

*National Evaluation of Local
Strategic Partnerships*

Theory of Change Issues Paper

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Partnerships*

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Mike Geddes for the National Evaluation team

July 2006

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This paper was written by Mike Geddes, Warwick Business School, on behalf of the National Evaluation team, which is drawn from a consortium comprising the Local Government Centre, Warwick Business School; the Cities Research Centre, University of the West of England Bristol; the European Institute for Urban Affairs, Liverpool John Moores University; and the Office for Public Management. Many members of the team contributed to the development of the theory of change.

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Department for Communities and Local Government
Eland House
Bressenden Place
London
SW1E 5DU
Telephone: 020 7944 4400
Website: www.communities.gov.uk

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INTRODUCTION

This paper is one of many outputs from the first phase of a long term evaluation of Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs¹). It discusses the contribution of a theory of change methodology within the evaluation. The origins of the approach are first discussed along with its increasing application in UK policy evaluation studies, especially within the set of evaluations of elements of the Local Government Modernisation Agenda (LGMA). The paper then examines the way in which a theory of change has been developed and applied in the LSPs evaluation. This discussion emphasises the dynamic way in which the model of change initially developed at the outset of the evaluation has been modified as the evaluation progressed, while preserving its core features. This suggests that the model has combined robustness and flexibility. It is argued that the theory of change has had two main benefits – it has provided a framework which has helped to give coherence to the diverse elements of the evaluation, and it has served as the basis from which key elements of the evaluation have been designed. In conclusion some issues are raised about the possible deployment of the theory in the next stage of the LSPs evaluation.

WHAT IS A THEORY OF CHANGE APPROACH?

The theory of change (TOC) approach draws on US work by Connell and Kubisch (1998), Chen (1990), Weiss (1995), among others². It is becoming widely used in UK policy evaluation studies (e.g. Mackenzie and Blamey 2005; Sullivan *et al.* 2002 on Health Action Zones³) and is a central element in the meta-evaluation of the LGMA⁵.

¹ See the appendix for a full list of abbreviations used in this paper.

² Connell J.P. and A.C. Kubisch (1998) 'Applying a theory of change approach to the evaluation of comprehensive community initiatives: progress, prospects and problems' in K. Fulbright-Anderson, A.C. Kubisch, and J.P. Connell (eds) *New Approaches to Evaluating Community Initiatives, Volume 2: Theory, Measurement and Analysis* Washington DC: Aspen Institute: 15-44; Chen H.T. (1990) *Theory Driven Evaluations* London: Sage; Weiss C. (1995) 'Nothing as practical as good theory: exploring theory-based evaluation for comprehensive community initiatives for children and families' in J.P. Connell, A.C. Kubisch, L.B. Schorr and C.H. Weiss (eds) *New Approaches to Evaluating Community Initiatives, Volume 1: Concepts, Methods, and Contexts* Washington DC: Aspen Institute.

³ Mackenzie M. and A. Blamey (2005) 'The practice and the theory: Lessons from the application of a theories of change approach' *Evaluation* 11: 151-168. See also Sullivan H., M. Barnes and E. Matka (2002) 'Building collaborative capacity through theories of change: Early lessons from the evaluation of Health Action Zones in England' *Evaluation* 8: 205-226.

⁴ See for example Sullivan H., G. Gillanders, S. Goss and J. Steele (2004) *Developing a 'Theory of Change' to evaluate Local Public Service Agreements* London: ODPM; Boyne G., S. Martin and R. Walker (2001) *Best Value, Organisational Change and Performance Improvement: a theory-based approach*, Local and Regional Government Research Unit, Cardiff University; *Meta-evaluation of the LGMA: Progress reports on accountability, community leadership, public confidence, service improvement and stakeholder engagement* (2005) London: ODPM.

According to Weiss (1995), the concept of grounding evaluation in theories of change takes for granted that social programmes are based on explicit or implicit theories about how and why the programme will work. As Leeuw (1995: 20) states, a TOC, in a simple sense, maps the assumptions which underpin any social intervention:

*'A TOC is a system of social and behavioural assumptions that underlie a public policy which have been reformulated in the form of propositions. These propositions reflect the beliefs of policy makers about the cognitions, attitudes and behaviours of the policy's target group: the people whom the policy is to affect.'*⁵

Sullivan and Stewart (2006/forthcoming)⁶ note how the theories of change approach to evaluation *'was devised to meet the need for an evaluative approach that could accommodate the multi-level and many dimensional impacts of developing social and public policy interventions..... In such initiatives the task of linking action to outcomes is extremely complex and difficult and existing evaluative approaches are considered either inadequate or inappropriate. The designers of theories of change argue that its emphasis on the 'systematic and cumulative study of the links between activities, outcomes and contexts of the initiative' diminishes the attribution problem in part through the prior specification of the various links by stakeholders in the intervention'*.

However, it is clear that there are a number of ways of working with a TOC approach (even already within the group of LGMA evaluations, for example). Sullivan and Stewart (2006) raise a number of critical questions about the approach and its application in the UK compared to US contexts, especially whether it is important that the approach is shared with those involved in the programme under evaluation, not just by the evaluation team. It is relevant to note in this context that the approach was originally developed in the context of community-based initiatives, rather than national policy programmes.

THE INITIAL LSPS THEORY OF CHANGE

In developing our proposal for the LSPs evaluation, we took the view that there were certain advantages of a TOC approach:

- It could help the evaluation to develop a set of agreed perspectives within the research team insofar as it requires us to be explicit about our assumptions
- It could help provide a critical framework enabling the evaluation to respond coherently and innovatively to issues and developments, and to focus on key aspects of the programme

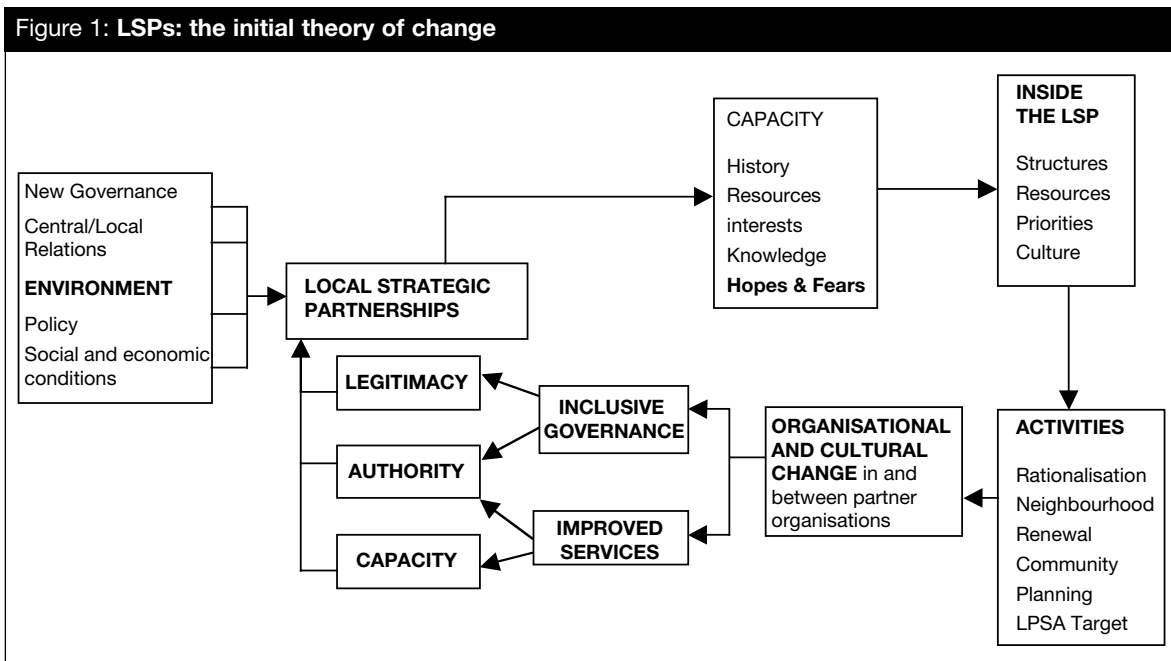
⁵ Leeuw F. (1995) 'Policy theories, knowledge utilisation and evaluation', in R.C. Rist (ed) *Public evaluation: linking theory to practice* Aldershot: Edward Elgar.

⁶ Sullivan H. and M. Stewart (2006) 'Who owns the theory of change?' *Evaluation* 12(2), forthcoming.

- It could assist in focussing not only on what works but why and how; and indeed whether policy is working⁷.

We suggested that government's 'system of assumptions' about the role of LSPs was built around the proposition that a framework of strategic partnership at the local level will create more inclusive and pluralist local governance, bringing together key organisations and actors (from the three spheres of state, market and civil society) to identify communities' top priorities and needs, and work with local people to provide them. This is consistent with the wide perception in the policy community of the advantages of partnership working as the way of achieving effective outcomes, and solutions to so-called 'wicked issues', by building trust, sharing knowledge and resources, and working collaboratively across boundaries.

Figure 1 represents an initial attempt to capture the key features of a formal model of policy making and implementation to which these propositions about the potential contribution of LSPs apply.



This diagrammatic representation assumes that there are a number of key links in the chain of causation which will determine the extent to which LSPs come to represent an effective element within the structures and processes of local governance.

- Emerging LSPs are conditioned by their environment. The environment within which LSPs are emerging is one of major change in the contemporary forms of governance, with new forms emerging in response to the deficiencies of traditional, large bureaucratic 'silos', a more fragmented and fluid set of institutional structures and relationships, and changing relationships between the state, the market and

⁷ This suggests that to understand why policy may not work, as well as why it does, we need models of the 'vicious circles' of policy failure as well as of the virtuous circles of success.

civil society. Many of these tendencies are closely related to the government's key policy drivers such as the modernisation of government and local government, continuous improvement in the performance of public services, and joined up working to tackle cross-cutting, 'wicked' issues such as social inclusion and neighbourhood renewal. The local policy contexts in which LSPs are emerging are strongly conditioned by such trends, but will respond in differing ways as a result of local factors.

- (b) The capacity of emerging LSPs is initially conditioned by the history of past partnership working and the character and capacities of key partners, bringing 'to the table' a set of vested interests, knowledge, aspirations, hopes and fears. Initially therefore LSPs will be able to draw on some resources, but will be seeking to acquire more and transform others, adding value and seeking synergy.
- (c) The structure and membership of the LSP then provides the framework within which these resources can be drawn upon, as the LSP develops its own working processes, practices, procedures and protocols, and starts to form its own organisational culture, as trust is built and leadership style established, in the process of determining its priorities within the parameters set by government guidance and policy objectives.
- (d) These processes of 'forming' the LSP then enable it to address – with greater or lesser degrees of success – its key activities: the development and implementation of the community strategy and neighbourhood renewal strategy, rationalisation of pre-existing partnership arrangements, LPSAs and floor targets etc.
- (e) The effectiveness of the LSP in achieving outcomes in all these areas will however depend crucially not only upon the effectiveness of arrangements 'within the LSP' but even more upon the extent to which the LSP is able to promote cultural and organisational change among partners – both among public service providers but also among other partners from the business, voluntary and community sectors, as it is through the activities of partners and the extent to which they are positively co-ordinated and integrated that success will depend.
- (f) It is upon this linked chain of causation, therefore, that outcomes in terms of both improved services and more inclusive local governance will depend. In turn, the success of the LSP in facilitating such outcomes will impact upon the legitimacy, authority and capacity of the wider local governance system – and on the position within it of the LSP itself.

The model sketched in Figure 1 can thus be seen to constitute a broad research hypothesis about the linked processes through which LSPs may achieve positive outcomes. As such, the diagram helped to suggest some of the key research and policy questions which initially informed both the formative evaluation and the action research.

DEVELOPING THE THEORY OF CHANGE

We recognised however that this was only an initial framework, which would need to be developed a good deal further if it was to fulfil its potential. Consequently, our understanding of the theory of change was outlined to stakeholders during the consultation process undertaken during the feasibility study. The general perception was that the theory of change is a good mechanism through which to drive the research programme. However, it was clearly at an early stage of development, mapping a structure rather than stating a substantive theory.

In the course of the work undertaken during the early stages of the evaluation, including both the initial round of case studies and the early action learning sets, we were able to develop our approach further. The interviews for the first phase of the case studies work, for example, were structured around the TOC framework. We organised two workshops within the evaluation team, to discuss the implications of the ongoing work for the theory of change. This enabled us to develop our approach in several ways:

- Elaborating the theory of change which appears to underlie the introduction of LSPs by government.
- Revising and elaborating our model of the set of linked processes through which LSPs attempt to achieve change.
- Developing this model towards a more detailed and operational framework to guide the evaluation, through the identification of a set of empirical questions based on it.

As was noted above, the starting point for our application of the TOC approach was recognition of the government's 'system of assumptions' about the role of LSPs, as stated, for example, in the White Paper, *Local Leadership, Local Choice*.

This set of assumptions can, we think, be broken down into a set of five linked theoretical propositions. These together involve assumptions about process; about vision and strategy; about implementation and delivery; and about outcomes. These assumptions are set out below.

Theoretical Proposition	Relates to:
TP1 Inclusive processes of negotiation and deliberation generate a shared analysis, sense of direction and capacity which.....	Process
TP2 Unifies and adds clarity to the local governance agenda and priorities for service delivery, so that....	Vision and strategy
TP3 Partners will then implement the vision/strategy, both within their own organisation, and multilaterally	Implementation
TP4 In doing so, service delivery and governance gains occur because agencies have a better understanding of what the community wants and work together to deliver	Outcomes
TP5 Success creates a cycle of increasing and sustainable outcomes, increased social capital and institutional thickness	Sustainability

Each of the five theoretical principles can also be disaggregated into several empirical questions, as follows:

TP1 Inclusive processes of negotiation and deliberation generate a shared analysis, sense of direction and capacity which.....	Are the processes inclusive? Is there an effective process of deliberation and negotiation? Is there a shared analysis? Does the LSP have sufficient capacity?
TP2 Unifies and adds clarity to the local governance agenda and priorities for service delivery, so that....	Has the LSP unified the local governing agenda? Have priorities for local service delivery been set?
TP3 Partners will then implement the vision/strategy, both within their own organisation, and multilaterally	Do partners implement the vision/strategy? Is there joined up action and delivery?
TP4 In doing so, service delivery and governance gains occur because agencies have a better understanding of what the community wants and work together to deliver	Has better understanding of priorities led to gains in service delivery outcomes? Has governance improved?
TP5 Success creates a cycle of increasing and sustainable outcomes, increased social capital and institutional thickness	Are outcomes increasing and sustainable? Have social capital and institutional thickness increased?

Clearly, any model such as this is a simplification, in at least three ways:

- Processes are more complex than this simple linear progression would suggest.
- The model does not reflect the possibility that different LSPs, or different stakeholders, may espouse different views, based on different theoretical propositions, about LSP purposes and processes.
- The model implies a logic chain along which the linked theoretical propositions are validated in practice. It would also be possible to model a ‘chain’ in which some of the connections are broken and therefore in which the propositions are not validated.

Despite these limitations, the model proved very helpful as a broad framework within which to progress the evaluation, both in drawing together findings from different component parts of the evaluation (especially in the Interim and Final evaluation

reports) and in driving and structuring further stages of the research (such as the 2004 survey of all LSPs). At the same time, ongoing work suggested the need to revise the model of the processes through which LSPs achieve change. Figure 2 below reflects a number of modifications:

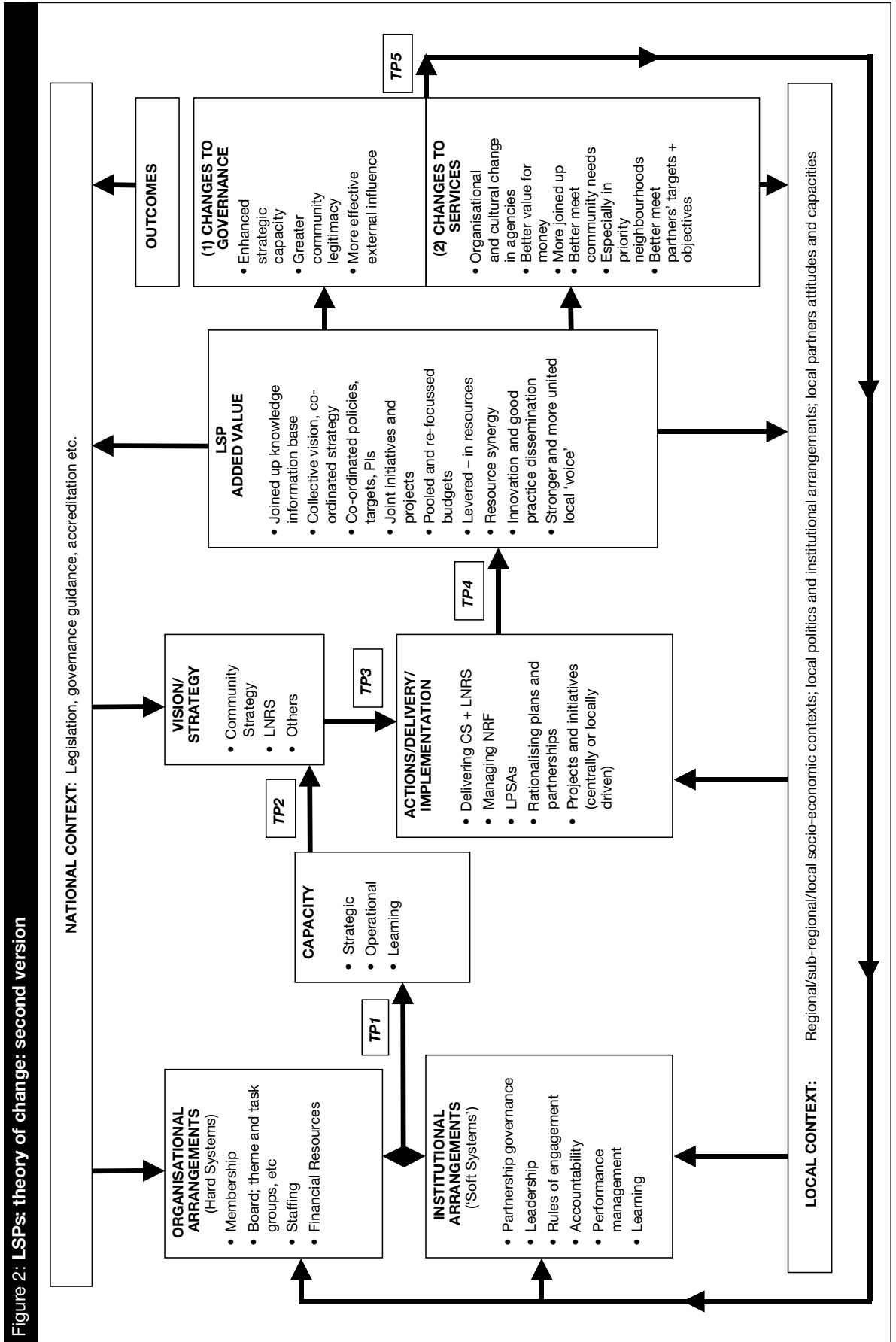
- The diagram links the five theoretical propositions to this model.
- Much of the early work of the evaluation focussed on what in the previous model we titled 'Capacity' and 'Inside the LSP'. This distinction did not enable us to fully consider some of the key issues about LSPs' structures and processes, and we developed a revised diagram which distinguished between the organisational arrangements (or hard systems) and institutional arrangements (or soft systems) which LSPs set up, to recognise the importance of both, and the interrelationship between them; and their conditioning effect on the capacity of the LSP.
- The new diagram recognises, as the previous one did not, the potential role of the LSP in developing strategy, as well as in action, implementation and delivery.
- It also highlights the crucial issue of the ways in which the LSP may add value, through its actions, to outcomes in terms of changes in governance or service improvements.
- The fact that national and local contextual factors are not merely an input at the 'forming' stage of the LSP, but a continuing influence. In turn, if LSPs are successful, they will increasingly influence, as well as being influenced by, these national and local contexts.

Context is a crucial ingredient in the model, and the Final Report of the evaluation⁸ recognises this in placing the experience of LSPs within the current and possible future policy context. Context is also central to the TOC approach. Connell and Kubisch (1998 op cit) argue that *'careful consideration of context helps...the evaluator gain clarity about factors that may have a significant effect on an initiative's chances for achieving its intended outcomes but that the initiative itself is not initially able to influence'*. Stewart (2003: 257-8)⁹ highlights the fact that traditional scientific models of evaluation may be inappropriate due to their inability to control external variables, and suggests it is essential *'to be keenly aware of the extent to which particular initiatives are susceptible to external factors and to identify as far as possible, those effects attributable to an initiative and those which are in whatever way outside its control and determined in some way by context.'* Understanding context is thus crucial to consideration of some of the key issues in policy learning – not simply the attribution question but also the longer term potential for transferability, replication, and sustainability of the initiative.

The potential interaction between initiative and context is already evident within the LSP example. National context has most obviously influenced the development of LSPs

⁸ *National Evaluation of Local Strategic Partnerships: Formative Evaluation and Action Research Programme: Final Report* London: ODPM, 2006.

⁹ Stewart M. (2003) 'Platform of Prison? The Role of Context in the Evaluation of Neighbourhood Renewal' in Scott C.M. and W.E. Thurston *Collaboration in Context: Papers from the 9th International Conference on Multi-organisational Partnerships and Co-operative Strategies* University of Calgary, Alberta: Institute for Gender Research and the Health Promotion Research Group.



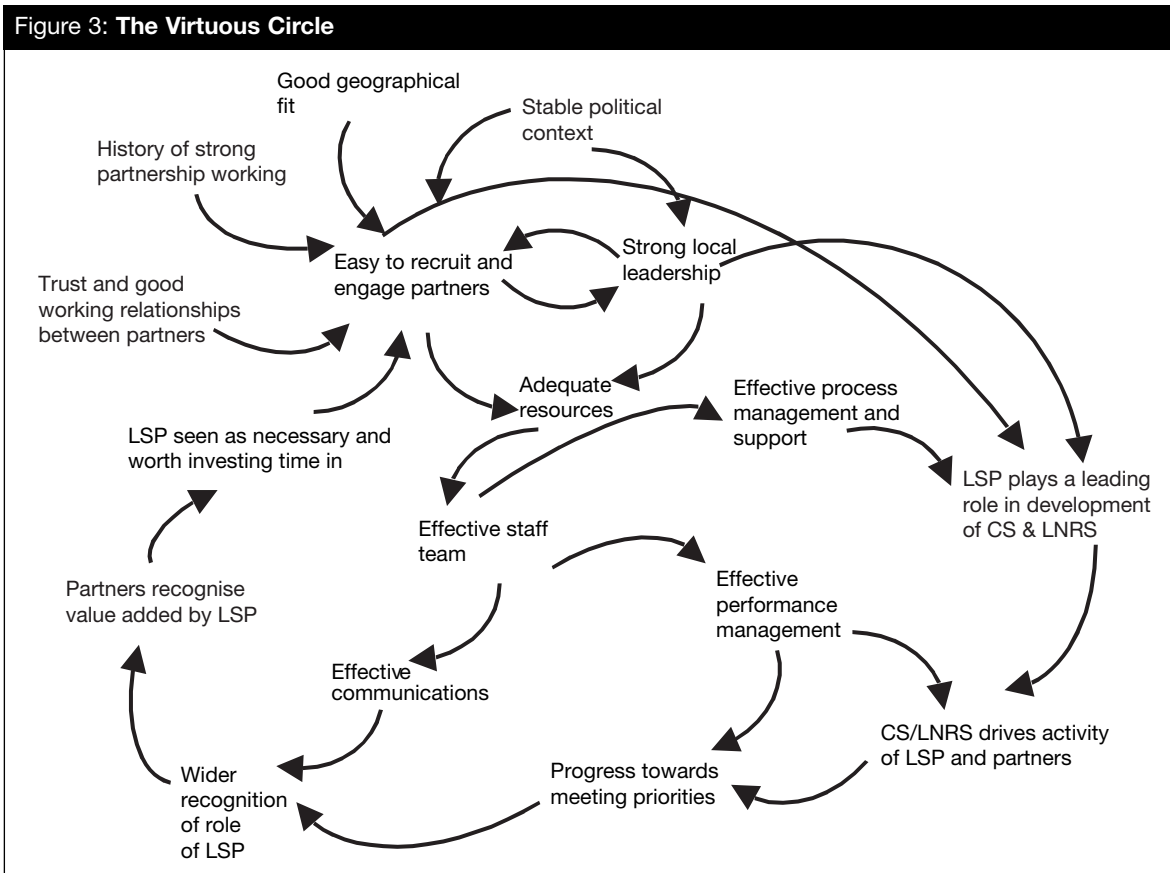
(notably through the establishment of LAAs). But the learning from LSPs has itself begun to influence the national context, as the recent government consultation paper¹⁰ illustrates, and a significant part of any further evaluation of LSPs within a theories of change framework will need to give attention to the changing nature of both national and local contexts.

VIRTUOUS AND VICIOUS CIRCLES

It was noted above that, while the formal model in Figure 1 tended to presuppose a logical, orderly and sequential route, in practice the processes involve more iteration with feedback loops demanding the revisiting of ‘previous’ stages. Over time, the evaluation showed more clearly that there were major differences in the extent to which LSPs were making progress. We found it important, therefore, to develop ideas about both ‘virtuous’ and ‘vicious’ cycles. In the Final Report of the evaluation we contrasted these two circles, identifying the main factors associated with each.

The virtuous circle

The virtuous circle is likely to be rooted, in the first place, in a **positive local context** – a history of strategic partnership predating the LSP, and of trust and good working



¹⁰ Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (2006) *Local Strategic Partnerships: Shaping their future* London: ODPM.

relationships between partners. Positive local contexts are also those in which the geographical area covered by the LSP is a good 'fit' with both socio-economic patterns, and with the boundaries of key partners, and in which there is a stable local political environment.

A positive local context of this kind is likely to make it easier for the LSP to recruit and **engage members** – partners will want to engage with the LSP rather than needing convincing or persuading. But engaging partners will also be easier when there is **effective local leadership** – from the local authority, but also from other partners, so that there is an atmosphere of collective leadership, rather than the LSP being driven by the local authority. In particular, perhaps, the **voluntary and community sectors** will recognise that their involvement is valued by other partners.

Alongside the leadership exercised by leading Board or Executive members, the role of the partnership's **staff team** is crucial in setting up and running the processes through which the LSP works in an inclusive, professional and efficient manner. An effective staff team will communicate well with partners, regional and sub-regional partners, the GO and other stakeholders, and will ensure that strong performance management arrangements are used proactively to monitor and evaluate performance and drive progress.

Adequate **resources** will be available to manage and run the LSP – probably primarily from the local authority, but other partners will contribute because they recognise the value of the LSP to their own objectives.

The LSP will have played a leading role in the development of the Community Strategy (and the LNRS in NRF areas), ensuring that it is widely owned and is **seen to add real value** to the strategies of partners. The **CS and LNRS will be driving the activity of the LSP**, and as both these strategies and those of partners are reviewed and updated there will be increasing synergy between them and this will lead to opportunities to modify partners' spending plans to meet joint priorities, and to significant progress involving active collaboration among partners to meet local floor targets and other priorities. **Performance management arrangements** will be an integral part of the LSPs development and improvement.

As progress is made it will increasingly have a **self-sustaining effect**, as partners and stakeholders recognise the value which the LSP adds and commit themselves more fully. Effective **publicity** will ensure that the role of the LSP in the wider local governance system is recognised well beyond those who contribute directly to it. Partners will increasingly recognise the value of the LSP in **lobbying** on behalf of the area with regional and national government. When asked about the added value which the LSP brings, partners will be able to quote concrete examples of **positive outcomes and impacts**, and will consider that, in the words of one individual 'if the LSP did not exist we would have to invent it'.

partners. As a result, the CS and LNRS will not drive the activity of the LSP or of key partners, and the LSPs activity will not add up to more than a disparate bundle of actions not rooted in the mainstream. In NRF areas, partners may see the LSP as little more than an opportunity to access NRF funding.

In this scenario, the LSP is likely to suffer from **inadequate staffing and resourcing**. Lack of commitment to the LSP will mean that neither the local authority nor other partners are willing to commit substantial resources to the LSP, and consequently a small staff team, often perceived to have little autonomy from the local authority, will not give the LSP sufficient capacity. **Performance management may be lacking** or may exist in principle but without serving as a real driver of improvement. With the failure to develop a strong strategic focus which engages partners, the LSP may come to be seen as a talking shop, or as a **bureaucratic process** which consumes time without leading to outcomes. Partners will increasingly question the value of the LSP, and devote more time to their own organisations or to other partnerships which seem to offer more added value.

Identification of these virtuous and vicious circles is not intended to imply that LSPs need become locked in one or the other. Partnerships may experience progress in some areas but face difficulties in others. Some LSPs have made good initial progress which has then faltered, while others have made recent progress after a slow start. It is possible for LSPs to 'break in' to the virtuous circle or 'break out' of the vicious circle at various points. Thus, for example, strong local leadership can build a supportive local context for the LSP in areas where this does not already exist, while failure to institute efficient working practices can undermine initial partner commitment. The purpose of identifying these trajectories is rather to highlight on the one hand those factors which in combination tend to make for an effective LSP, and those in which the LSP is unlikely to succeed.

The identification of both virtuous and vicious circles of LSP development in this way helps to highlight not only those factors which either drive progress or constitute barriers to it, but the complexity of policy initiatives such as LSPs. Limited political commitment to the LSP, or the limited engagement of partners, reflect some of the tensions within the wider agendas of public service reform and local government modernisation which can play out in LSPs, and which a fully developed theory of change should try to acknowledge.

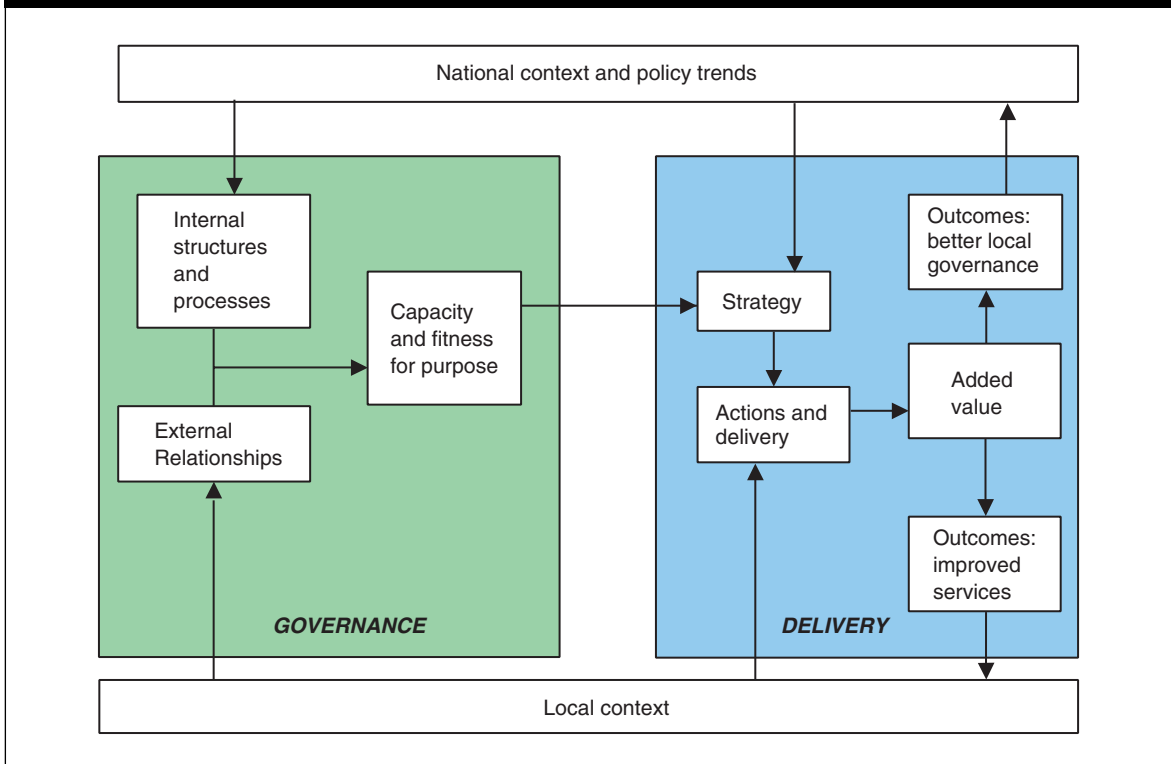
THE THEORY OF CHANGE AND FORMATIVE AND SUMMATIVE ELEMENTS OF THE EVALUATION

The first phase of the LSPs evaluation, in the context of which the theory of change has been developed and used, has been primarily formative, with a strong component of action research. Consequently, issues about the 'forming' of LSPs have been the primary concern. However, it has also been an objective of the evaluation to assess emerging outcomes, and in fact this objective has become increasingly important during the later stages of the first phase of the evaluation. The 2004 survey of all LSPs, in particular, was

structured to provide substantial evidence about the activities of LSPs and their progress towards outcomes, as well as their structures and working practices. This part of the survey, and other assessment of emerging outcomes, for example in the second stage of the case studies, were developed from the parts of the theory of change model concerned with action, added value and outcomes in terms of both local governance and improved service delivery.

The final version of the theory of change model (Figure 5 below) reflects the combination of formative and summative components in the first phase of the evaluation, by superimposing a distinction between issues about the governance of LSPs and issues about delivery. At the same time, later work in the evaluation, especially on the relationships of LSPs both upward (with regional and sub-regional bodies and strategies) and downward (to the neighbourhood level), led us to recognise the importance of a distinction between the LSP's internal processes and its external relationships, and this is also reflected in the final version of the model.

Figure 5: The final version of the theory of change



CONCLUSION: REFLECTION ON THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE THEORY OF CHANGE TO THE EVALUATION

The theory of change has played an important part in the long-term evaluation of LSPs undertaken by the consortium led by Warwick Business School, both:

- As an overall conceptual framework which has given coherence to the work and to key outputs from the evaluation. This has been particularly important given the complex nature of the evaluation.

- In framing the research design of important elements of the evaluation, including the case studies and the 2004 survey of LSPs.

The model has proved to be both robust and flexible, developing in a dynamic way with the progress of the evaluation. However, the theory of change has been used primarily within the research team¹¹. The understandings reflected in it were confirmed through seminars with policy makers and practitioners at an early stage, and seem to have been widely accepted as further research outputs have been disseminated. However, the theory of change has not been actively utilised in dialogue between the evaluation team and LSPs themselves in quite the way in which the North American originators of the approach regarded as important: *'the expectation that all affected stakeholders will be involved in developing, agreeing, monitoring and evaluating a relevant theory for the intervention, and the assumption that widespread stakeholder involvement will extend ownership of the intervention to achieve 'total ownership' (Sullivan and Stewart, 2006 op cit)*. The experience of using a theory of change approach in the LSPs evaluation suggests that the idea of 'total ownership' may thus be unrealistic.

Indeed, the way in which we have developed the model through the elaboration of virtuous and vicious circles embodied recognition that some stakeholders take a critical view of LSPs. An important conclusion would seem to be that, as Sullivan and Stewart discuss, a theory of change is likely to be contested if it concerns a government policy which is itself contested to some degree, and that something like the 'virtuous and vicious circles' approach which we have developed can go some way to recognise the contested nature of policy. However, it may well be relevant to consider further how to incorporate more fully into the model questions of power relationships (both between central and local actors and between different actors at the local level) which underlie, for example, issues about the inclusiveness of LSPs and the relationship between the 'national context' and local initiative. At this point it is relevant to be clear about the 'level' of theory we are concerned with in theories of change, especially as applied to policy initiatives such as LSPs. Adopting the perspective of a critical realist approach¹², we are working with a middle level theory, which focuses on the organisational/institutional level, between on the one hand, society as a structured entity, and the individual, with powers of agency within specific social contexts. However, as Sanderson (2000)¹³ for example recognises, it is important to 'embed' this meso-level, organisational focus in its social, political and economic contexts.

The next stage of the LSP evaluation will be summative. This will involve a greater focus on progress by LSPs, outcomes, and the value which the LSP adds as part of the institutional framework of local governance in England. The current theory of change has shown that it can be developed to address these issues (in the design of the questions in the 2004 survey concerned with progress and outcomes, for example). If the theory of change continues to be used in the second stage of the evaluation, further

¹¹ This is partly because of resource limitations within the evaluation, but also because there are important differences between the local community-based evaluations in which the idea of a theory of change approach was initially developed, and national policy initiatives such as LSPs.

¹² Pawson R. and N. Tilley (1997) *Realistic Evaluation* London: Sage.

¹³ Sanderson I. (2000) 'Evaluation in complex policy systems' *Evaluation* 6(4): 433–454.

consideration will need to be given to the elaboration of the model to underpin research questions and design to provide as robust an assessment of outcomes and added value as possible. One important consideration in this respect would be to take more account of the organisational dynamics within partner agencies, not just within 'the LSP' itself. However, one of the most valuable features of the theory of change has been the way in which it has highlighted the relationships between three sets of issues:

- the national and local contexts of LSPs;
- their governance arrangements;
- and progress and outcomes.

For example, the evaluation has highlighted the importance of 'maturity' (the extent to which LSPs have been able to build on pre-existing positive strategic partnership arrangements) as a very important factor determining the extent of progress made. If what matters is not only what works, but how, why and for whom, then the causal relationships between the different elements of the theory of change - contextual factors such as the change in the policy context, the relative effectiveness of different governance arrangements, and progress, outcomes and added value, will be a crucial concern. This suggests that the evaluation framework posited by the theory of change will still be relevant, albeit with clear shifts of emphasis: on the one hand to understanding the influence of LSPs on the national and local contexts within which they operate and on the other hand to identifying and evaluating progress on the 'delivery' issues the model identifies. These two shifts are of course closely related as shifts in the policy context (currently most obviously the introduction of LAAs) affect the outcomes which LSPs are asked to deliver.

APPENDIX

Abbreviations used in the text

CS	Community Strategy
GO	Government Office (for the region)
LAA	Local Area Agreement
LGMA	Local Government Modernisation Agenda
LNRS	Local Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy
LPSA	Local Public Service Agreement
LSP	Local Strategic Partnership
NRF	Neighbourhood Renewal Fund
TOC	Theory of Change