success of this approach include a loss of power (for example significant funding cuts) or loss of interest (for example a change in national sports policy and objectives) amongst a 'champion'. In order to minimise this risk, efforts need to be made to broaden the base of support for the strategy by increasing the interest of other stakeholders (from box C) or building the power base of supporters (from box B) (Johnson and Scholes 2001). Figure 7.5 illustrates the desired power / interest matrix for the badminton development group.

Figure 7.5 Desired power / interest matrix for the Bury badminton development group.

		Interest	
		Low	High
Power	Low	<i>A (monitor with minimum effort)</i> Participants (0)	<i>B (keep informed)</i> Other adult and social badminton clubs (0) Individual coaches (+) <i>Primary Care Trust (0)</i>
	High	<i>C (keep satisfied)</i> Greater Sport (+) <i>Bury MBC sport and leisure facilities (+)</i>	<i>D (key players)</i> Bury Sport & Physical Activity Service (+) Badminton England (+) <i>Broad oak and Woodhey School Sport Partnerships (+)</i> <i>Bury Topflight Badminton Club (+)</i>

- On the desired power / interest matrix those organisations shown in italics have moved boxes as a result of the work of the two champions to establish the badminton development group. This work has not only led to an increase of support for the group amongst other organisations (broadening the base of support) but the formation of a new

organisation, namely Bury Topflight Badminton Club which not only provided new opportunities for junior badminton but also acted to strengthen the power base of supporters.

- As a result of the clear links to the national PESSYP strategy and provision of school-club links, the two School Sport Partnerships have moved from box C to box D and are now key players in the development of badminton within Bury.
- The Primary Care Trust has moved from box A to box B due to its interest in the outcomes of the work of the development group in response to increasing adult participation in physical activity, specifically the increase in numbers of adult and social clubs providing badminton opportunities and the development of 'No Strings' Badminton sessions.
- Bury sport and leisure facilities have also moved from box A but unlike the Primary Care Trust they are now positioned in box C. As a result of the work of the two champions of the strategy, they have bought into the 'No Strings Badminton' initiative and now run two of these sessions within their facilities. As a result of this funding arrangement with Badminton England, they need to be kept satisfied in terms of getting value for money from the 'No Strings' sessions and being regularly informed of any future opportunities or threats as a result of the work of the development group.
- The status of the adult and social badminton clubs has changed from being unknown to neutral. At this stage the focus of the development group has primarily been on developing junior provision and 'No Strings' sessions. These have led to the establishment of new adult and social clubs, but there has not been a direct impact on these clubs in terms of how they operate, so at this stage they remain neutral rather than for or against the strategy.

The map in figure 7.5 resembles a 'dream ticket' according to Scholes (2001) where there are several champions of the strategy and no powerful opponents. Potential threats to the continuing success of the development group include complacency amongst key players (Scholes 2001). It is also crucial that they keep the other organisations and players informed and satisfied; for example if the 'No Strings' Badminton sessions were to be unsuccessful it is likely that Bury sport and leisure facilities would lose interest in the strategy and possibly be unsupportive of future ventures. There is also the potential for conflict between partners should the strategic objectives of key players change. For example, should Badminton England change its focus to exclusively concentrating on talent identification and development at the expense of its current strategic objectives of increasing participation? This could potentially lead to conflicting agendas with other key players, and also impact on the relationships with the other organisations shown on the matrix.

#### *Supporting Partnerships:*

The S within the PiiSA framework focuses on structure and whether the systems in which the partnership is developing are fit for purpose, i.e. whether the structure / system in which the partnership is developing is dynamic and

flexible enough to meet changing demands of the partners and / or the intervention. Successful partnerships will have structures that enable and empower rather than disable and disempower those involved. This also relates to the power / interest matrix above where the badminton development group needs to be flexible to meet the demands of a wide range of partners. Without an ability to do this, it is unlikely that the development group would benefit from the support base it currently possesses or be able to implement its strategy as successfully.

This aspect of partnership work has to be supported by education and training, so extent to which those involved immediately in the partnership have the requisite skills to support others to support themselves more effectively is important. This means that SDPs (and others) have to micro-manage the system to ensure that it remains fit for purpose and at the same time recognise their individual weaknesses, in order that the partnership is able to continue to be effective; a positive cycle of development if you will. As Frisby, Thibault and Kikulis (2004) warn, many partnerships fail to meet expectations because little attention is paid to managing the web of partner relationships that emerge. Their research on organisational dynamics in partnerships within leisure service departments discovered that the three structural dynamics that created issues within partnership were a lack of planning and policy guidelines, unclear roles and reporting channels and insufficient resources. Frequently, partnerships are neglected once established and almost expected to function effectively with no maintenance or attention. It is also common to find that there are no leadership structures in place, with no single partner taking responsibility for driving the partnership forward and 'gentlemen's agreements' taking the place of formalised actions / decisions. Shaw and Allen (2006) describe this as a 'lack of management intensity' where partners are unwilling to intervene in the management of the partnership. Conversely they also counsel against over-management, in particular a hierarchical arrangement which may also blunt the partnership's effectiveness. It is therefore essential to establish a common framework for working that achieves both a balance between over- and under-management, but that also establishes clear partnership goals and communication channels and provides internal accountability.

#### *Taking Action:*

Action is the final factor of the PiiSA framework and reflects the organisation's capacity to take action in terms of resource and capability. This element requires organisations to be clear about outputs (and therefore overall outcomes) and the objectives required to achieve these outputs in the short term. Taking action is the hardest element of partnership working. Frequently partnerships are very successful at producing strategic documents, but poor at making decisions and implementing them (Asthana, Richardson and Halliday 2002). Clearly without the partnership generating outputs and outcomes it will be less able to develop a broad support base for its work or attract potential partners to invest in that partnership. Producing results was and is crucial to the success of the badminton development group shown in figure 7.5 and has allowed it to gain political support for its work, namely from other departments within Bury MBC and also the Primary Care Trust. This not

only raised the group's profile but also creates the possibility of additional resources for its work. In addition, I&DeA (2009) warns against the development of 'talking shops' which can ultimately lead to a lack of action and frustration amongst partners, and crucially a complete failure to implement strategy.

#### *Partnership Appraisal:*

The PiiSA framework allows those working within partnerships to assess and appraise the effectiveness of their relationships. One of the common weaknesses within sport development is a lack of willingness to terminate partnerships when they have served their purpose or are not fulfilling expectations. Instead SDPs contribute to pre-existing feelings of partnership fatigue by continuing to undertake partnership business, even in the form of meetings that become talking shops and achieve very little, because of an inability to 'pull the plug'. Whether this is due to pressure to work in partnership wherever possible or due to the members of the partnership each being unwilling to suggest termination is unclear. What is evident is that partnerships without purpose continue to be a drain on already stretched resources. Parent and Harvey (2009) argue that evaluation of partnerships is frequently forgotten despite an honest appraisal of successes and failures having the potential to result in future improvements. Unfortunately, resources spent on evaluation are often seen as taking resources away from delivery, and thus not prioritised. Utilising an action learning approach to evaluation, for example, creates a cyclical process of evaluation and promotes continuous improvement.

### **Working together in the future**

If developed in the right way, with high levels of critical consciousness, partnerships allow, and fundamentally demand the growth of trust, respect and cohesion within communities (Gilchrist 2003). Within community settings, strategic sport development should be concerned with long-term, sustainable change and 'thoughtful action' (Ledwith 2005) and in order for this to be achieved, the SDP needs to have appropriate skills (i.e. be an authentic transformative leader) and utilise partnerships effectively in order to enable communities to fulfil their own potential. The value of real collaboration over and above working in silos (or, in fact, in paper partnerships) should not be underestimated in the war against physical inactivity.

### **Learning activities**

#### **Developing Skills**

For a partnership you have knowledge of, attempt to locate organisations within a power / interest matrix. You should initially attempt the current version of the matrix and then move onto articulating the desired future state. You should focus specifically on identifying how this future state will be achieved.

## Developing Knowledge

Using the proposed typology of partnerships as well as the PiiSA framework, analyse the strengths and weaknesses of an organisation with which you are familiar. You should identify improvements to practice wherever possible.

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