
A MODEL FOR PARTNERSHIP WORKING IN SPORT AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE

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September 2022

CONTENTS

	PAGE
Forewords	4 - 5
Acknowledgements	6
1. Introduction	7
2. Overview of the model of partnership working	8
3. Methods	11
4. Findings and insights	12
5. Conclusions	22

FOREWORD FROM **KEITH FRASER**, CHAIR OF THE YOUTH JUSTICE BOARD

As Chair of the Youth Justice Board I know how important effective partnership working is to ensure children who are in, and at risk of entering the justice system get the support they need to live positive, happy and healthy lives.

Therefore I personally welcome this report which suggests a model for partnership working and makes a strong case for thinking about the way we work together. The report recognises that one size-does not fit all and that if delivered correctly, effective partnerships can generate genuine transformation.

This report explores some of the multi-stakeholder partnerships operating within the ground-breaking Levelling the Playing Field project, of which the Youth Justice Board is national strategic partner. The Project convenes approx. 100 partners to reduce the overrepresentation of ethnically diverse children involved with the Youth Justice System through the power of sport and physical activity. Those partnerships include Youth Justice Services, Police and Crime Commissioners along with other statutory services and a wide range of civil society partnerships. Therefore it is a great example to explore effective partnership working and learning from what does and does not work.

The timing of this report is critical as Youth Justice Services across England and Wales are thinking more about how they can work with a diverse range of partners to divert and prevent children from becoming involved with the Youth Justice System. Therefore I would like to thank the Alliance of Sport in Criminal Justice for this important piece of work and to the Universities of Bath and Gloucestershire for their expertise and focus on such an important area of work.

Keith Fraser, YJB

FOREWORD FROM **JOE THOMPSON**, HEAD OF FUNDING, THE LONDON MARATHON CHARITABLE TRUST

The London Marathon Charitable Trust (LMCT) is delighted to be supporting the Levelling the Playing Field (LtPF) project and this ground-breaking research into partnership working in sport and criminal justice. We believe that this model for partnership working will be of real benefit to partners working in the criminal justice, sport, youth and wider sectors.

As a funder, we know that effective partnerships are the key to unlocking the full potential of our funding to help change lives. Funding alone cannot deliver transformative outcomes – impactful funding relationships always depend on effective partnerships. We therefore welcome this pioneering research into the features of effective partnership working, which will help inform collaborative, cross-sector work to improve outcomes for children and young people.

Our funding mission is to inspire, encourage and champion participation and diversity in physical activity. We know that we cannot achieve this alone – partnerships are the bedrock of effective work in this area. LMCT's £1million investment in LtPF in 2019 was, at the time, our largest grant awarded through their Strategic Partnerships programme – an indication of our faith in its ethos, scope and potential.

The grant was also a huge endorsement of the project's ground-breaking approach to partnership-working. Previously we had not funded a project with such a diverse range of stakeholders, where sport and physical activity was not an end in itself but a tool, not just to benefit young people, but to have a major impact on social change. As outlined in this report, we were particularly interested in 'the way in which partnerships can utilise limited resources to achieve maximum impact.'

It has never been more important for stakeholders to collaborate effectively to reduce over-representation of ethnically diverse children in youth justice and to give children of all ethnicities a platform to have their voices heard and fulfil their potential. Thanks to the Alliance of Sport in Criminal Justice for their relentless focus on this crucial work and to the Universities of Bath and Gloucestershire for their contribution to this important research.

Joe Thompson, LMCT

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

At the Alliance of Sport, partnerships and working effectively with others are at the heart of everything we do. It is also an area in which AoS has been contributing to ongoing research and development for several years.

We would like to thank Dr Haydn Morgan from the University of Bath and Dr Colin Baker from the University of Gloucestershire for their work in producing this report. Our thanks must also go to the following for their contributions:

- **Basra Olow,**
Maan Somali Mental Health Sheffield
- **Dr Catherine Haywood,**
University of South Wales, Community Youth House
- **Dr Hannah Hammond,**
University of Birmingham
- **Faisal Eid,**
Active Burngreave, Yorkshire Sport Foundation
- **Imran Ali,**
Saalik Youth Project
- **Jackleen Abdurub,**
ACT
- **Julie Callaghan,**
Sheffield County FA
- **Justin Coleman,**
Alliance of Sport
- **Kathryn Mudge,**
Yorkshire Sport Foundation
- **Katie Glossop,**
Sheffield United Community Foundation
- **Lauren Poole,**
Newport Live - Positive Futures
- **Leon Dearn,**
Sheffield County FA
- **Lucy Donovan,**
Newport Live – Positive Futures
- **Mark Seymour,**
The Gap (Sanctuary)
- **Martin Cawley,**
Gwent Police
- **Martine Smith,**
Maindee Primary School
- **Matt Elliott,**
Newport Youth Justice Service
- **Rudro Sen,**
Alliance of Sport
- **Saeed Barasab,**
Unity Gym Project
- **Sharmarke Ismat,**
Maan Somali Mental Health Sheffield
- **Susi Miller,**
Maan Somali Mental Health Sheffield

1. INTRODUCTION

Academic studies have helped to shed light on the potential of partnership working as a means to address crime prevention issues, but from a practical perspective it seems to have done little to further our understanding of what it is that makes the difference between partnerships that are effective and those which are not. This is even more the case within the sport and criminal justice sector, where evidence concerning the relationship between partnership operations, processes, and outcomes is limited, with little understanding of the contradictions, complexities and contexts in which partnerships take place.

Research conducted by Morgan and Baker (2021¹) emphasised the high prevalence of strategic partnerships within the sport and criminal justice sector, where collaborative working is characterised by criteria-driven and ‘incentivised’ delivery, which responds to short-term targets. This leads to a strongly pragmatic approach to building partnership relationships which can overlook the importance of relationships, cooperation and consensus. Moreover, strategic partnerships lead to intensified scrutiny of partnership outcomes, increased competition between partners, a persistent fear of failure, and a transactional approach to partnership operations. Consequently, Morgan and Baker (2021) propose that communicative partnerships, which emphasise processes over outcomes through co-evolution and co-design, may present a more effective approach to partnership working. This focuses on social action and transformative change for beneficiaries.

Building upon these findings, a model of partnership working has been developed by Dr Colin Baker and Dr Haydn Morgan (see Morgan et al., forthcoming) which attempts to capture the structural, process and involvement factors that are predictive of members’ perceptions concerning partnership working. Through the identification of

these factors it is possible to identify key features of the partnership which establish a point of reference for practitioners and researchers alike. This helps to bring into focus what it is that happens as a result of collaborative activity in partnership contexts.

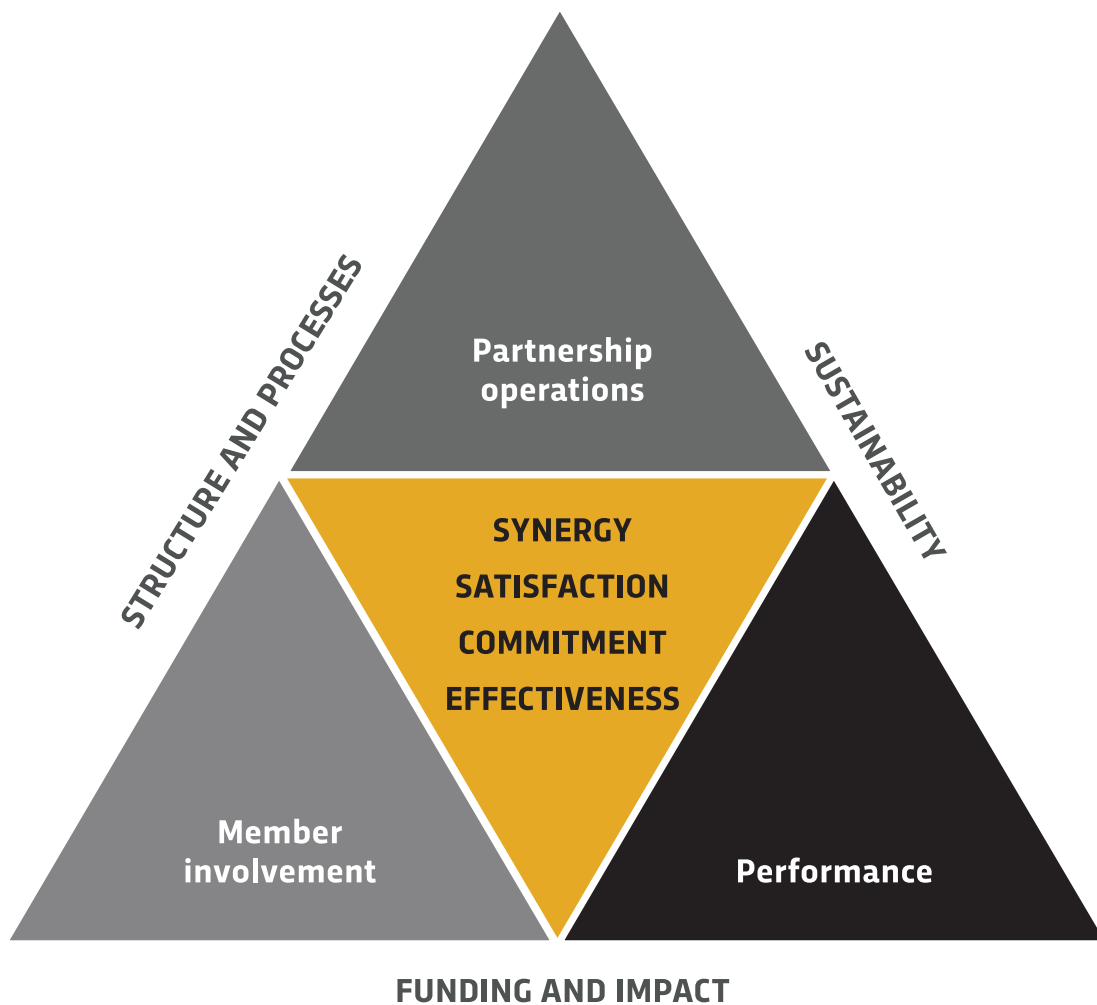
The aim of the current research project was to provide empirical evidence to support and validate the model’s optimisation and use practitioner perspectives to provide insights into the component parts of the model. In doing so, the research aims to provide a more detailed understanding of each component of the model in isolation, but also how the individual components interact with each other. Firstly, an overview of the model and its core domains is presented.

Following this a flow diagram is introduced which seeks to animate these domains and demonstrate their overlapping and interactive nature. The diagram highlights that partnership outcomes precede wider partnership impacts through the activities and programmes that are developed. In doing so it draws attention to a number of factors which might serve as a tool for guiding thinking, discussions and decision making within partnerships in order to maximise impact.

¹ Morgan, H. & Baker, C. (2021). Strategic or communicative partnerships? Insights from sports programmes in the criminal justice sector, *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, 13:4, 715-732.

2. OVERVIEW OF THE MODEL OF PARTNERSHIP WORKING

The partnership model presented in Figure 1 was developed using primary data collected from stakeholders involved in a UK crime prevention partnership that seeks to build a better and safer society through the use of sport in the criminal justice system. The model posits a number of structural, process and involvement domains that are predictive of perceptions of those involved in the partnership. These are conceptualised as synergy, satisfaction, commitment and effectiveness and represent four critical factors that help understand the processes and outcomes of partnership working.



Participation
Benefits & Costs
Trust
Ownership
Conflict

Management & leadership
Function
Communication
Decision making
Planning & strategy

Interventions & Programmes

Figure 1: Model of partnership working in sport and criminal justice

2.1 Outcome indicators

In the absence of accurate indicators to evidence the impact of partnership, the model proposes four proximal outcome indicators derived from the academic literature, which assess the product of partnership activities (i.e. what it is that is being achieved through partnership, and how). These indicators speak directly to the immediate outcomes of the partnership itself, as experienced by those taking part, and provide a means of understanding important areas of focus to sustain collaborative activities.

- **Synergy** concerns how well those working in partnership situations are able to achieve successes through working together (Butterfoss, 2006²) and are able to accomplish more than could be achieved by acting independently of other organisations.
- **Satisfaction** relates to the extent to which those working in partnership derive fulfilment from their engagement in the partnership, both in terms of how people work together but also the way in which people are satisfied by the way partnership processes and plans are implemented (Butterfoss, 2006).
- **Commitment** relates to the degree to which those working in partnership feel a degree of responsibility or duty towards the partnership, which enables open and honest relationships, and a culture of compromise, alongside clarity regarding aims, expectations, roles and partner responsibilities.
- **Effectiveness** relates to the factors that outline the degree to which the partnership is perceived as successful in producing a desired result, and may include factors such as the contribution of the partnership to the community and beneficiaries that it serves, and the extent to which relations between those working in partnership are productive (Babiak & Thibault, 2009³).

2.2 Function and operation

The four outcomes are associated with three interrelated and overlapping domains which articulate how it is that the partnership functions and operates:

- **Partnership operations and processes** concern activities that transform inputs (such as planning, leadership, communication, and decision making), into processes and outcomes that help develop and implement partnership activities and promote common understanding.
- **Member involvement** refers to the factors that enable an individual's (including those representing host organisations) ongoing involvement in a partnership and foster the necessary trust to ensure that those involved perceive their contributions to be valued, and that everyone acts in the best interests of the partnership.
- **Performance** relates to the extent to which the intentional efforts and activities of the partnership result in the implementation of interventions and activities that address its stated aims, and how benefits are accrued to partners and beneficiaries which would not otherwise have been created were it not for the partnership.

2.3 Pillars of partnership

There are three theoretical pillars underpinning the four main domains introduced. These pillars consist of theoretical and practical elements, the first relating to sets of ideas or concepts, the latter relating to the practical reality of applying these ideas and concepts. These provide the basis for sustained and effective action by maintaining the role and relevance of the theory and contexts in which partnerships operate.

- Pillar 1:** Member involvement and partnership operations are conceptualised as the basis for partnership structures and process which concern the management arrangements (whether formal or informal) that are established to coordinate the activities of the partnership in respect of core administrative, decision making and communication processes. Without these, the partnership would not be able to function effectively.
- Pillar 2:** Together with partnership operations, performance is conceptualised as the basis for sustainability. This concerns the potential for partnerships to maintain productive activities that address its core aims and to build or enhance capacity to identify and respond to the issues it is trying to address over time with respect to the skills, experience and expertise of its partners.
- Pillar 3:** Member involvement and performance are conceptualised as factors relate to funding and impact. Reflecting the wider operating environment, this concerns the relationship between local partnership-level factors and the wider socio-economic environment, and the way in which partnerships can utilise limited resources to achieve maximum impact.

Summary

The partnership model seeks to establish a means of 'lifting the lid' on partnerships in the context of sport and physical activity crime prevention and rehabilitation projects. In doing so it aims to provide a potential means of exploring the complex and overlapping dimensions of partnership working to understand in detail the configurational nature of relationships between diverse actors in a way that is relevant to both theory and practice. Usefully, this might provide a basis for identifying and exploring things that are not only theoretically but experientially relevant and in so doing help support those working in partnerships.

² Butterfoss F. D. (2006). Process evaluation for community participation. *Annual Review of Public Health*, 27, 323–340.

³ Babiak, K.M. & Thibault, L. (2009). Challenges in multiple cross-sector partnerships. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*,

3. METHODS

The primary research consisted of in-depth analyses of two case studies, both of which utilise a partnership and multi-agency approach to operationalising sport and criminal justice projects. These cases, located in Newport (South Wales) and Sheffield respectively, were identified by the Alliance of Sport, who acted as a gatekeeper for the research team. The two cases were assessed as appropriate examples for examination, given that they comprised i) partners from both statutory and non-statutory organisations, ii) some organisations whose remit was regional in scope while others were focussed on local delivery, and iii) a mix of organisations with a defined sport-for-development focus alongside those that were more concerned with youth work and community development. The diversity of partners within the two case studies provided a breadth of perspectives and experiences, and enabled the research team to investigate how practitioners might use the model to recruit organisations to multi-agency partnerships and guide the management and leadership of partnership operations.

Data was collected via two group interviews (one with each partnership) conducted 'in person' by the researchers at a time and location convenient to the respective partnership. In total, 22 participants took part in the interviews (10 in Newport; 15 in Sheffield). The interview in Newport lasted 97 minutes in duration, while in Sheffield the interview was 120 minutes. An interview guide was developed by the researchers for use with both partnerships which broadly sought to enable discussion around the four outcome indicators derived from the proposed model (synergy, satisfaction, commitment and effectiveness), and what factors influenced progress towards these. As expected, situational and contextual differences arose within discussions that took place which revealed the dynamic and complex nature of partnership working.

To ensure the accuracy of interview data, interviews were audio-recorded using a digital Dictaphone and transcribed verbatim. A set of 'fieldnotes' containing key discussion points and analytical memos captured by both researchers during each interview supplemented the audio data and informed its subsequent analysis. All interview transcripts were reviewed by the research team and analysed using thematic analysis. This is a systematic method for identifying and organizing themes in data that convey the meaning of participants' experiences, attitudes and opinion. Focusing on meaning within the data encourages the researcher to observe and make sense of collective or shared meanings and experiences that are relevant to the research problem in question (Braun & Clarke, 2012⁴).

⁴Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2012). Thematic analysis. In H. Cooper, P.M. Camic, D. L. Long, A. T. Panter, D. Rindskopf, & K.J. Sher (Eds.), *APA handbook of research methods in psychology, Vol. 2. Research designs: Quantitative, qualitative, neuropsychological, and*

4. FINDINGS AND INSIGHTS

4.1 Synergy

Both interviews provided insight into how synergy was created within their partnership and enabled them to work collaboratively to achieve more than they could independently. Uppermost in attaining synergy was an apparent willingness to learn from the experience and knowledge of other individuals and partner organisations. In doing so, individuals were able to draw upon each other's strengths to the benefit of the partnership. As one respondent from Newport noted:

Working in partnerships you get to use everybody's strengths ... and I've been able to learn things [from others] I wouldn't have possibly learnt [otherwise], and we bounce off each other and use each other's strengths and knowledge ... it's the best education you can get!

One of the respondents from Sheffield revealed a similar perception of synergy noting that partnership working created a sense of 'alchemy', whereby more could be achieved (and celebrated) when partners drew upon each other's strengths:

... the one thing I love about this partnership ... it's like alchemy. When you put two ingredients together the separate strengths of those ingredients give you something new ... you actually realise that there's something new happening that doesn't exist anywhere else and the changes you can make are quite deep because you're learning from and building on some of the strategies of different organisations.

A further consequence of working synergistically was the ability to ensure that activities within the partnership were not duplicated, or more precisely, were able to be built upon and optimised. A good example was provided by the Newport partnership and their provision of 'Wicked Wednesdays' which offered a suite of community-based activity sessions delivered by a variety of local providers. Explaining how Wicked Wednesday was conceived, the partnership had noticed that similar and over-lapping activities were being offered to young people, which caused confusion for them as to which activities to attend. By pooling these activities into one, weekly event, a solution was discovered which responded to local need. As the Newport partnership explained:

... there is a risk of over-saturation in a community ... and we talk about partnerships to reduce duplication ... [but] we came up with what was best for the children and came up with Wicked Wednesday, where we all come together. But it took a lot to come to, but it was about sitting down and thrashing out [a solution] because the children were being pulled [in different directions]...

It was clear from both interviews that trust was an important contributor to synergy and was something that had been established and reinforced over a period of time. Several contributors spoke of the trust they had developed with other partners and how this had enabled them to be co-ordinated and structured in their provision and support to beneficiaries, but at the same time to be agile, flexible and adaptable for other partners, all while being responsive to beneficiaries' needs. In this sense, it was evident that not only was trust between partners important but so too in respect the mission and aim of the partnership. As one Sheffield partner indicated:

The important bit, and the difference I've seen, is the ability to be flexible about things ... and being adaptable [to local needs] rather than a governing body saying 'this is how to do it; how do you want our version of things' and that doesn't work.

Resonating with the pillars of partnership highlighted in the Section 2, being sensitive and responsive to beneficiaries' needs was pivotal to the process of determining actions that intentionally involved dialogue. This co-design approach encouraged exchanges between partners and target beneficiaries which helped incorporate a diversity of (local) views and perspectives and bestowed a sense of credibility for the partnership because people felt they were being listened to. Trust, therefore, was important between partners and between the partnership and the community. It was this philosophy that, arguably, best illustrated the benefits of synergy within the partnerships, as typified by the following statements:

The synergy has enabled the community to fit in with the partnership, because we've gone from [thinking] 'what do we think this community needs?' to 'what would you like us to do?' and asking that simple question has brought a whole new wave of engagement ... because [before] they [beneficiaries] were saying 'nobody's listening to us, we feel isolated' ... [Newport].

One of the things about this group is that its very consultation-driven, that you listen to participants, listen to the young kids, listen to older participants ... everyone feeding back [with what they want] ... and it's like 'they've asked for this, how can we work together to deliver this' [Sheffield].

In this sense, synergy not only concerned the ability to secure better outcomes than working individually but also how these outcomes were achieved. The inclusive, equitable and discursive approach adopted by both partnerships speaks to a collective mindset which intentionally sought to empower local people and give them a voice in the opportunities with which they engage. As such, synergy provides an important conceptual lens through which to explore and unpack peoples' experiences of partnership working in the current context.

4.2 Satisfaction

The interviews revealed that the co-design approach to partnership working and the involvement of community members to generate localised solutions also enabled partners to derive a sense of fulfilment and satisfaction from their involvement in the partnership. Several individuals spoke of the pride that they experienced in being a member of their partnership and that this helped to sustain their involvement in the collaboration. This was captured strongly by a Sheffield respondent:

What we've been able to do as a collective is reduce the amount of groups competing for bits of funding, and competing for participants and bringing in (new partners), with different expertise ... and celebrating that it's local people and celebrating local achievement. We created something new and different. We wouldn't have got some of the learning, the confidence, some of the celebration and some of the pride. I feel proud when I see any of the partners [being successful].

Respondents also highlighted how the basis for their satisfaction was founded on working with people and organisations who shared similar values and principles, which often involved contributing to the partnership 'for the right reasons'. For example, in Sheffield, respondents explained that they had, on occasion, refused the offer of external funding and resources because the provider did not share the same values and principles. They explained:

As much as we need those resources, we can confidently say we can deliver as much on small crumbs that don't jeopardise our principles which some funders want us to do ... and it's the same with collaborators. We retain a sense of confidence and a value to the work that we do.

Along similar lines, one partner from Newport explained how shared values and an assurance that no partner organisation wanted to take individual credit for a success was key to satisfaction. However, they also recognised this as a challenge that needed careful management:

... it goes back to values and we're all in it for the right reasons and taking the ego out of it ... and because we're facing such challenging times the ego sometimes comes in because people are precious about their work and want to show that they're the ones making a difference ...

However, by working with similarly minded and similarly principled partners, respondents felt that their satisfaction with the partnership was enhanced as activities were able to be focussed on objectives and beneficiaries that they all believed to be important. This was in contrast to feeling obligated to tailor their actions to meet the outcomes derived by funders (consistent with a strategic approach to partnership) which focussed on more 'mainstream' concerns. As one member of the Sheffield partnership revealed:

What [the partnership] has done is bring community development alive, they've brought us to work collectively and start [a project] on 'our' terms ... [whereas in the past] it was done on the 'mainstream's' terms.

What these findings reveal is that satisfaction can be related to all three pillars of partnership. In both cases, the interview data indicated that a distributed approach to leadership was evident whereby leaders did not expect to solve problems themselves and instead created a social and cultural context which was not dominated by any one individual (Pillar 1). This established a more inclusive though no less challenging environment where partnership priorities and actions were negotiated. Equally, maintaining a strong focus on community issues was clearly important to all concerned which had a strong coordinating effect on the efforts of partners (Pillar 2). Furthermore, a sense of unity and purpose within the partnerships appeared to have provided a considerable source of satisfaction which enabled partners to feel confident in making autonomous decisions concerning how the partnership conducted its business (Pillar 3). In this way, confirming satisfaction as a multifaceted aspect of partnership working helps us to understand it as an important consideration for practitioners and researchers alike.

4.3 Commitment

Respondents highlighted a variety of ways in which their commitment to the partnership was strengthened. Without this commitment it is unlikely that sustained or meaningful partner engagement was possible. It was clear that partners were highly committed to causes in their communities and in this respect, it was essential that there was clarity around purpose and the broader partnership aims, expectations, and responsibilities of each member. This helped establish a set of conditions which allowed partners to channel their energy and resources. Participants in both interviews alluded to common purpose being an important driver of commitment, the Sheffield partnership revealing:

We all want the same thing ... to help the community. So, once we acknowledged what we wanted to get out of it [the partnership], we could work together. Community is our common ground, full stop. And everything we do, we do it for the community.

Commitment was also demonstrated through an individual and collective duty towards the partnership, with several examples provided as to how partners went 'above and beyond' their professional role to support beneficiaries. As one Sheffield respondent indicated:

... our phones are never off, so if we turned our phones off at 5 o'clock we'll soon see what [is being lost or missed in our delivery].

A collective duty towards the partnership was also visible in the level of responsibility that partners demonstrated towards each other. Specifically, respondents spoke of other partners acting as advocates for the partnership and partner organisations in other forums, as well as representing each other positively in other collaborations:

We know that when those other guys [partners] go into other meetings they will represent us as hard as we represent ourselves – that's reassuring and shows [they're] somebody we can trust...

Finally, commitment was enhanced through the open and honest relationships that were evident from the two interviews, and the extent to which partners were able to openly debate and compromise, where needed, on strategic direction. Commitment, in this sense, was perhaps most evident in the way in which the partnerships openly embraced conflict and were able to deal with disagreements by recognising that critical debate was essential to productive relationships, and that any criticism was well-meaning and was intended to enhance partnership activities and not promote personal agendas. Viewed in this way, partner commitment would appear to act as a buffer to more challenging aspects of partnership working and, in some cases, might help partners view conflict as a potential resource, providing opportunities for wide ranging discussion and expansive thinking. As the Sheffield partnership explained:

... because of the work that we all do, it's coming from a good place ... when we do have those disagreements we have a dialogue to have a meaningful change we talk to each other and to a lot of people that doesn't happen ... but it's different here, we do have frank conversations.

Furthermore, respondents also noted how a culture which welcomed compromise was essential to ensuring that the partnership operated in an authentic manner, which also contributed to commitment. A Sheffield respondent noted:

We're aggressive, we call it passion, we're vocal, our tone of voice is not [always] appropriate, but that's just us being us, so when we find a partner like us, we share.

This willingness to embrace conflict and engage in open and honest critical debate was highlighted as a key component of partnership effectiveness, a factor to which we now turn.

4.4 Effectiveness

The most common measure of partnership effectiveness which arose from the interviews was the intentional focus on assessing and refining partnership processes. This was in contrast to using performance outcomes (for example, numbers of local people engaged in a project) as the key measure of effectiveness which were recognised by many as the traditional metric used. Here, a Newport respondent revealed:

Effectiveness is about process ... but what we sometimes do is skip to the end-game rather than going through the process ... so for us it's about following the process and try and include as many people as we can ... and the city will be different [as a result].

By focussing on process, the two partnerships demonstrated that they had a long-term commitment to enabling change in their communities, rather than being solely concerned with short-term measures of success. In this sense, partnership effectiveness provides a potentially more valuable and expansive way of understanding partnership success because it is focused on more than simple or discrete measures, as typified by the comments:

By getting people like this round the table and collaborating and identifying people with the talent to drive the next generation from this group ... to the next level and become role models and give children born today hope ... and that [they] have a chance and can aspire... [Sheffield respondent].

It's about making sure that we add value to the group, that this group is still here, it's still achieving and still doing what it set out to do ... Ultimately, success for this group is that it is still here in a hundred years' time... [Sheffield respondent].

The data revealed that a longer-term, gradual and communicative approach to change helped not only recognise the realities (and challenges) of working within their communities, but also demonstrated how the long-term sustainability of the partnership was (for them) an important and relevant indicator of effectiveness. A respondent from the Newport partnership explained:

Sustainability is effectiveness, and needing more [young partners] to then lift this [work] and expand this and impart that knowledge on to the next wave of managers; and then we're enabling...

Moreover, respondents felt that by concentrating on partnership sustainability, this enabled them to be accountable to their communities and beneficiaries rather than funders and politicians, and 'work with' them in a supportive and co-constructed manner. A Sheffield respondent captured this philosophy:

Our accountability is to the communities that we serve and that level of accountability is far more stringent and different to being accountable to a funding board ... so there is that level of accountability which is far more challenging for us. We value the work that we do ourselves, we never need somebody to come along and tell us we're being effective, but we know that what we do is effective because of the change in the young people ... we give them hope, aspiration, we can see that impact right in front of our eyes, and we take ownership of that...

The data presented here appear to confirm effectiveness as an important and useful way of understanding not only what the partnership achieves in terms of results within the community, but also the way in which these results are produced. It is important therefore to explore the nature of relationships and processes within and between partners in order that a holistic understanding of what it is that is important for effectiveness.

4.5 Summary

Overall, the data presented here appear to confirm the role and relevance of the four outcome indicators and the complex and dynamic nature of these factors within the crime prevention partnership context. Discrete factors such as these help to delimit aspects of partnership and in doing so provide an important way of exploring and explaining what it is that is going on. Given the interaction between these factors and the wider partnership context, these will be experienced in unique ways so that each partnership is distinct. However, the factors outlined here remain conceptually relevant to all partnerships.

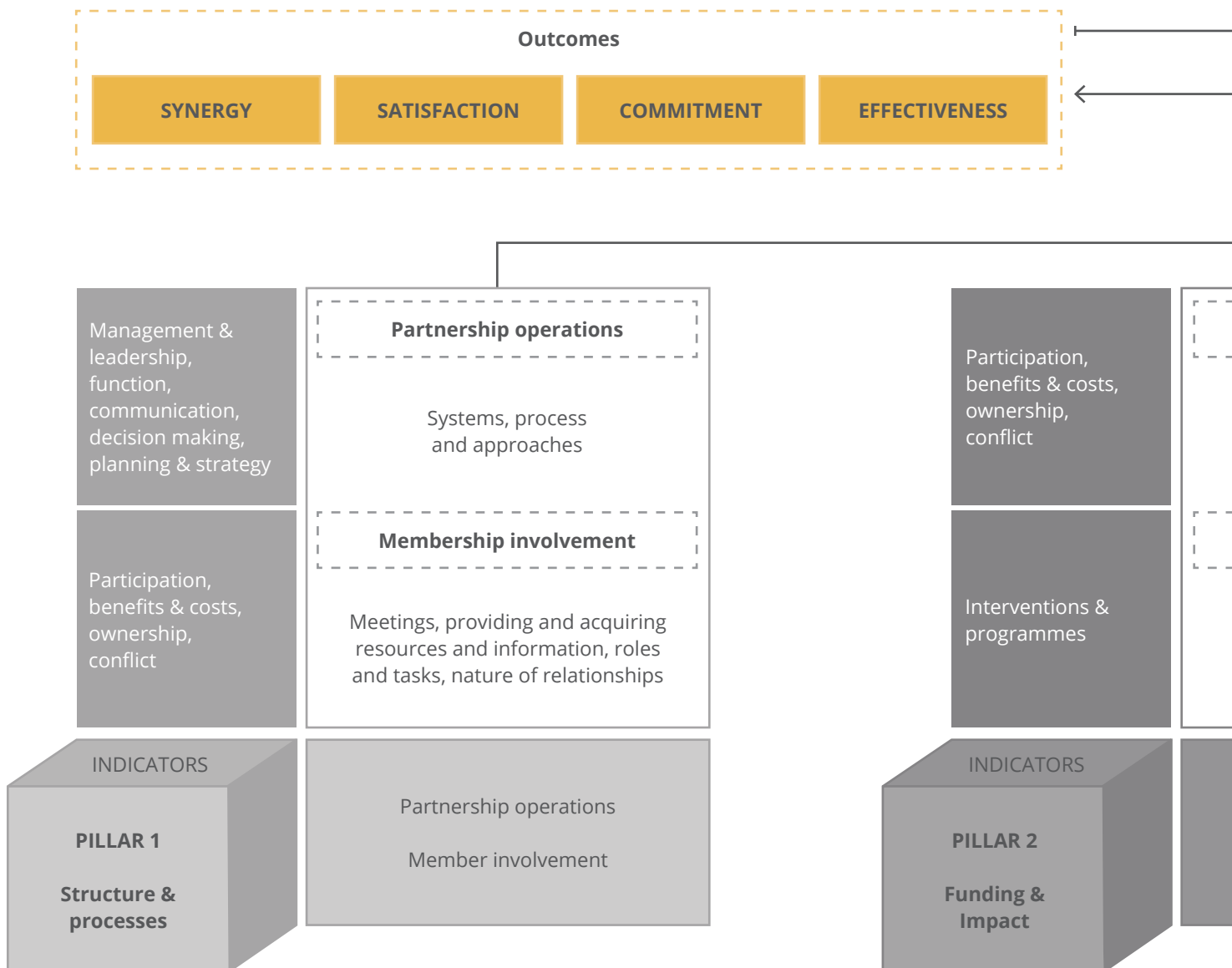
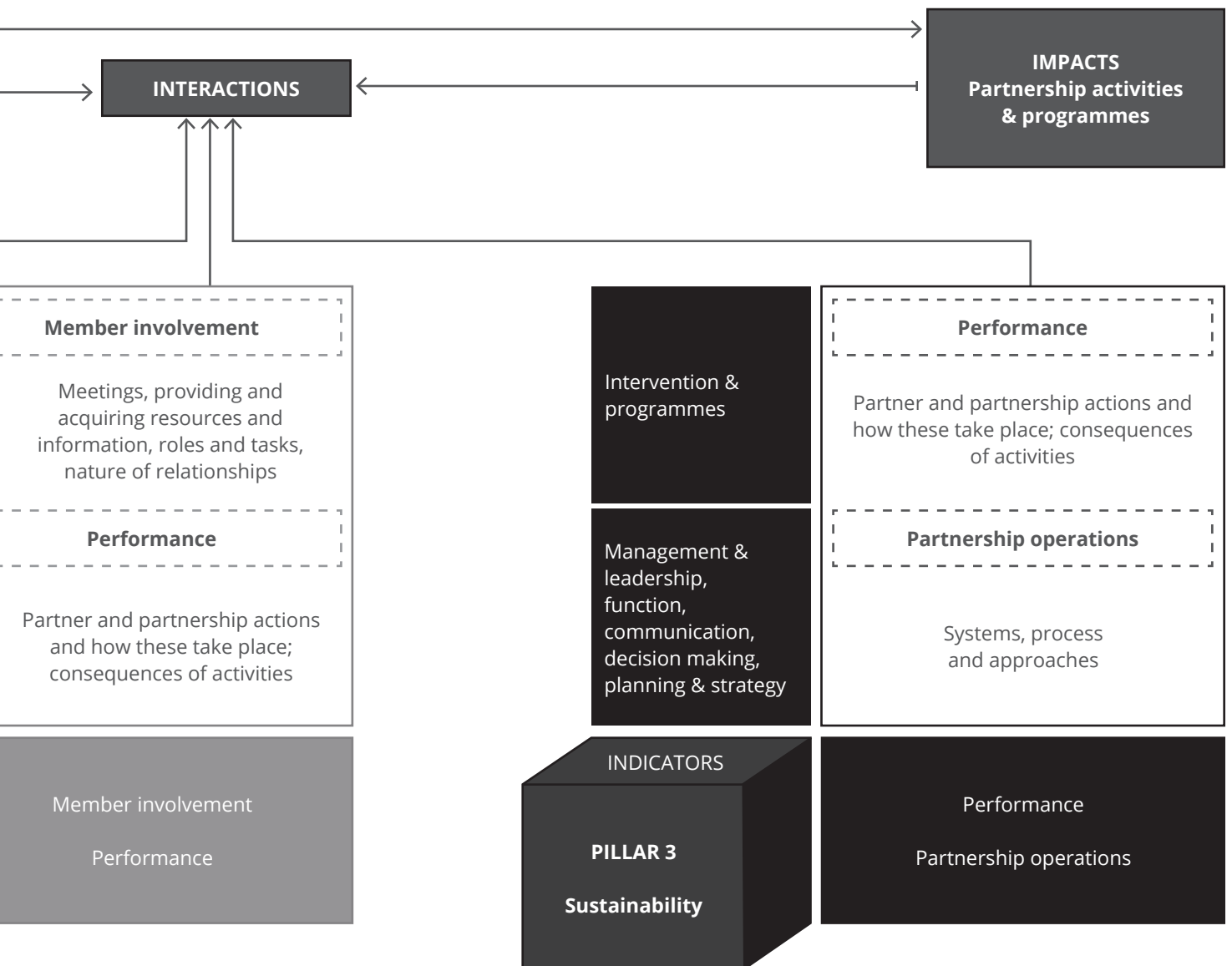


Figure 1: Model of partnership working in sport and criminal justice

The flow diagram in Figure 2 uses the data presented thus far to highlight the dynamic nature of partnership working. Depicting things in this way demonstrates the interrelatedness of factors discussed here together with a number of indicators that support thinking, discussions and decision making. Consideration of these might help navigate the hinterland between what is visible or known, and what is possible by working together and so assist those working in partnership to better understand what they do and how they do it, and to lift the lid on their own partnerships.



5. CONCLUSIONS

The research has shown that there are many inter-related factors that contribute to effective partnership working, and a number of important considerations that need to be thought through before engaging in, or forming, a partnership.

- **Partnerships are complex and operate in complex environments:** there is not a 'one size fits all' model of effective partnership working. However, if practitioners understand the three pillars of partnership working—structure, impact, and sustainability—and how these pillars attune to the politics and idiosyncrasies of the local context, then the creation of a partnership that is both focused upon and in harmony with the needs of the local community is more likely to be achieved.
- **Effective partnerships need awesome people:** partnership working, and the achievement of partnership objectives, requires a significant commitment from all members. While commitment may manifest in different ways, the 'human factor' cannot be underestimated in establishing and maintaining the values and beliefs that will underpin the partnership, as well as demonstrating the passion to drive partnership objectives and navigate the (local and national) politics of community development. Identifying when 'new' or 'diverse' individuals or organisations should be added (or indeed, removed) is key to ensure that the partnership is refreshed with new ideas and knowledge, and values are challenged to sustain the purpose and relevance of the partnership when longstanding members leave. Having a 'backbone' organisation (in this case the Alliance of Sport) to oversee and support the overall development of a partnership significantly assists progress towards partnership outcomes and/or establishing the three pillars.
- **Effective partnerships assert a strong ethical and moral stance:** effective partnerships are self-governing and evolve in response to community need. A commitment to co-design, an acceptance of decision making based on consensus, and an openness to critical debate on conflicting ideas is critical. Attitudes and structures which facilitate this are fundamentally important. Effective partnerships not only emanate from communities but are located morally and ethically within their communities, either through their physical presence in that community or through an alignment of ideas within community perspectives. This potentially elevates their relevance as mechanisms for change above other local actors.
- **Effective partnerships generate genuine transformation:** supporting and developing communities through sport and physical activity is an on-going process, perhaps a journey, rather than an end in itself. Partnerships which recognise this distinction and ensure that strategic and operational activity has a longer-term outlook and promotes sustainable solutions is the hallmark of genuine transformation and indicative of a communicative approach to partnership working.

