

Local authority?

*How to develop leadership
for better public services*

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with Matthew Horne

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Foreword

Leadership has never been more important in public services, but the nature of leadership is changing. Charismatic individuals capable of driving organisations may not have all the skills necessary to lead in the future. While theory textbooks now identify the difference between transactional and transformational leadership, managers on the ground are learning about new spaces in which leadership has to be exercised.

New governance spaces, and new organisational forms are emerging. Networks and partnerships between agencies are becoming as important as single organisations in delivering public services. Public agencies are forging new sorts of relationships with their communities and their customers – which require the active negotiation of social outcomes, and require shared commitment and shared responsibility. But we have yet to create the conditions in which local leadership can thrive.

Local strategic partnerships, for example, offer the potential to break out of old and failed systems, but they are fragile and face enormous challenges. Command-and-control cannot work, since to achieve social goals people with very different interests and experiences have to learn to work together, to compromise, to pool resources. We need new models of leadership, if we are to break out of old behaviours. Much of the success of new sorts of partnerships, and new organisations such as public-private initiatives, consortia, education trusts, primary care trusts, housing companies and public interest companies will depend on their ability to build widespread consent and legitimacy for new approaches.

As agencies become better at listening, they are discovering the sheer diversity of community interests and needs. Simply consulting ‘the community’ is not enough. Leaders are having to find ways to build consensus through many different lived experiences and perceptions, to draw on the richness of this experience to build new solutions.

Danny Chesterman and Matthew Horne show how, by drawing on learning from the field, we can begin to build a shared literacy about modern leadership in partnership situations. They argue that leadership cannot exist outside socially constructed relationships, and therefore leadership inevitably requires an ability to understand and work effectively within those relationships.

These days leadership in public services is not confined within an organisation, but extends across a ‘web of interests held together through a network of relationships’. The crucial factor recognised here is that the leadership role is not to try and win a struggle between different realities, but to ‘converse across different realities in order to negotiate meaningful action.’ It is through the process of *interaction* that new solutions can be forged.

Networks and partnerships are not simply new vehicles for service delivery. If partners come away having successfully defended their ideas and their territory, partnerships will fail. Partnerships are vital crucibles for learning – places where people with different ways of seeing and thinking can come together and create solutions that cannot even be ‘thought’ in old silos. For this to work, partnerships must find ways of working that don’t replicate the old – and must change the work process radically – from the committee meeting to a process of shared exploration.

Externally imposed solutions won’t work, not simply because they seldom fit local circumstances, but because they smash through the very process of shared exploration that can create breakthrough.

Not everyone in central government understands or values the new governance spaces, or the new forms of leadership that are emerging. There is an important educative task ahead. Despite the creative energy that went in to supporting local strategic partnerships and a wide range of local networks, government still tries to drive delivery through old systems. By treating fragile partnerships as if they were simply ‘agents’

of government, they risk destroying them. Partnerships are too easily overloaded and hamstrung by rigid requirements, guidance, monitoring systems and over-control which comes inevitably through civil service departments less able to grasp and work within complex local situations than local actors themselves.

Creative leaders recognise that public agencies are not machines, but collections of people in relationship. Public services rely on the energy and commitment of those people who are actively negotiating the relationship between the state and civil society. Much of that interface depends, not on white papers or policy – but on the actions of individual members of staff, teachers, social workers, youth workers, receptionists. They are often struggling to make sense of change, trying to respond to conflicting demands, to the public's insistence on more for less, trying to balance efficiency and responsiveness to local needs, modern delivery systems and social values.

Everyone in public service is an explorer, trying to find new ways to improve people's lives. Good leaders sustain and nurture this process of exploration. At the moment they are trying to do so within delivery systems that are outdated and over-controlled, and without a theory of leadership which properly understands either the problems they face, or the capabilities they are developing to respond. This book is an important step in changing this.

Sue Goss
Director of National, Regional and Local Services
Office of Public Management

1. Local leadership in partnership

This report addresses a challenge that has become widely recognised in political and public debate in recent years, but is not yet fully understood: the need to develop a new capacity for leadership, at a local level, in complex settings characterised by partnership across agencies and communities.

The importance and profile of cross-agency collaboration have risen steadily as a result of the UK government's emphasis on improving public service delivery and in response to the increasing complexity and intractability of the social challenges encountered by local communities. 'Modernisation' of local government and public services has been promoted as an answer, and policy-makers have tried a number of ideas, including local strategic partnerships and directly elected mayors, in an attempt to stimulate new forms of cross-cutting leadership.

But so far, though there are many examples of improvement in service delivery and promising practice in community engagement, government and public agencies are still struggling to find a coherent and credible approach to the engagement of communities in solving public problems or generating legitimacy for leaders and public institutions.

Our report seeks to address the issues underlying this frustration by re-examining why leadership in a partnership context is really necessary, and by shaping the emerging issues into an agenda for practical action and policy change. We have not sought to present a comprehensive review of current practice or evidence of effectiveness. Our research has involved talking to a wide range of people involved in

efforts to revitalise public services and local community life (see the appendix for details).

Local leadership in a partnership context is important for three reasons:

- social problems cut across disciplines
- solutions to social problems require inter-agency and community partnerships
- globalisation increases rather than eliminates the need to act locally to tackle social problems.

Social problems cut across disciplines

Most of the social problems and aspirations that still affect communities and individuals have wide roots, which spread beyond the domain of single disciplines. Crime, poverty, health, education and unemployment are intimately interrelated; both causes and consequences are dispersed through the wider social system.

It follows, therefore, that single agencies, professions or localities cannot solve these problems or realise their aspirations on their own. As a participant at the Whitehall and Industry (WIG) focus group said: 'Partnerships are vital to achieving social reform.' Our argument is that more collaboration is necessary, not just between agencies, but in the way we think. A new health system that focuses on health rather than ill-health needs to bring together fragmented components of the existing system that have been separated into social services, primary care, acute care and emergency care. Health offers a good example of a field where national government has been busy in seeking to encourage collaboration and integration between traditionally separate service providers, but changing the structures of health care also demands that we adapt our ways of thinking about health.

Public sector partnerships operate at a high level of complexity because there is 'no [single] common objective, instead a set of conflicting ideas about the purpose of public service and what constitutes the public interest'.¹ Such ambiguity of purpose is in the very nature of government. But the implications of that ambiguity and complexity mean that it is often hard to predict how the whole system (as distinct from its discrete parts) will react to particular interventions.

Current concern about management and performance within various health agencies is justified, but neglects to recognise sufficiently the importance of what occurs in between them. Bed blocking is a classic recent example. Hospitals cannot increase efficiency and throughput unless there is adequate provision for discharged patients provided through social services. Recent efforts to provide financial incentives for hospitals and social services to work together, by penalising bed blocking, have been criticised for producing perverse outcomes.² At an operational level, the need to bridge gaps between agencies is as urgent as the need to improve the current performance of discrete public sector institutions.

Partnerships between agencies are currently seen as the best way to tackle the most complex intractable social problems, but partnerships between agencies are not enough. The effectiveness of agencies involved in the prevention and detection of crime relies on information from the public. The improvement of the nation's health depends on the public's taking responsibility for healthier life styles. Raising standards of education in schools depends on the active involvement of parents. If the relationships and trust between these communities and public service agencies is broken, no amount of inter-agency collaboration will deliver the step changes in the production of public goods that we seek.

The partnership imperative

As our awareness of interdependence grows, public agencies are required to collaborate more and more. Community planning, public service agreements, local strategic partnerships, health action zones and neighbourhood renewal schemes are just a few examples of a trend from permitting collaboration to requiring it. New Labour has attempted to 'join up' what is visible to the citizen: the delivery of its services and policies. Phrases like 'community leadership', 'partnership working' and 'joined up government' are now widely used. On the surface, 'partnerships' and 'joined up government' are ideas that are universally welcome. However, these terms can mask a complexity that lies just beneath the surface.

Our argument is that there is a preoccupation among policy-makers in national and local government with joining up the visible parts of

the system: the policies and structures that we can see. The more pressing need is to join up the ways we see. The recent government white paper on local leadership is a clear example.³ The proposal that the Audit Commission classifies local authorities in one of four categories reinforces the current ways we have of seeing: central government (or its proxy) is the dominant scrutineer, and it is the performance of individual institutions that gets scrutinised. This approach maintains a gaze on a single part of the system without examining the wider context. The alternative, to set up processes by which the whole system in a locality (including central government) reflects on the cumulative impact of its interactions together, is too often avoided. This remains the case despite the fact that our collective track record in tackling inner city problems, poverty and social exclusion is not impressive.

In Kent, an inter-agency learning set focusing on how to deliver the cross-cutting targets within a public service agreement heard how the intention of the county council was that the establishment of common targets would stimulate the underlying substructure and systems to join up as well, through a self-organising response.⁴ But the learning set concluded that a precondition of success was that the main players spent time ‘growing up together’ so that they could understand more about each other’s ways of seeing.

A prominent theme in our conversations was that networks of relationships where people had ‘grown together’ were absolutely vital. Every time there is a restructuring these relationships are fractured. Within the set we had experience of well-intended investment of public money failing to deliver because the local networks of relationships were patchy or fragile. We speculated that the support of local learning networks is a key leadership task before a PSA is negotiated, not afterwards.⁵

The preoccupation with what is seen (by the dominant party) obscures understanding of the different ways people and their organisations see. Policies have focused on what agents see, think and do, and not on ways of seeing, ways of thinking and ways of acting. Policies have created partnerships as products, rather than organic processes and within partnerships individual leaders have been developed rather than collective

leadership processes. The goal of joining up services has been overtaken by the desire to be seen to join up services. The goal of increased local leadership has been overtaken by the desire to see local leaders. Examples from our study cover a range of different policy areas at local government level.

Health and education action zones have been created without first developing the capacity for cross boundary working. The result is organisation-centric rather than citizen-centric action. Organisations are enthusiastic members when they are recipients of tangible benefits, but when they are asked to change their existing practices or sacrifice long-cherished independence their enthusiasm and commitment declines.

Community plans are being created without first building the capacity for involving community members in what John Stewart calls a deliberative democracy.⁶

Ambitious public service agreements exist without integrated multi-agency management structures or arrangements for whole system learning.

Partnerships have been established along dominant bureaucratic lines before the participants have developed the capacity to talk meaningfully and openly together.⁷

Best value has been superimposed on traditional public service internal review systems without a developed capacity for dialogue with citizens.

There have been well-intentioned and effective innovations at the national level. The Social Exclusion Unit, Sure Start, Jobcentre Plus, Standards and Effectiveness Unit, Performance and Innovation Unit, Delivery Unit, Forward Strategy Unit and the Department for the Environment and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) all indicate a willingness to redraw agency boundaries. However, the core structures of government, the professions and the political institutions remain powerfully intact. In our research, civil servants described their frustration at the current

separation of strategic policy-making from daily operational activity. While there has been a great deal of innovation at the strategic policy level, this has had little impact on the operational structures of most major departments. Indeed, the strengthening of vertical inspection regimes, targets and central-funding controls has resulted in less room to work beyond traditional jurisdictions. During our research we heard common messages from a range of different public sector professionals.

Managers of personnel professionals involved in this study described how their attempts to be innovative and creative were set within fundamentally bureaucratic cultures and therefore resulted in overwhelming their colleagues with policies and procedures.⁸

Over-zealous use of national targets can distort local judgements. Research by Wiggins and Tymms shows that English schools are more likely to concentrate on their targets at the expense of other important objectives.⁹ This may for example have a negative effect on pupils' next stage of education, due to lack of skills and abilities not measured by the key performance indicators.

Community planners described how well-intentioned attempts to engage members of local communities became rushed and bureaucratic consultation exercises, which scratched the surface of opinion of an unrepresentative group of citizens.¹⁰

Less is more

Ten years ago politicians would have responded to this unified response from public sector professionals as an indication of political resistance, reluctance to change and vested interest. Now central government's response is to vow to consult more effectively on the next wave of new policies. An example of this is the Local Government Association, which is regularly consulted about policy in a way that was unthinkable just a few years ago. However, welcome as this shift is, it still misses the fundamental message that central government should develop less policy in the first place. For example, Andrew Mawson, a leading social entrepreneur, demands less and less of policy-makers: 'Stop trying to do things everywhere at once. Forget your 368 initiatives – just get three

right. Start growing things inside out and start to follow the flows and rhythms of the community. Don't try and get them to dance to the civil servant's tune.' Leadership is often about doing less not more.

For Frank Green, principal of a city technology college, the very essence of leadership is about learning not to do things. Successful school leadership is based on building successful teams that enable as much operational activity to be delegated as possible. Only then can the leadership of the school engage in the crucial process of vision creation and strategic development. The challenge for head teachers and principals is to enforce delegation to the point of action. Often middle managers in schools bypass the right layer of decision-making and go right to the top, while senior managers who aspire to becoming a school leader find it most difficult to push decision-making and responsibility down the organisational hierarchy. Although these teachers want the experience of decision-making, they often bemoan the trivial nature of the decisions with which they deal. The challenge to political leaders is similar. They must learn when not to intervene, and learn how new policies enable them to abandon old ones.

David Triggs had a similar message:

You have to invert the organisational pyramid and recognise that you are the most insignificant person in the organisation as far as day-to-day management is concerned because people are empowered to do the job. . . . Most head teachers delegate responsibility and accountability. Well, they have two out of the three. Authority is key. Without authority there is no delegation. . . . To give authority you have to trust people, and when you trust people they will make mistakes.

Members of partnerships often know where they want to go, but feel lost in the processes of creating partnerships. Without support for the process of partnership-building individuals find themselves unable to pursue the goals that are most important to them.¹¹

The importance of local action

Globalisation paradoxically makes local action even more important. It is widely recognised that individuals, communities and govern-

ments at any level cannot solve problems on their own. Solving the most intractable problems depends on being able to mobilise effort through a complex web of formal and informal networks.

Problems are too complex to be remedied by global or national intervention alone. At the University of West of England (UWE) we discussed how increase of interdependence and complexity challenges the effectiveness and legitimacy of the traditional nation state, without reducing the need for public action to tackle common problems. The result is that more and more people from the private sector and from communities are brought into the process of the government and asked to take distributed responsibility for tackling challenges that might once have been seen as solely the preserve of government and the public sector.

However, just as the need for partnership working is increasing, so other trends are weakening the ability of traditional institutions to facilitate these partnerships. Participants at UWE highlighted how recent change has simultaneously involved centralisation and decentralisation of state power. Local government has seen much of its powers ceded simultaneously to national government and to local organisations like schools and hospitals. Regional government is as likely to draw even more powers away from local authorities as it is to draw powers down from central government.

Some have argued that the relationship between the local and the national should be ‘fixed’ by restoring the traditional functions of local authorities, or creating the ‘right’ balance between institutional boundaries and collaboration. But our argument is that traditional hierarchical organisations, wherever their boundaries or however wide their powers, cannot now meet the demands that arise at the user interface. The key issue is that the constantly shifting distribution of powers in the system demands continual adaptive thinking: building the capacity of adaptive systems and adaptive organisations to respond to changing environments.

A recent Demos report showed how the concept of ‘complex adaptive systems’ is useful to an understanding of how public services operate. ‘The main source of understanding the characteristics and properties of complex adaptive systems is observation of natural or living systems’. If public service organisations are considered in this way, the approach

which attempts to effect change by treating systems as small manageable units becomes obvious. A complex adaptive system has to be treated as a whole entity, which has clear implications for a target-setting approach to change which focuses on specific parts of the system rather than overall performance. The conclusion reached by Chapman is that ‘the only effective judge of performance is the end-user’.

The ‘local’ as social context

‘Local’ is not limited to a sense of geography. It goes much deeper, to the particular conditions that occur within a person’s immediate social context: their family, their friends and their home. It is at this level that our public services succeed or fail. This implies a huge degree of diversity at the point where policies and institutions touch individual citizens. For us, it is also inextricably linked with the principle of self-government, through which the natural tensions between individual and communal interests are moderated. Without local leadership any amount of sophisticated national policy-making will have a limited effect in securing improvements in the quality of people’s lives.

While our definition of local is deep, our definition of partnership is broad. We see partnership as any form of collaborative endeavour, from simply taking into account the views of others to full-scale joint investment within a legal framework. Similarly, we do not limit our enquiries to inter-organisational partnerships but also embrace collaborations between client groups, local politicians and social entrepreneurs.

If local action is to achieve meaningful improvement in citizens’ lives, greater attention to the relationship between thinking and doing is required – what could be called the spaces between the words. At the moment, the emphasis is on trying to get lateral coherence across the range of social policy domains, but improvements in the health of communities and the well-being of citizens will not be achieved by thinking up more integrated policies. The integration will come from finding new ways of combining policy-making with practice.

The old linear models of policy formation, consultation and implementation need to be replaced by a process where policy creation, experimentation, reflection and adjustment occur simultaneously, or

at least iteratively. And the processes of talking, listening, thinking, working and acting together demand a very different sort of leadership.

Our perspective on leadership

We prefer to see leadership as a phenomenon conferred on groups and individuals by others. It is not a role that comes automatically from seniority, age or electoral mandate. It is not a role that individuals can assume for themselves. Leadership is not self-mandating. Heifetz explains that leadership is fundamentally relational: ‘People in power change their ways when the sources of their authority change their expectations. Their behaviour [as leaders] is an expression of the community that authorises them.’¹² Leadership is only meaningful when understood within a social context.

The characterisation that participants in our research process felt most comfortable with also came from Heifetz: ‘Leadership is activity which mobilises adaptation.’¹³

In a partnership context, leadership is not defined simply by ‘followership’ but by collaborative endeavour. It implies multi-directional motion rather than linear motion, adaptation rather than change, and influence through rather than on the environment.

This presents a big challenge to the conventional assumptions about leadership embodied in much current policy, where the emphasis is on identifying individuals capable of carrying out demanding, pre-defined leadership roles.

For example, a group of local authority chief executives conceived of their own leadership as a space occupied by many people at different times.¹⁴ Sometimes that space was congested, sometimes empty. Who was occupying these spaces at any one time was a function of several factors:

- the history of the institution
- the divide between officers and politicians
- positions taken by other institutions, notably central government
- the tensions between public presentation and private activity.

Zoë van Zwanenberg, chief executive of the Scottish Leadership Foundation, suggested a popular metaphor for leadership in a modern day context:

Leadership is like a jazz band, where all the members of the band have expertise in their own field, but they have to be able to relate to one another and to the context they are in. They need to be able to improvise with what is given to them in terms of theme, and rhythm and to be able to pick up from one another and develop the work further. The sum is greater than the parts and the whole process is generative rather than passive.

Our analysis invites you to think of leadership as the function of a system, not the property of an individual. This does not mean that individuals are irrelevant. Participants at the University of West of England focus group made it clear that ‘leadership is about process rather than personality, but do not get rid of the individual leaders before new systems and structures for leadership are in place’. How we establish those systems and structures, the necessary conditions for contemporary leadership, is the subject of this book.

Local transformation invariably involves working across boundaries of all sorts, not just policy innovation or structural reform. Fundamentally social problems cannot be solved through abstracted analysis, no matter how clever it is. It is in the messiness and unpredictability of working it out through action at the local level that problems are (dis)solved. Our eyes are not accustomed to noticing the sort of leadership that operates in the relative darkness behind the floodlit stage.

2. The leadership discourse

Learning and adaptation

At the heart of developing local leadership in a partnership context is the idea of deliberation, the measured process by which communities of interest bring to the surface their diverse aspirations, experience the dilemmas in their midst, explore different perspectives and gradually come to an accommodation of competing claims. This is very different from simply making decisions, which is the process on which our democratic institutions are predominantly built. Without deliberation, the whole system cannot learn and adapt. And unless the whole system learns, including the communities who mandate their public institutions, we will not be able to improve the nation's health significantly, reduce the incidence of crime or raise educational attainment.

We argue that this deliberation or discourse is a leadership activity. It follows therefore that the quality of leadership is a function of who takes part in the conversation and how they communicate with one another. In this section we examine how the stage is set for our public discourse.

As well as attributing leadership failures to inadequate individuals, our difficulties in sustaining local leadership processes have also been attributed either to the 'resistant' cultures of public agencies, or the apathy or disengagement of communities. This description of the 'problem' leads to efforts to change the cultures and encourage democratic participation. But by and large our collective attempts to change cultures have failed. In our focus groups, social entrepreneurs and community activists reported that they still experienced local authorities as bureaucratic and slow. Local government officials experienced

civil servants as centralising and averse to risk, and so on. Likewise, efforts to encourage voting at local elections have only been effective at the margins. It is time to try a different framing of the ‘problem’.

Relationship and difference

We are arguing the case for discourse to focus not on individuals, organisations or communities but on the relationships between them. Somehow we forget that public organisations are part of a system in which power and meaning flow both ways: as individuals in communities we authorise public organisations to exist but at the same time gain a sense of identity from those same organisations. For example, communities authorise their councils to provide old people’s accommodation, and schools. Those homes and schools then in turn create a sense of identity for those who use them. One does not exist without the other.

This relational view should also be applied to the connection between policy and practice (or implementation). While policy sets objectives and resources in the abstract, it can only really be understood in a specific, applied context. On this view, policy and practice need to be able to adjust continually in response to what they can learn from each other.

For example, some early signs suggest that the success of Sure Start can be partly ascribed to the combination of clear outcome objectives with a high degree of openness about the details of policy and implementation, and a learning approach. Sandra Shears, manager of Ipswich Sure Start, says:

To a large extent we have had to work it out as we’ve gone along. . . . We found the so-called hard to reach groups were not hard to reach at all if we went to them with an open mind. . . . The staff here are developing into a different kind of practitioner, where they draw on their professional skills but are not dominated by them.

It is through language that distinctions like those between policy and practice, purchaser and provider or between public organisations and local communities are socially constructed and maintained. Most of the

time we operate as if these distinctions were obvious and fixed. But a short reflection reminds us that they are not. For example, is an unpaid volunteer helper in a school part of the 'organisation' of the school? Is a council officer also a member of the local community? Which is the 'real' policy? The one that is claimed in the rhetoric or the one that exists as part of custom and practice? Leadership in public service is concerned with the distinctions we otherwise take for granted. It is a process by which relationships are reconstructed. Changing the discourse, speaking from different voices, changes the relationships between things because it creates a different reality we can act into. As Sue Goss puts it:

Social formations in the past have not found reasons enough to persuade the powerful to enter into meaningful dialogue with the powerless, and unless the powerless are able to articulate their own desires and to act, within the political process, the 'new' politics will remain rhetoric.¹⁵

The voices of dissent

Local leadership is often associated with new ways of framing problems from the citizen's perspective. Understandably, those who have the most compelling reasons to solve local problems are the most effective at creating solutions. Dissenting customers, citizens or voices within organisations are the very stuff of transformatory leadership. Julia Middleton of Common Purpose described the ideal citizen as the person who creates problems for professionals. The most memorable and effective examples of local leadership (such as those below) often seem to involve individuals who have not been prominent in the leadership process before. It appears that including individuals who are normally silent or unheard often leads to outstanding leadership. However, it is important to note that these individuals need their voice to be heard on their terms.

At Weston, a group of family doctors, community trust professionals and care workers developed common standards for care.¹⁶ Rather than try to integrate in abstract the social and medical models of care, the cross-disciplinary team took a more practical approach. It worked through a series of individual case histories together, which enabled it

to create a common standards framework. The care workers did not 'speak the same language' as the professionals, but their voices were key to developing policy based on practical experiences. The care workers described the physical and emotional circumstances of their clients in their own way. As a result, common standards of care began to emerge through the telling of these stories. Integrating medical and social approaches to care proved achievable in practice because those with the most intimate knowledge of the customers in their homes were enabled, with professional help, to contribute to the discussion.

Andrew Mawson is clear that the best way to ensure that policy-makers and professionals hear the knowledge held by members of a deprived community is through storytelling. Articulating the experiences of non-professionals in their own language is the most honest way of ensuring that the professional culture does not swallow the detail of local community life. He described how the language of regeneration policy with its SRBs, NDCs, NRU and LSPs is not understood by the people it is designed to help.

A similar example can be seen in the area of children with special educational needs. The knowledge and voices of classroom assistants, volunteers and parents is vital if the local authority is to make the best judgements about each child. But the voice of knowledgeable para-professionals and non-professionals needs careful handling if it is to be heard clearly among the voices of more powerful professionals in the decision-making process.¹⁷ In this context, we address the potential power of dialogue later in this section.

Devices that counter the normal distribution of power among professionals can help to create the conditions for that knowledge to emerge. In Dumfries and Galloway, the Director of Social Services was concerned that the voices of professionals would drown out the voice of service users when a decision was needed on the future of a mental health centre. The Board was made up of five groups: the Health Board, the social services, an independent organisation called Capability Scotland, the Health Council, and a user representative group. To balance the voices, the Board instigated a simple device that gave the user group a 50 per cent weighting in decision-making: the votes of the representatives of the users counted for half of all the votes.

In Walsall the council used action-learning teams comprising council officers, politicians and members of the public in an attempt to improve community relations.

Other stories illustrate different ways of disturbing the normal patterns of thinking and conversation. Slough Council achieved lasting impact in tackling the growing problem of unemployed and disaffected youth when they set up a research team made up of some of the unemployed, disaffected young people. The research eventually led to the formation of the Nai Roshni Partnership, which in due course launched a wide range of successful projects, including peer-led drugs education work and the building of 37 single-unit housing units:

The progress of the Youth Team itself reflected many of these concerns. One member was made homeless, another was served with an eviction notice and threatened with homelessness, and some young women were unable to join the team through cultural restrictions, others from lack of confidence. Dealing with English as a second language sapped confidence from a bright team member. . . . Working as a team the young people provided mutual support to meet the challenges of working with the public, shared knowledge of different ways of getting on the route to a job, shared life experiences from similar and very different backgrounds, developed many new skills and networks.¹⁸

The leadership role in setting the conditions for dialogue

From the East Riding of Yorkshire we heard how a local businessman had been invited to take up the lead role in community planning. The Chief Executive of the Unitary Council recognised that his own leadership was best exercised behind the scenes. In this way the local strategic partnership was able to have a dialogue without the Unitary Council's voice being privileged. Similarly Northamptonshire Education Authority heard more diverse voices when it used an external facilitator to engage the local community on educational issues. It seems that local leadership often involves the organisational leaders taking a

back seat, using intermediaries to create the conditions for productive dialogue.

In some cases drawing clear distinctions about which parts of the process are held in public and which are held in private helps people to voice and hear perspectives that might be unexpected. Warnock describes how there was a particularly impressive process at Ballymoney in which the discourse was in public and the voting in private.¹⁹ This helped people become more confident in participating in dialogue and achieve a very strong level of commitment to an overall vision and working partnership:

In Ballymoney the methodology we created together looks at first sight somewhat paradoxical. For the result is confidential open discussion . . . it is a new hybrid and it has superior vigour and great synergy. It works better than the classical private meetings followed by the separate presentation of findings.

The first step is to assemble participants in largish workshops. We had between 20 and 70 at a time. Using PowerPoint slides the workshop leader begins by opening up the key issues one by one, ensuring understanding through discussion in open plenary session. Then when half a dozen issues, or sub issues, have been discussed delegates are asked to go into confidential secret ballot mode on the batch of issues just discussed. At that point they will see in the screen a slide that is reproduced as a tear-out page in their conference pack. They are invited to record their votes, in secret, and are then asked to hand in the vote set to be included in an overall analysis. (Ideally this aggregate data is then fed back to the whole group in real time.) This is followed by further discussion in the issue set. During this discussion delegates are asked to raise further related issues. This discussion is recorded both on flip chart and by a clerk who captures the detail.²⁰

In all these cases, imagination was required not only in thinking differently about whom to engage in conversation, but also being willing to develop a new way of communicating. It is important to recognise that professionals can overpower smaller voices relatively easily.

Intermediaries can be used to enable conversation in a common language among equal citizens rather than an exclusive conversation among professionals, politicians or bureaucrats.

Developing the practice of dialogue in the wider society

Those who have benefited from experience abroad comment on the distinctively adversarial nature of discourse in the United Kingdom. Our justice system is built on the principle of advocacy and disputation. The French system is built on the principle of investigation. Our education system values debate above dialogue and knowledge over wisdom.²¹ Our political system values argument over enquiry and confrontation over coalition. Developing young people's skills of dialogue at school, college and university are essential to shifting the cultural importance of dialogue throughout society.²²

Some provisional conclusions

What we deduced from the accounts we heard was that local leadership in a partnership context does not come from grand plans nor from strategic partnerships, though these are sometimes useful, but more often from the small quiet corners where people with hugely diverse perspectives examine and work out the dilemmas of modern society.

When we reviewed the stories we heard about leadership in partnership our conclusion was that the common factor was the quality of dialogue. It was the dialogue itself that was the transformative factor in the relationships between end-users and the commissioners and providers of local services. The next chapter sets out nine avenues through which we might improve the quality of those dialogues.

3. Developing increased capacity for local leadership

In this chapter we offer suggestions in nine areas, all aimed at developing an increased capacity for local leadership in a partnership context. Each suggestion focuses on a relationship between forces in the system. The nine areas are:

- planning in partnership
- promoting dialogue
- opening up the professions
- from human resources to human relationships
- developing leadership teams
- from inspection to expectation
- researching in action
- supporting social entrepreneurs
- a new politics of relationships.

3.1 Planning in partnership

This section outlines the relationship between different planning systems, talking and acting, and planning and reviewing.

Different planning systems

We have commented earlier on the growing requirement for joined up planning. However, people report great difficulty in planning in unison. One of the first problems to surface is that the planning processes used by each of the partner agencies vary. Sometimes they work on differ-

ent planning cycles and time horizons. Some agencies need to test their plans through local democratic political machinery (such as local councils), others (like the health service) do not. Geographical areas of jurisdiction are often not coterminous. Some agencies are under an obligation to form partnerships, others not. Several local authority chief executives consider that the consequence is often that adjacent agencies only play lip service to the arrangements. From the other agencies' perspective, local authorities are guilty of assuming that, because a process is high profile and important in one organisation, it has equivalent importance in adjacent organisations. This is also paralleled in the relationship between central and local government.

A good example of this manifested itself in the Kent inter-agency learning set, mentioned above, which was established to develop reciprocal understanding of how public service agreements could be made to work. An extract from a paper it produced capturing its interim thoughts makes the point:

What we've noticed so far includes:

- All public sector agencies have targets set or imposed outside of the PSA framework. These have a powerful influence on where management attention is focused (e.g. reducing waiting lists) and will impact on the otherwise laudable intention to encourage a 'self-organising' response to the public service agreement (PSA) targets by the various agencies.
- Several senior managers from key agencies in Kent County Council are unaware of the PSA. Because it has such a high profile and importance in KCC there is a danger of assuming it has a high profile and importance elsewhere.
- Other significant and influential plans, e.g. the NHS Plan, do not yet fully accommodate the PSA. There is a 'time lag' for strategies to develop coherently but joint ownership is critical in bringing them together.

In the field of community planning a number of chief executives in local authorities told us that community planning would be more effective if adjacent agencies such as health and housing trusts, police and so on were

required to participate actively. They felt that there was a case for extending the legislation so that community planning is genuinely cross sector. Glaister and Travers describe how, in the case of the CrossRail project, the UK's 'slow, complex and often antiquated planning system' makes it almost impossible to realise a project even where there is wide public support.²³ In our fragmented system, the unintended consequence is that the interests of the parts take precedence over the interests of the whole.

The problem is exacerbated because, certainly at local level, different public service agencies do not share a common data set. Admittedly there are complex ethical issues around the exchange of data about families at risk between police, fire, health, social services and housing, but exchange of such data is essential if we are to move the emphasis from curative to preventative public services. While the public needs to be engaged in the difficult dilemmas in this area, it is possible in the meantime to make a lot of progress by joining up the data that is already in the public domain. For example, Torfaen Borough Council made a successful bid for European money to fund a geographical information system that presents cross-agency data on health and well-being at ward level. Such integrated data is essential for joined up planning.

Talking and acting

These arguments point towards the need for a more joined up planning process, wherein the interests of the parts and the whole can be better balanced, but while joined up planning systems are necessary they are not sufficient. The complexity of civil society now requires us to rethink what we might mean by planning in partnership. In particular, we need to reinvent the relationship between talking and acting. Unless there is a bias for action, integrated communal planning won't sustain the attentions of those who are being lured strongly elsewhere.

Currently our prevailing model of planning is built on assumptions of linear cause and effect, predictability and rationality, which are troublesome even within organisations, let alone in partnership contexts.²⁴ The first assumption is that consensus is necessary by all before any partnership can act collaboratively. Deciding who has the 'power to agree' leads to a preoccupation with who is in, and who is outside, the partnership. We talk as if agreement is a precondition for action. It isn't. But sufficient trust is. And the evidence suggests that 'agreements' do

not generate trust. Given the difficulties we identified above, it's not surprising that action in partnership is repeatedly deferred. If it's deferred too much, people lose heart in the process.

The second assumption is that this consensus is achievable through language. It's as if we expect a jazz group to learn how to play together in harmony without ever picking up their instruments. Minutes and plans are repeatedly recrafted so that the 'right' words are chosen to convey the message. Those in existing positions of authority invariably select the 'right' words, so power relationships get reinforced. But words mean different things to different people, depending on the associations they have with those words as a result of their own life experience. And words spoken in one context, with a particular tone of voice and body language, can signify something very different when committed to paper and read in a different context. We have some suggestions to make on this in the section on dialogue that follows.

An alternative approach is to build in a bias for action on the ground right from the start, connecting with others and learning as we go. Geoff Mulgan, head of the Performance and Innovation Unit, believes: 'The skills of deep listening and partnership working have to be learned by doing. They cannot, in this sense, be taught.'

In practice this could mean being more willing to suspend 'meaning making' until after acting, when we reflect together on what we have done. We need to interrupt the natural resistance of our systems (and ourselves) to change, by finding things to do together, in different combinations, rather than forever chasing the mirage of overarching consensus. Local leadership is not waiting for the policy framework to become clear before you act; it is being willing to act in lots of small ways before the fog has lifted, so that new possibilities for policy integration can be discovered in the darkness.

Planning and reviewing

There is also scope here for better integration of review and planning processes. For example, in theory at least, the best value process involves the sort of fundamental review that can disturb familiar patterns of thinking and behaving and form an essential part of effective planning. However, in our research it was clear that, by and large, best value and community planning were conceived of, managed and inspected as sepa-

rate processes. Few links were made between them, and one of the consequences reported to us was that there was difficulty in getting community planning to ‘bite’. Linking them together more explicitly would prepare the ground for local leadership to flourish.

3.2 Promoting dialogue

This section analyses the relationship between advocacy and enquiry and the role of mediation.

The relationship between advocacy and enquiry

One of the strengths of our system in the UK is the tradition of intellectual debate. This process has produced academic institutions that are among the best in the world, and legal and parliamentary systems in which competing versions of truth can be tested through adversarial argument. The implicit assumption of one truth is deeply ingrained in our forms of talk. Advocacy is privileged over enquiry. For one to be right, the other has to be wrong. So we invest a great deal of time in working out how the other person could be wrong.²⁵

Like all strengths, however, this is also a weakness when left unchecked. Our particular form of conversational grammar does not dominate in other cultures. Geoff Mulgan pointed out that in India and Pakistan, for example, the process of discussion takes the form of communal problem solving. Restorative justice conferences, where individuals recount their crimes and hear the effects of them on the victims and their relatives, are now being conducted in Thames Valley Police Force. The point is not to judge, nor to condone, but to bring home to all parties the patterns of cause and effect that weave people’s lives together.

What we propose is the development of a different kind of talking: that of dialogue. In a nutshell what we mean by dialogue is a particular type of conversation that prefers relationship over ideology.²⁶ The assumption in such conversation is that truth is pluralistic. According to Argyris dialogue involves three key skills:

- actively enquiring into others’ views and the reasoning that supports them

- advocating one's own view and reasoning in a way that encourages others to confront it and to help the speaker discover where the view might be mistaken
- stating publicly the inferences that one makes about others and the data that leads to those inferences, and inviting others to correct the inferences if they are inaccurate.²⁷

Dialogue is the active process through which different sources of knowledge, evidence and experience are combined in ways that enable coherent action to be taken. Indeed, the active process of combining and refining different sources of knowledge is also one that creates and reinforces sets of relationships in which there is a mutual willingness to act together, and in which understanding and collective commitment are achieved. It is through dialogue, not through agreement, that trust is established.

Evidence-based policy-making is a step in the right direction. But without the skills of evidence-based dialogue it could become another way by which the already powerful maintain their position at the expense of the powerless. Developing the capacity for dialogue is a key to leadership in partnership. We believe it is quite possible to begin training in the skills of dialogue as early as primary school level.²⁸

Mediation

It was also suggested that greater use should be made of techniques of mediation. Here we use mediation to refer to a process whereby a third party, expert in the process of conflict resolution but not in the content, helps two or more parties explore their differences and common ground in order to arrive at a way forward. It is not rocket science. In one field, that of special education needs assessments, the government is currently asking all authorities to establish mediation processes. We think there is scope for other applications (for example, in resolving differences between patients and the NHS).

Another area is in the field of customer complaints. Most commonly the conversational grammar that underpins the way the conversation unfolds invites a 'right or wrong' dynamic, which stimulates attack and defence. The emphasis is on dealing with complaints 'efficiently' rather than using dialogue and mediation to re-engage the citizen as an

equal participant in problem solving. We heard of at least one authority, Waverley District Council, which has started to use the skills of its community mediation service in this way.

3.3 Opening up the professions

This section looks at the relationships between professions, between professions and end-users, and between professional development and assessment.

Between professions

The problems of fragmentation, which in turn fuel the demand for leadership in partnership, have some origins in the strong professions that characterise public services. Many of the chief executives and senior managers involved in the project spoke of the difficulties they experienced in ‘getting professionals to see the bigger picture’. We heard similar expressions in the civil service, with talk of strong departmentalism. We noticed some fragile attempts to network the professions together but at best their impact is marginal.²⁹

We feel there is a strong case for the professional institutions themselves to open up the processes by which they generate and examine knowledge. Introducing inter-professional peer review, similar to that running in local government and the civil service, might start this. Review teams could include not just professionals from other disciplines but also politicians and members of the wider community. Their focus would not be on the internal efficiency of the institution but their net contribution to cross-cutting social goals . . . like the reduction of crime, and health improvement.

On professional development we heard a strong message from David Triggs:

If they [the National College for School Leadership] start worrying about the leadership of schools then they have missed the whole point. It has nothing to do with the leadership of schools. It is all about the leadership of organisations. If you can lead an organisation you can lead a school . . . I think head teachers should have to complete an MSc in Management or an international MBA where they have to visit a certain number of com-

panies and other organisations around the world, and write papers not about education and schools. You can broaden people's horizons that way

Between professions and end-users

More needs to be done to counterbalance the power of the professional institutions. The qualification system over which they preside reinforces hierarchies of specialist knowledge rather than building coalitions across professional and organisational boundaries. The interests of the professional, not the end-user, are privileged. Too little attention is given to that which is not yet known, too much to defending that which is already known. A recent examination of gender in relation to the professionalisation of management concluded that:

Paradoxically, the more management seeks to become a profession, the more it may perpetuate a system of knowledge and behaviour at odds with what public sector professionals actually need.³⁰

In the course of our research we came across an exciting example of professionals regulating themselves through communities of practice rather than by recourse to a fixed body of knowledge.³¹

The Independent Practitioners Network (IPN), a new model of accountability for counsellors, psychotherapists, educators, and growth and allied practitioners, has developed a rigorous form of self-regulation, which is shown in the box below. The Executive Coaching Forum is moving to something similar.

The Independent Practitioners Network

The Independent Practitioners Network offers a new model of accountability and validation: one which actually takes account of what we know as practitioners about the human use and abuse of power.

The unit of membership is a group of at least five practitioners who know and stand by each other's work, and who take responsibility for supporting each other's good practice and the good practice of other groups in the network, and for addressing any problems or conflicts in their work. The group seeks

to establish the quality of its members' work through face-to-face interaction. Each group is also required to form cross-links with other groups.

IPN makes no distinction between more or less qualified or 'registered' members, since we recognise that there are many routes to being a good practitioner. The structure is horizontal and multi-centred rather than vertical and pyramidal. Our aim is to provide intending clients with a context of security within which they can make their own decisions about which practitioner is valuable for them. Rather than using a central code of practice, each peer group creates and circulates its own.

The Network has no commitment to any particular form of practice, training or therapeutic relationship, since we specifically favour a richly pluralistic and multi-skilled ecology.

No individual or group runs IPN. No individual or group is empowered to speak for IPN. Proposed policies or procedural improvements/modifications are circulated to IPN participants and discussed at a National Gathering. Decision-making in the Network is through pluralistic consensus: an ongoing process which considers all the options available, listens to all views and supports a variety of outcomes being pursued simultaneously. This approach implies an emphasis on issue identification, exploration and a 'sense of the meeting' rather than on adversarial proposals and counter proposals. Unresolved issues are held open for further discussion and all decisions remain subject to subsequent modification.

A key argument to emerge from this research is that the very strength of the professions in the UK is also their weakness when it comes to joined up government. The more a group of people develops a distinctive body of knowledge with its own language and conventions the greater is the gap that has to be bridged to those who do not speak that language. While professional institutions may espouse a broader purpose to influence the whole, they cannot survive without advancing the interests of their members; this means that the voice of the professionals is automatically privileged over voices from those outside the profession, sometimes with disastrous consequences. To counterbalance this natural tendency, leaders of professions have a particular responsibility to listen 'in public' to voices that come from outside their worlds – especially the voices of end-users. (The medical profession recently started a column in its professional journal devoted to 'mistakes'.)

Between assessment and development

Another way that the professions can influence the potential for leadership lies in their approach to the process of assessment. David Triggs at Greensward College described how he and his colleagues had enabled their respective communities to learn more effectively by practising self and group assessment for learning in preference to the more traditional forms of assessment of learning. Students learn the vital skills of giving and receiving feedback through their participation in the assessment process. Even more important, they develop a greater capacity to integrate feedback not just from their line manager and other vertical sources but also from lateral ones, their peers, which is at the heart of leadership development in a partnership context. David Triggs is clear about the development role that leadership has to play: 'Leadership is not about making decisions. Leadership is primarily about coaching, mentoring, development and releasing and empowering your people.'

3.4 From human resources to human relationships

This section discusses the relationships between:

- employees and organisational systems
- jobs and work
- professional development and collective partnership development
- contractual and performance management arrangements.

Individuals and whole systems

Our research shows how organisations experience a profound mismatch between the current preoccupations of personnel management and their ambitions for more agile and flexible forms of organisation. They claimed that their attention was where they didn't want it to be, on internal matters like job evaluation schemes, equal opportunity policies, recruitment policies, rather than on the end-users.

Once a profession is established the interests of the professionals become dominant. The term human resources, invented presumably by personnel professionals, implies ownership and instrumentalism. In likening people to raw materials it also implies a production line in which there are clear lines of attribution. But as Zoë van Zwanenberg put to us: 'Our experience of working in the people development

world is that lines of attribution are far from clear and strict equations of investment to outcome are very difficult to prove.’

The personnel profession also remains remarkably attached to the notion that people have line managers who oversee their work. Increasingly this does not match the experience of those who work in public service where:

- reporting lines are distributed not only among several people in the organisation but also among some outside it
- the employee or their line manager ‘on the chart’ is in transition between roles and structure
- the employee’s manager only sees a tiny proportion of the work the employee does.

Yet the array of personnel policies and procedures that abound in our organisations are predicated on a world where traditional line management arrangements are intact. Personnel professionals have not kept up with the reality of dispersed accountabilities, webs of relationships and constant fluidity.

Thus the world we inhabit is much messier than the professionals would have us believe. So, inevitably, we end up with a whole raft of personnel practices that are limited and limiting. Rubenstein has described how our equal opportunity policies routinely suppress the development of talent.³² Recent research, undertaken in 147 local authorities in England and Wales, has identified the over-emphasis on the development of individuals:

The emphasis on individual learning minimises the importance of collaborative and systemic learning. This means that there is little attempt to consider the systemic dynamics of the whole organisation and consequently the analysis of learning and change at an organisational level are mostly ignored.³³

Jobs and work

We have recruitment and pay policies which stay stubbornly predicated on the indivisible notion of a ‘job’, when it is commonly accepted within business that job descriptions are out of date even before the

ink dries. The work we need to do, especially in a partnership context, cannot easily be described because the work isn't knowable in advance. Yet many of our personnel policies are predicated on job descriptions and the person specifications that flow from them. At a psychological level, these are incorporated into our sense of identity.

The architecture of individuals and jobs leads to a natural focus on equity and structure. Activity to encourage networking and flexible working is added on afterwards. But the work that needs to be done and the problems that need to be solved are not neatly parcelled up in job or individual-sized units. It is not surprising therefore that we have difficulties in 'joining things up', not only across domains and organisations, but also within them.

Our view is that the moral and philosophical container in which these things thrive is increasingly moribund. We have focused too much on the properties of people at the expense of the processes, relationships and interactions between them. We invest in human capital but under-invest in social capital.

We began to see glimpses of what might be possible. Peter Fryer at the former Humberside TEC described an organisation with a very different architecture of personnel management:

Humberside TEC, before it was replaced by the Local Learning and Skills Council, was recognised by its community to be adopting a much more open style of leadership. For some time as Chief Executive, I had been studying complex adaptive systems and their implications for employing organisations. What is more, I made a conscious decision to explore how the principles of complexity theory could be integrated into the running of the TEC.

Using this perspective, I took out of the organisation many of the traditional approaches to management such as rules, hierarchy charts, budgets, appraisals, job descriptions, and, importantly, those posts relating to checking and supervising. In their place I had introduced a culture which treated all the staff as self-responsible adults and who were trusted to act in the best interests of the business. Within these parameters staff were all free to take whatever decisions they felt were

appropriate. To help people cope with this new freedom and responsibility a substantial self-development support programme was introduced, which particularly emphasised the development of thinking and learning skills and developing self-confidence.

The purpose of this approach was to recognise that the real business of the organisation took place at the interface between the staff member and the client or stakeholder. And that therefore, the more staff that were available at this interface and were able to take decisions on behalf of the TEC, the better the standards of service would become. As people developed a sense of ownership of their contribution to the TEC, it became not only more effective but also, in the medium term, more efficient (as was demonstrated by various independent benchmarking studies). This approach also encouraged people to be more creative, to feel a valued part of the organisation and consequently to work smarter.

Herefordshire Council has made joint appointments to social services and primary care trusts, so that the occupants work for two organisations simultaneously. At Camden they are starting to appoint people to teams rather than jobs. Such innovations honour the complexity of the issues we ask people to manage and trust that things will be worked out primarily through relationships, not through structural or policy intervention.

Contractual and performance management arrangements

Changed employment practices can also help in other ways to create the conditions that build capacity for leadership in partnership. It is easy to slip into a way of talking that implies that paid officials, politicians and community entrepreneurs exist as separate groups of people. In fact, of course, many people occupy at least two of these roles, if not three, often simultaneously. Many officials in public service said they were drawn towards taking up voluntary roles (such as school governors or parish councillors) because they felt it was easier for them to work in a joined up way there than in their paid roles. Several remarked on the irony of only being able to do what

their organisations said they wanted them to do while not being employed by them.

We saw scope here for a more innovative management of the boundaries between these domains. For example, employers could promote a more supportive approach towards their employees, not just in terms of time off for voluntary activities but more explicit encouragement for employees as part of their employment contract and performance management arrangements. That might mean that certain staff are entitled to work for one day a week with a local voluntary agency, without loss of pay. It might mean that one of their key targets for the year is determined not by the host public service agency but by a local parish council.

3.5 Developing leadership teams

This section analyses the relationship between cross-cutting social issues and leadership development and the relationship between development and partnership.

If we are to make radical and sustainable impact on intractable cross-cutting social issues, we need to create the conditions for people to come together from all the agencies that have an influence on the problem. For example, if teenage boys increasingly commit robbery, preventative approaches need to involve not just the police and the local authorities but also further education colleges, the Connexions service and local sports clubs. The need for convergence at a policy level is increasingly recognised, but a precondition for the effective realisation of policy into practice is learning at both individual and organisational levels. And the infrastructure for enabling such learning is still fragile and insufficient.

At the moment we have a development infrastructure that privileges development within the respective agency and professional domains. There are colleges for the civil service, the police, schools, but not for public service (although the Scottish Leadership Foundation in Scotland is starting to fill this vacuum north of the border). What we need is an infrastructure that brings together for learning those parts of the system that are necessary to solve pressing social problems.

The infrastructure needs to provide the protection necessary for people not just to learn but also to act. An unintended effect of the

performance management regimes within the various public agencies is that there is no slack left to do those things that fall between them. For example, in Kent an inter-agency learning set noticed that a bottleneck in the local accident and emergencies department could be tackled if officers from health, police and the local night clubs got together to work out ways of preventing injuries incurred at night clubs on Friday nights. But in this example tackling the problem requires all three organisations to dedicate the time necessary to solve a problem, which lies outside their immediate priority.

Building the capacity for public agencies to respond to these unexpected cross-cutting issues is both a function of local leadership and a precondition for it. How do we rebuild it and where should it be located? There comes a point in all organisations where the singular interests of the organisation diverge from the wider interests of those whom they serve. There is therefore an argument for rebuilding this capacity outside the individual organisations. However, if it is completely outside them, the product of that cross-cutting capacity will be easier to resist. So the best balance could perhaps be obtained by setting up local cross-agency consultancy capacity, directed by a local public service partnership, but with the staff remaining employed by the respective agencies. (This is the virtual organisation model, similar to most Sure Starts.) The staff would need to be given a free rein on how they worked together to achieve outcomes, and would need to be located together to build up the necessary relationships. The Public Service Reform Unit could take a lead in this, with support from government regional offices.

Developing partnerships as well as individuals

There is also the problem that most leadership development activity is geared for individual training courses. What is missing is any sustained support and development for existing partnerships and networks of local leadership. A few organisations, like Common Purpose and the Whitehall and Industry Group, help to establish networks but they do not offer sustained support to existing partnerships or to local networks already attempting to work across boundaries. The Centre for Management and Policy Studies (CMPS) unit within the Cabinet Office does see this as part of its role but inevitably it is caught up in a predom-

inantly civil service perspective. Overall, this is an area of serious neglect in our current arrangements in the UK. There is a need to set up team development and partnership support services to help the growing number of partnerships get beyond brainstorming and into performing. David Triggs felt that much training failed because it was ‘too mechanical: it assumes that given certain experiences and competencies people will be trained to do things; it assumes that there is an answer to every question; it assumes that there may be only one or two ways of doing things’.

We are indebted to the Local Government National Training Organisation for uncovering one authority that has been proactive in this field: Stirling Council. Stirling Council does not use competencies, but it is serious about developing leaders capable of transforming the quality of public services in partnership with other agencies and local communities. The Stirling Assembly, meeting every six weeks or so, provides a forum for citizens to discuss and influence significant issues affecting the Stirling area and its communities. The Assembly is clear that it wants public agencies to work together to deliver joined up services – and this means that the agencies need to train together. Stirling Council’s leadership programme brings together council officers and staff from other agencies for an experimental three-day workshop to explore – and develop – the skills, techniques and attitudes required for effective partnership working.

There are some excellent development programmes for officers in local and central government, some of which bring officers together according to their agency. However, there are insufficient opportunities for joint learning between the following groups: officials, politicians, inspectors, professionals, social entrepreneurs. The development agencies we talked to agreed, but their forward plans do not currently resource such activities. We felt it was significant that we could not easily point to an institution that would have lead responsibility in championing this type of development.

Jo Field, representing the Technical Advisers Group at one of our focus meetings, made a particularly interesting suggestion. His involvement with Professor Ziegler’s work in America led him to believe that fiction could be used on joint development programmes to draw out different value systems and set the groundwork for a collaborative approach to

leadership. It is clear that each of the various development agencies regards its client or network base as its principal source of commercial value. It was therefore not surprising that there is a natural resistance from the agencies in joining up those networks for the common good. At the same time it seems clear that there would be obvious synergy in doing so more openly.

3.6 From inspection to expectation

The following section looks at the relationship between inspection processes and social results.

What gets inspected?

At the moment the gaze of the various inspectorates (Best Value, Ofsted, Social Services) falls mainly on individual agencies. Admittedly, some take a cross-cutting theme to examine within the organisation, but there is little scrutiny of the extent of collaboration between agencies in pursuit of social results. Themes like community health, early years and social exclusion are all areas where the inspectorates could help to focus attention on the spaces between the agencies.

Where the inspectorates cast their gaze has a significant effect on the way the system responds. If their gaze is exclusively on individual organisations, the response they invite mirrors it. Andrew Mawson argued that public policy should be looking for synergies and connections to create a sticky ball of entrepreneurial projects across different organisations and traditional organisational boundaries that produce holistic solutions.

We are indebted to Chris Waterman of the Society of Education Officers for two interesting examples of the influence professional associations can bring for a more joined up approach to what is inspected. The Society was able to get Ofsted, the Standards Commission, DfEE and the Audit Commission to agree on a common data set for the early years client group, which meant less bureaucracy and a common language (creating the conditions for a more integrated inspection process and better dialogue). In another example, Chris recounts that the DfEE Standards Fund had 58 separate divisions: great for accountancy controls but not so helpful when you want to encourage creativity and

joined up thinking. Through intervention by his society and the Audit Commission, they were able to get the divisions removed.

The impact of inspection and its influence on the development or suppression of leadership is also a function of the way they inspect, who inspects and when they inspect.

How the inspection is carried out

The styles of the various inspection agencies are very different and constantly evolving. Some are perceived as primarily adversarial in nature. Others are reported to be more advisory, verging on developmental. The methodology of ‘appreciative enquiry’, first developed by David Cooperrider, could be helpful in moving towards a more developmental approach, away from the name and shame mentality.³⁴

Who inspects?

It is noticeable that the myriad voices of the citizen are missing in the composition of the inspection teams themselves. The current government is strongly pushing client-centred planning in many fields of social care and education. But being client-centred apparently stops short of involving clients in inspecting and reviewing the services they receive. Is there scope for some innovative experimentation here, piloting more inclusive methodologies of enquiry and assessment?

When to inspect

All the resources of the Best Value Inspectorate are currently tied up in making inspections after reviews have taken place. This seems perverse when it is then too late to do anything about the quality of the review. At least some of the inspection resources could be used to intervene before reviews take place. It could, for example, help the authority to frame the review from different customer perspectives, and give them insight about which lines of enquiry have proved fruitful elsewhere. A later follow up visit could be aimed not at evaluation but auditing the organisation’s own self-assessment of its performance. This would create the incentive that organisations need to reflect and learn from their experience. The inspection agencies could then play a much more constructive part in creating the conditions in which local leadership can emerge.

3.7 Researching in action

We outline below the changing relationship between research, policy and practice.

Research has a big potential impact on how the capacity for local leadership is encouraged or suppressed. Who researches, what gets researched, when research takes place in process and how that research is rewarded are all fruitful areas of enquiry. A Public Money and Management report recently demonstrated that even if evidence influences policy-making: ‘the current approach seriously underestimates the challenges of bringing about change in complex social systems.’³⁵

Rewarding practitioner-led research

Professor John Benington suggested to us that the current points system for rewarding university research privileges research that is never seen by practitioners.³⁶ This is because points are awarded for publication in obscure academic journals never read by practitioners, not for implementation on the ground. Moreover, the more successful the university is within the current system, the less incentive it has to change the system. There are shining examples of practitioner-based research (the Scottish Leadership Foundation, the Warwick Institute, the North East Change Centre and the North West Change Centre, Strathclyde), but these are still in the minority. How might the system be changed so that practitioner-based action research is privileged and rewarded?

Who researches?

Widening the spectrum of the people who do research will automatically change the nature of that research, just as changing the people who are talking will change the nature of the talk. Estelle Morris discussed the idea that teacher training should include a period of research so that the all-important habit and legitimacy of generating local knowledge would be reinforced. In the UK there are 410,000 full-time equivalent teachers, each of whom is a potential researcher in the field of education. But at the moment teachers do not have time to visit other schools to research their practices, still less to take a sabbatical to research an aspect of learning. Could the government establish a fund to enable such developments and seek to mainstream it over time?

Once the knowledge is generated from a combination of theory and practice, it should be accessed more easily. Leadership in partnership requires us to open up what we know for scrutiny and appreciation by others. During the course of our research we heard about the decision of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology to place on the internet the content of all their courses, accessible free of charge. Which will be the first university in the UK to follow suit?

Dissemination

Interviewees mentioned some disturbing features in the current relationship between research and policy-making. One example lies in the way in which the learning from pilot projects is disseminated. Too often it is disseminated as a blueprint leaving local implementation no discretion about how to adjust to the needs of a particular community. The assumption is that what works in one locality can be replicated and will work in another, the one-size-fits-all philosophy. But local contexts, like individual families, are unique. In fact, all the stories of leadership that we heard involved people doing things that hadn't been done before.

Another problem with the current arrangements for dissemination lies in our strong written traditions, which have led us to place more authority in the written word than in the spoken word. This in turn has reinforced the view of knowledge as an inert commodity. If knowledge were seen more as relational, it might lead to a renewed confidence in the oral tradition (based on storytelling), with its greater potential to draw out not only what Nonaka calls 'explicit' knowledge but also 'tacit' knowledge. The National College of School Leadership has recently initiated a series of events called Leadership Stories, at which head teachers hear stories of leadership from education and other sectors, and discuss their experience of what leadership means. The Scottish Leadership Foundation has done something similar with women managers.

Balancing evidence with intuition

Then there is the danger of only funding that which has already been seen to work, with the result that innovation is inhibited. Central governments seem quite happy to infuse evidence-based policy-making with political intuition and faith; nobody expects them to do otherwise.

But they are less willing to see other spheres of government operate with the same balance. Likewise officers in local authorities rarely experience their colleagues in government offices as sharing the risks in partnership projects, but they can have a big influence on creating the conditions for innovation at the local level.

Developing a more productive relationship between research, evidence and policy-making requires attention to when research takes place in the cycle of planning, implementing and reviewing or learning. The point is not to insist on evidence before policy or policy before evidence, but to combine the generation of both simultaneously. That means thinking of policy not as a static thing but as a kind of provisional knowledge – the best rules we know so far. Most politicians, and therefore civil servants, start off with this line. The hard thing is to sustain it. The history of best value is a case in point. When it was first conceived, Hilary Armstrong, the minister with responsibility for local government, voiced her reluctance to issue guidelines about how best value should be measured, and invited local government to share in the responsibility of working this out. But in due course copious guidelines were issued and local government responded through a mixture of compliance and resistance. The mutuality was lost. Once again the leadership we needed here was about not doing something.

The implications are that:

- We need much greater attention to the skills of drawing out the policy implications of practice on the ground.
- We need to avoid stifling good policy initiatives with excessive guidelines, wherever they come from.

Policy-makers and practitioners need to share the risks and responsibility for connecting policy and practice. It is not enough for politicians to hide behind the statement: ‘we set policy and you implement it’. Nor can officials and public service managers shrug their shoulders at politicians and deny any responsibility in policy-making.

3.8 Supporting social entrepreneurs

This section deals with the relationships between social entrepreneurs and public agencies, between peripheral and mainstream budgets, and between the statutory and voluntary sector.

The relationship between social entrepreneurs and public agencies

Peter Housden has described how the idea of civic entrepreneurship promoted by Sue Goss and Charles Leadbeater has been readily taken up in parts of Whitehall.³⁷ He observes, however:

There is perhaps a lack of cosmopolitan understanding on how these individuals and groups can be productively linked with local partnerships and democratic structures. It is in this connection that such heroism can become transferable and thereby sustainable beyond individual burn-out.

Social entrepreneurs, who are a rich source of local leadership, rarely report that they have received sustained support from public agencies. What is going on in the relationship between social entrepreneurs and the various public agencies that may fund them?

At these points of intersection, where the worlds of social entrepreneur and public servant meet, two different trajectories collide. The social entrepreneur's primary interest is making a difference in a local social context, for example improving the conditions on a housing estate. Accounting for the expenditure of public money is a secondary interest. In contrast, the paid official's primary driver is more often making sure that any expenditure of public money can be defended and avoiding the risk of failure. Improving the conditions on the housing estate is secondary. It is not that the paid official has no interest in social results, nor that the social entrepreneur has no interest in accounting for public money. But the roles they take up in the discourse mean that each is expected to draw on a different rationale for justifying their actions, and because the paid officials have an unequal share of the power it is normally their view that prevails.

A good example of how this works is in the way funding routines work. A common complaint from the voluntary sector relates to the philosophy of additionality that is typically the test for public funding.

This works by ensuring that any funding given to an initiative is adding something to what already exists, not substituting what is being funded in mainstream services. So, in shaping proposals for funding, applicants are required to show that their project is new, different and clearly separable from the mainstream. The problem this creates only manifests itself later on, when the initial funding runs out and the initiative needs to be funded out of the mainstream. In any case, many of the most effective social entrepreneurs are adding value precisely because they are developing innovative ways of integrating mainstream resources with the problems experienced by service users or community members. In this respect, it makes no sense that they should do so only around the edges of existing provision. To be successful at this stage, initiatives need to have so disturbed mainstream funding traditions that when the time comes for integration they have a good chance of being accommodated. At this stage, substitution is the goal. But they have already positioned the initiative as being outside the mainstream. So they are caught in a no-win situation.

In effect they have to argue in two different directions. While the intention behind the test is fine, the unintended consequence is that far too many of our innovative social experiments die off after a few years because the funding runs out. Professor John Benington commented how leadership had become implicitly associated with starting new things rather than sustaining existing ones.

Re-engineering mainstream budgets

The relationship between social entrepreneurs and public agencies is exacerbated by the difficulties our public institutions have in rationalising provision to release more funds. Carrying out this research, we heard many stories of how extraordinarily difficult officers find it to close a small library, school or hospital, even when the economic arguments are compelling and better quality services can be delivered in their place.

We are indebted to Deborah Ward at East Kent Council for Voluntary Services for a typical example. The Thanet Employment Subsidy Scheme was funded by the (then) Kent TEC to provide short-term paid employment opportunities in voluntary organisations. The twin objectives were to increase the prospects of people for permanent employment while

at the same time building capacity in the voluntary organisations – a nice bit of joined up thinking. The project met its targets at the output level (placements in voluntary organisations) and at the outcome level (the number of people who subsequently moved into permanent employment). But the scheme stopped because the categorisation of funds changed and the new funding criteria were more tightly drawn.

If we want to liberate imagination and enterprise in the community we need to shift the burden of proof. At the moment it is the social entrepreneurs who have to make too much of the running, navigating a complex maze of funding regimes and procedures, and having to justify their ideas on terms laid down by the various public agencies. They have to prove their case to access public money, which is somehow conceived as belonging elsewhere.

The burden of proof could be shifted if we worked from the principle of subsidiarity, whereby power and authority are assumed to reside at the lowest level unless it can be justified that it needs to be handed upwards. A stronger effort to audit and assess effectiveness horizontally, across services and communities, rather than just vertically, back to the formal source(s) of funding, could also make a dramatic difference.

A step in that direction might be achieved if the test of additionality were replaced by a test of synergy. Under such a test, local authorities might be required to work with social entrepreneurs to help them identify long-term funding possibilities at the outset. The testing process would be two way, not one way; the local authority and the social entrepreneur would test each other in accordance with their respective rationales. Their lines of enquiry would seek to establish how a different pattern of overall investment could potentially deliver better services. The presumption underlying their conversation would be that they have a joint responsibility for accounting for public funds; it isn't down to the local authority.

Re-establishing this sense of mutuality (or as some would put it adult-adult relationship as opposed to parent-child relationships) is not easy for either local authorities or voluntary sector agencies when they operate predominantly within a contract culture. But that is what is needed if we are to establish the conditions for local leadership to thrive.

Helping the voluntary sector to help itself

The recent flurry of compacts between government and the voluntary sector reinforce a very limited and limiting frame of the relationship. A recent evaluation by Osborne and McLaughlin warns:

As the work of Young (2000) has suggested, the assumption of complementarity between the roles and work of the governmental and voluntary sectors includes real dangers for the voluntary sector. These dangers could lead to the negation of its legitimate societal roles as independent watchdog and voice for the marginal and dispossessed.³⁸

Partly because of their desire to preserve the independence of the voluntary sector, local authorities do not usually feel it is their job to help the voluntary sector to help itself. The councils for voluntary services do their best, on meagre resources, to support voluntary agencies, but they are not sufficiently connected or resourced to make the difference that is needed. Support to the voluntary sector deserves to be co-ordinated strategically, not just at national level, but also locally. At present they are too often seen as a provider of the services that the public purse cannot afford by any other means. In the long term a more mutual relationship between the statutory and voluntary sectors represents one of the best chances we have for creating the conditions for sustainable leadership in partnership.

In theory, local authorities are in the best position to take such a strategic approach, and a few are starting to do so. One such is South Holland District Council in rural south Lincolnshire. The Council's Rural Action Zone Partnership has brought together a wide range of local and regional organisations to address jointly the problems of a deeply rural area. Community capacity building is a major theme around which the council has structured its own organisation. The voluntary sector is being supported by dedicated staff and a project to convert a former telephone exchange into a home for the voluntary sector is under way. A trust, which will be grant aided by the council, is being formed to manage the multi-purpose facility. Many other projects are already leading to an increase in the capacity of the voluntary sector. Not unusually, grants for capital projects are relatively easy

to obtain – it is the ongoing revenue core-funding implications that frequently provide the greater challenge.

South Holland is perhaps a little unusual. Many councils are so stretched in coping with their current agenda that they simply don't have the capacity to fill the vacuum. Learning and skills councils may be better placed to do this in some areas, and might be less likely to get caught up in conflicts of interest that occur, for example, between capacity-building roles and contract-commissioning roles.

3.9 A new politics of relationships

The relationship between politics and ideology

A feature of this research has been to take a fresh look at the interactions between the various actors and processes in the leadership dance. When we entered that dance from the perspective of local politics, we experienced a curious paradox. On the one hand, the political scene seems increasingly characterised by flexibility in ideology. As the leader of a large council put it: 'There is more variation of political beliefs within my political group than there is between the groups.'

As the supremacy of the new right in politics has faded, New Labour's language has come to dominate the lexicon of mainstream politics. This dominance masks the variation in ideological positions that exist within the party, and the different value positions that also exist, internally, across the range of public service and community organisations.

The promise of a more pluralist and complex set of value positions which are more reflective of contemporary society but still able to combine in effective ways and achieve public goods is being frustrated by the legacy of an adversarial culture which reinforces a 'right or wrong' model of political debate and institutional decision-making. It is a culture in which we learn that disputation is the prime way of discovering a singular truth. It manifests itself not just in the party political system, but in the judiciary and the education system. It is a culture that reinforces the assumption that in a world of competing ideas there are clear winners and losers. As Sir Michael Richard said:

If you think about it what usually happens in meetings is that someone takes up a position or constructs an argument and

then defends it against attack. This process of challenge is justified because it is supposed to test ideas and identify the flaws in an argument. But it has two disadvantages. The first, as De Bono points out, is that you never bring to bear all of the energy in any group on identifying the advantages of a proposal or on identifying its flaws. And the second problem is that this process very often results in good ideas being strangled at birth because people want to analyse, criticise, judge and condemn before the idea has been given the chance to grow to the point where you can see whether it's worthwhile. After all a new idea is fragile.³⁹

Not only are we culturally attuned to picking the faults in each other's arguments, but our electoral and parliamentary systems are set up to magnify the differences between us. To the citizen, these differences appear to be less and less relevant to the messiness of 'current realities'.

At a local level, the stage on which adversarialism is played out seems to have shifted substantially away from genuine debate by the political parties over ideology. In local authorities it is the relationship between cabinet and scrutiny, introduced by most councils as part of the new local political management arrangements, which have provided the new setting for adversarialism. In one large unitary authority we encountered, back bench members described how they had experienced themselves being 'squeezed out', while cabinets (the front bench) found themselves being frustrated by having their policy decisions frequently called into question through the scrutiny process.

The result is that the executive leadership of many local authorities experiences a policy vacuum, and the electorate in turn feels that it is alienated from the political process.

A new role for local politicians

It can be different. The report of a study visit to the USA organised by the Local Government Management Network in 2000 states: 'Whilst in the USA, we saw that the openness of decision making, the high levels of citizen engagement and the political processes themselves benefited from an ethos of community interest rather than political manifesto.'⁴⁰

The loosening of party political ideologies, for example over the use of the private sector in delivering parts of the public service, presents an opportunity for renewal of the democratic process. Local people can shape the definition and delivery of services to support their communities, making local choices about how they want services defined and run. But realising this potential involves developing a different role for politicians, one that is less dependent on ideology and the imposition of a single political vision and more able to thrive within fluid networks of meaning and communication, offering the possibility of synthesis and shared meaning.

Some local authorities have begun to strengthen the relationship between elected representatives and their communities by devolving small sums of money to local councillors to spend in conjunction with their communities without recourse to 'the centre'. In Suffolk County Council the sum was £8,000 each. Lin Homer, chief executive of the council, reports that part of the argument for doing this was to help rebuild the relationship between communities, their elected representatives and the agencies who serve them.

Up to now, our expectation of politicians and the mandate they act out is that they can lead change in our society by influencing the beliefs people have. They do that through advocating the most convincing ideologies and policies. But what we have already noticed is that the problems of localities are not solved through ideological intervention, still less those of global conflict. The difficult choices of the day are not between right and wrong but between right and right. Sooner or later, mediation across different belief systems has to take place. The opportunity arising is that politicians (and the mandate we give them) now need to focus more on brokering the relationships of those with differing belief systems. This needs to happen just as much at the local level as it does at societal level. Politicians can make a difference between sustaining organisations that maintain their narrow interests and building ones that reach out to the bigger picture, enabling new alliances and partnerships and being willing to put their own organisational interests second in pursuit of a greater good. In the UK, the dominant role expected of politicians is that they represent the interests of their constituents, holding public organisations to account for those interests. But there is a price to be paid for this domi-

nant paradigm. The very process of representing the views of others detaches discourse from the context in which it is created and has the most meaning – and ultimately it is that very same context that needs to be transformed in order for social problems to be solved. Another, less developed, role for politicians is holding their diverse communities to account, creating the forums in which all the voices of communities can express their aspirations and concerns to one another. This is a facilitatory role, not a representational one, and is well evidenced in the following example submitted by chief executive John Yates:

When the new Stirling Unitary Council was established in 1995, the first decision of the Council was to set its values, which included listening to citizens and involving them in decision-making. This has cascaded through to all aspects of the Council's work over the past six years. As well as electing all community councils through an alternate vote system [which works through postal ballot and gives average turnouts of over 40 per cent, reaching 68 per cent in some areas], it has legitimised and strengthened the credibility of community councils.

At the Council-wide level, a Stirling Assembly has been formed which brings together civil society to debate and challenge not just the Council but other public bodies responsible for services in the area. It meets on Saturday mornings.

Typically the assembly will bring together 70 to 80 people representing community councils, voluntary organisations, the business community and interested active citizens. It is participative democracy at work. A key characteristic of the work has been the transfer of ownership of the agenda to citizens and a noticeable and progressive shift from most public bodies away from the defensiveness that too often occurs at the interface with the public. A shared understanding of the problems of regeneration areas in the town and affluent rural communities has welded together the civil society in a way which is mutually supportive. Significantly, it is also taking place outwith the traditional party political alignments.

This has required the Council to step back and acknowledge that a key ingredient of leadership is active listening and a citizen-focused Council. Local politics is changing and it is highly probable that the next generation of politicians will be drawn from citizens who started off wanting to make a difference in their own communities. Their values will be moulded by an active citizenship that is inclusive and perpetually, not spasmodically, democratic.

In California, the sovereignty of the community is enshrined in the Brown Act, which states that: 'Citizens do not yield their sovereignty to the agencies which serve them, nor do they give them the right to decide what is good for them to know or not to know. . . . Citizens insist on remaining informed so that they may retain control over the instruments they have created.'

A study group set up by the Local Government Management Network reported that 'this, together with an extremely high level of public interest in local affairs, sets the scene for the way decisions are made in city hall'.

The capacity for local leadership arises out of this relationship between citizens, politicians and institutions. Our contention is that this capacity is increasingly generated through the art of relationship management. Policy advocacy and representative democracy have an important contribution to make, but not as the dominant moves in the dance.

4. Invitations for the future

Our aim in this research was to be:

- Inquiring – questioning assumptions we had about leadership and provoking new lines of enquiry
- invigorating – aiming to fan the flames of the courageous leadership that we saw in action
- invitational – not aiming for consensus in a form of words but inviting reflexive action by interested people, wherever they are in the system.

Our argument is that the conditions for local leadership can be enhanced not by focusing on the quality of individual leaders or the functioning of individual agencies but on the spaces and relationships between our political institutions, public agencies, professions and the communities that ultimately authorise them. We need to create spaces that are beyond simply inter-organisational collaboration to what Isaacs calls ‘the art of thinking together’.

Barry Quirk calls for an *esprit de corps*, something in which the interests of the whole are at least as evident as the interests of the parts.⁴¹ This can be encouraged by suspending the interests of our respective institutions (political, organisational and professional) so that the possibility of organising differently can be explored, particularly the boundary between the formal and informal sectors of civil society. All organisations have a natural tendency to advance their own interests to the detriment of the interests of the whole. Because of their unique place in the system (mediating between the state and local community),

local authorities in particular need to be willing to suspend their own identities and certainties in order to rebuild social capital at the local level.

Simply joining up visible parts of a fragmented system isn't enough. We also need greater awareness of how we habitually re-create the very boundaries that we later work so hard to bridge. This means creating organisations with permeable boundaries, professions that privilege the knowledge held by those they serve, political institutions that value participative democracy as much as representative democracy.

Having created these fragile new spaces, we need to keep them open for long enough for sustained adaptation to occur. To keep spaces open, governments at all levels need to practise courageous patience. Often leadership requires us to do the hardest thing – nothing. Quiet persistence in sustaining things in the shadows is as much an act of leadership as starting new things in the full gaze of the public eye.

In Caradon, a district of South East Cornwall, staff tell a story of how three years of patient listening and dialogue between the local authority and its community eventually resulted in the chairman of the local citizens' advice bureau drawing up a comprehensive strategy for social inclusion. The strategy includes all sectors of the community – public, private and voluntary. The Council effectively took time to create the conditions in which community leadership was possible. Creating those conditions also involved preparing the organisation to listen: 'The very qualities we need to get things done in local government are those we tend to reserve for use outside the formal work environment.'⁴²

Learning continually across the boundaries is essential. We need much more joint development – of inspectors and practitioners, of politicians and executive leaders, and of local networks of emergent leadership. Peer review between the professions might be one way of encouraging learning across some of the boundaries; we also need action-based research to be privileged in the system where it is currently disadvantaged. To do these things also involves each one of us in managing our own internal space. As Gandhi said: 'Be the change that you want to see in the world.'

To create any space, people need to let go of something first. It might be a sense of identity, which is defined by the values and rules of a profession; it might be the comfort of always thinking first of policy

in an attempt to impose order on a confusing world; it might be being willing not to know the answer before we start a conversation; it might be letting go of the instinct to fix it. These things require self-awareness and an ability to manage our own anxiety in ways that ‘keep the spaces open’.⁴³

Letting go applies in different spheres of government, too. For central government, it means developing less policy. It’s not a case of consulting more; it’s a case of generating less to consult about. For local authorities, it means letting go of the ‘you need, we provide’ mentality.

We have sketched an agenda that could only be fully developed if many different levels of organisation were to begin to adapt together, rather than assuming that the possibility of change rests on actions elsewhere. But the potential of this agenda can be advanced through progressive, achievable steps and through the right kind of approach to learning more widely. In particular, it is an agenda that should apply to those bodies and associations whose role is to act as intermediaries and representatives, whether of communities, professionals or particular institutions. It also points, in the long run, to different forms of strategic governance, and a reshaping of the public policy process.

This agenda also requires that we meet differently. At the moment too many meetings are rituals characterised by formulaic exchange in which little contact is made. The meetings are set up in formal surroundings, held in committee speak, and where those present talk exclusively from their organisational or professional roles. Changing the way we meet together changes people’s sense of what is possible in the space:

Human conversation is the most ancient and easiest way to cultivate the conditions for change – personal change, community and organisational change, planetary change. If we can sit together and talk about what’s important to us, we begin to come alive. . . . simple conversations held at kitchen tables, or seated on the ground, or leaning against doorways are powerful means to start influencing and changing the world.⁴⁴

Turning down the extraneous ‘noise’ levels might mean that in the spaces the political, organisational and community leaders can really

hear the conversations on the front line. After all, the great dilemmas of policy and structure are ultimately worked out in people's lives and in the daily practice of organisations.

It is hard enough to hear the underlying rhythms, to distinguish the different melodic lines, and to know when it would be safe enough to improvise. But creating the conditions where we can listen would enable the community to hear itself – to notice the conflicts and dilemmas in its own value systems and open the way for new choices. Then, we really will be making music together.

Appendix

List of those interviewed and attending focus groups

The analysis in this report stems from research involving in-depth interviews with a diverse group of ten established leaders, and a series of focus groups with 64 individuals from a range of organisations across England.

List of people interviewed

- Nickie Fonda, Executive Adviser, Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development
- Frank Green, Leigh City Technical College
- Charlie Leadbeater, author, journalist and consultant
- Keith Makin, Director for Health and Social Service, Dumfries and Galloway
- Andrew Mawson, director of CAN
- Julia Middleton, Common Purpose
- Estelle Morris, Secretary of State for Education and Skills
- Geoff Mulgan, Head of the Performance and Innovation Unit, Cabinet Office
- Steve Pennant, Head of ICT, London Borough of Lewisham
- David Triggs, Principal, Greensward College

Focus group members

MSC in Leadership and Organisation of Public Services: 16 Feb 2001

1. Judith Baker, Thames Valley Police
2. Graham Brant, Cardiac Intensive Care, NHS

3. Jon Green, South Gloucestershire NHS Mental Health Services
4. Karen Mellalieu, Choices for Learning
5. Rod Latham, West Somerset District Council
6. Joy Norris, West Somerset District Council
7. Meryl Sparrow, North Somerset Council
8. Paul Joyce, North Bristol NHS Trust
9. Liz Kidd, Wiltshire County Council
10. Roy Smith, Devon County Council
11. Julie Warner, NHS
12. Amanda Davis, Dementia Care Trust
13. Nirma Phillips, NHS
14. Bill Wragge, Cotswold District Council

Inter-logics conference: It's a Relational World: 8 Mar 2001

15. John Hirst, Centre for Applied Ethics and Relational Studies at Durham University
16. Rita Cheate, Thurrock Council Social Services
17. Marion Canavon, Thurrock Council
18. Bob Wilkes, Diocese of Liverpool (Church of England)
19. Louise Knight, University of Bath
20. Mike Pupius, Sheffield Hallam University
21. John Carlisle, John Carlisle Partnership
22. Kath Aspinwall, Sheffield Hallam University
23. John Mackmersh, The Universal Improvement Company
24. Charlene Collison, Oracy
25. Steve Briault, Rubicon Associates
26. David Smallacombe, Phoenix Re-solutions
27. Dian Marie Hosking, Aston Business School
28. John Shotter, University of New Hampshire
29. Christine Garner, Industrial Society
30. Stuart Turnbull, Secret Garden Consulting
31. Wendy Briner, New Organisation Consulting

Common Purpose: 9 Mar 2001

32. Nira Gale, Marketing and Publications Coordinator
33. John O'Dwyer, IT Development Director
34. Kerry Ortuzar, East London Administrator

35. Jo Ro, Curriculum Director
36. Nicola Wharmby, MIS Director

Professional Organisations Network: 15 Mar 2001

37. Nickie Fonda, Executive Adviser, Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development
38. Keith Hamilton, Immediate Past President, Planning Officers Society
39. Chris Waterman, Society of Education Officers (now the Confederation of Education Service Managers)
40. Niki Luscombe, Policy Officer, Kent County Council
41. Jo Field, President, Technical Advisers Group

Whitehall and Industry Group: 10 Apr 2001

42. John Barnard, Clifford Chance
43. Sandy Bishop, DeTR
44. Norma Boultonwood, Cadbury Schweppes plc
45. Sally Cantello, Whitehall and Industry Group
46. Sally Carruthers, John Lewis Partnership
47. Hilary Danelian, Whitehall and Industry Group
48. Cheryl Coppell, Slough Borough Council
49. Angela Eden, Edenevolution
50. Kathryn Evans, Kairos Partnership
51. Kevin Galloway, Halifax plc
52. Alison Huxtable, consultant
53. David Kissman, Boots Company plc
54. Simon Powlson, Whitehall and Industry Group
55. Judith Riley, consultant
56. Fran Spencer, Department of Health
57. Rob Vincent, Kirklees Metropolitan Council

MA Leadership in Public Service: 25 Apr 2001

58. Ann Biddle, Head of Corporate Commissioning, London Borough of Lambeth
59. Danny Tammit, Corporate Director, London Borough of Redbridge

Local authority?

- 60. Debbie Wheatley, Director of Housing and Regeneration, Solihull MBC
- 61. Mick Young, Leader, Northamptonshire County Council
- 62. Tracey Dennison, Assistant Chief Executive, London Borough of Camden
- 63. Glyn Evans, Head of ICT, London Borough of Camden
- 64. Paul Matthews, Assistant Director Education, Torfaen CBC

Notes

- 1** Whitehall and Industry Group focus meeting.
- 2** J Chapman, *System Failure: Why governments must learn to think differently* (Demos, 2002).
- 3** *Strong Local Leadership – Quality Public Services*, 2002, DTLR.
- 4** The learning set comprised Ed Marsden, Bill Gillespie, James Butcher, Bryan Cunningham, Andrew Ireland, Paul Walker and John Jory with the author as facilitator.
- 5** Reflections on the Kent public service agreement process, 2001, published on the IDEA Knowledge net.
- 6** J Stewart, 'Towards deliberative democracy', paper to Antidote conference 'Change is Possible', 31 Jan–1 Feb 2002.
- 7** D Purdue et al., *Community Leadership in Area Regeneration* (Policy Press for Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2000).
- 8** Chief Executive of a unitary council at the Whitehall and Industry Group focus meeting.
- 9** A Wiggins and P Tymms, 'Dysfunctional effects of league tables: a comparison between English and Scottish primary schools', *Public Money and Management* 22, no 1 (2002).
- 10** Local Government Management Network Community Planning Policy net, 2001.
- 11** For a full discussion of this see P Brickell *People Before Structures* (Demos, 2000).
- 12** R Heifetz, *Leadership Without Easy Answers* (Harvard University Press, 1994).
- 13** Ibid.
- 14** The learning set comprised David Cowan, David Cook, Bill Murphy, Graham Farrant, Jack Neal and Ron Thompson, with the author as facilitator.
- 15** S Goss, *Making Local Governance Work* (Palgrave, 2001), p 198.
- 16** Details were given by Wendy Briner and Ed Piele at the 'It's a Relational World' conference at Warwick in June 2001.
- 17** We are grateful to Zanne Findlay for this example.
- 18** Free Form, commissioned by Slough Borough Council in 1996.
- 19** G Warnock, 'A private sector perspective', paper to Northern Ireland Branch of SOLACE, 20 Oct 2000.
- 20** Details given in session 2 at the SOLACE Northern Ireland conference (2000).
- 21** N Maxwell, 'Can humanity learn to create a better world?', in *The Moral Universe*, Demos Collection 16 (Demos, 2002).
- 22** Antidote, the campaign for an emotionally literate society; it can be contacted at www.antidote.org.uk and has offices at 5th Floor, 45 Beech Street, London EC2Y 8AD.
- 23** S Glaister and T Travers, 'Crossing London: overcoming the obstacles to CrossRail', *Public Money and Management* (Oct 2001).
- 24** G Binney, 'Strategy: connecting with reality', *Ashridge Journal* (July 1996).
- 25** P Corrigan, 'Infants, pain and responsibility', paper to Antidote conference 'Change is Possible', 31 Jan–1 Feb 2002.
- 26** Thanks to Chris Blanter for this neat definition.
- 27** Quoted in N Dixon, *Dialogue at Work* (Lemos and Crane, 1998).
- 28** The Antidote movement has already started to do some outstanding work in this field. See J Chapman, *System Failure*.

- 29** For instance, through the Professional Organisations Network initiated by SOLACE.
- 30** S Miller, R Hagen and M Johnson, 'Divergent identities? Professions, management and gender', *Public Money and Management*, 22, no 1 (Jan 2002).
- 31** Information kindly provided by Nick Totton.
- 32** M Rubenstein, 'Modern myths and misconceptions: equal opportunities', *Equal Opportunities Review*, 16 (Nov-Dec 1987).
- 33** R Vince and M Broussine, 'Rethinking organisational learning in local government', *Local Government Studies*, 26, no 1 (2000).
- 34** D Cooperrider and S Srivastva, 'Appreciative enquiry in organizational life' in Woodman and Pasmore (eds), *Research on Organizational Change and Development*, vol 1 (JAI Press, 1987).
- 35** S Nutley, H Davies and N Tilley 'Getting research into practice', *Public Money and Management*, 20, no 4 (Dec 2000).
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- 37** P Housden, 'Turning strategy into practice: organisational development in the modernisation of local government', *Public Money and Management*, 20, no 2 (April 2000).
- 38** SP Osborne and K McLaughlin, 'Trends and issues in the implementation of local "voluntary sector compacts" in England', *Public Money and Management*, 22, no 1 (Jan 2002).
- 39** Speech to the Warwick Masters in Public Administration
- 40** *Active Democracy: engaging citizens in local government*, published on the Local Government Management Network site, www.lgmn.org.uk.
- 41** B Quirk, *Esprit de corps* (YPS for Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2001).
- 42** Assistant Chief Executive, Caradon District Council.
- 43** Whitehall Industry Group focus meeting.
- 44** M Wheatley, *Turning to One Another: Simple conversations to restore hope to the future* (Berrett-Koehler, 2002).