

6

Modernising Governance

New Labour, Policy and Society

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6 Joined-up government: the politics of partnership

Above all, a joined-up problem has never been addressed in a joined-up way. Problems have fallen through the cracks between Whitehall Departments, or between central and local government. And at the neighbourhood level, there has been no one in charge of pulling together all the things that need to go right at the same time.

(Social Exclusion Unit 1998a: 9)

The governance literature outlined in Chapter 1 suggests a move away from coordination through hierarchy or competition and towards networks and partnerships. This theme is strongly represented in Labour's approach. It formed a central element of the Third Way, which sought to transcend old ideologically-based preferences for delivering services through state bureaucracies on the one hand and competition on the other. It underpinned Labour's discourse of 'joined-up government' through which the government attempted to move towards a more holistic approach to public policy, an approach which transcended the vertical, departmental structures of government itself. Partnership also represented a powerful discourse of inclusion and collaboration which was central to Labour's attempt to forge a consensual style of politics.

This chapter traces these themes in Labour's approach to governing and asks how far they represent a move towards a network-based form of governance. It analyses the contradictory influences on partnership working that are created by the tensions between centralisation and decentralisation in government policy, and suggests ways in which Labour's approach influences the internal dynamics of partnership working. The chapter concludes by highlighting the role of partnerships in the dispersal and reconfiguration of state power.

Governing through partnership: a paradigm shift?

Attempts to create more joined-up government are not a new feature of public policy; there is a long-standing tradition of initiatives designed to bring about better integration of policies and services. The state corporatism of the Wilson, Heath and Callaghan governments produced earlier attempts to create integration through policy planning systems and the

creation of super ministries such as the Department of Health and Social Security. Attempts to promote collaboration between statutory agencies such as the NHS and local authority Social Services Departments have a long history, with particular emphasis on the need for joint approaches underpinning successive policies on community care through the 1990s.

The idea of partnership as an emerging form of governance is rather different. It is associated with the 'hollowing out' of the state and the increasing fragmentation and complexity of the public realm. These developments, it is argued, have led to changes in the way in which the state seeks to govern public services, with an emphasis on governing by steering rather than by direct forms of control (see Jessop 2000; Kooiman 2000; Pierre 2000; Rhodes 1997, 1999; Stoker 1991, 1999). Jessop locates the rise of the new governance in the realisation that the market reforms of neo-liberalism had not delivered all that had been promised: 'market failures and inadequacies had not been eliminated, yet an explicit return to the state was ideologically and politically unacceptable' (2000: 11). The idea of networks as a form of governance was linked to the growing interest of governments in public/private, and other forms of, partnership.

Networks and partnerships grew in importance through the late 1980s and early 1990s, though the form and approach varied considerably. Conservative governments had introduced public/private partnerships as a way of unlocking the dominance of public sector power. These were viewed as a means of bringing in new investment for the development of public sector infrastructure and, later, the management of public services. The Conservatives had also set up a range of agencies (such as Training and Enterprise Councils and Urban Development Corporations) which brought together public and private sectors to tackle urban regeneration and economic development at a regional level. The City Challenge and SRB initiatives of Thatcher and Major developed a range of local partnerships through a policy approach based on competitive bidding. During the same period, local authorities actively developed local partnerships as part of anti-poverty strategies or to strengthen their broader role in urban regeneration and community governance (Alcock et al. 1998; Morgan et al. 1999; Stewart and Stoker 1988; Stewart et al. 2000). The 1980s and 1990s were also characterised by local collaborative developments around crime prevention, anti-drugs initiatives and community policing. The Morgan Report of 1991 recommended a multi-agency approach to community safety and, although not fully implemented, underpinned what Benyon and Edwards (1999) term the establishment of a 'community governance management of community safety' in the mid- to late 1990s.

The drive for partnership working, then, came from different directions. But a distinctive feature of Labour's approach was a more explicit focus on partnership as a way of governing. This focus was evident both in the strength of the partnership rhetoric and in the government's approach to the delivery of public policy. Labour introduced incentives for partnership working and emphasised the need to coordinate activity between health and

social services, to enhance regeneration partnerships at a local level and to overcome departmental barriers in central government. Policy documents repeatedly stressed the need for the integration of policy to address cross-cutting policy agendas. They spoke of the need for culture change to overcome barriers to joint working across the departments of government and between central and local government, and they set out a range of proposals for integrating services, from pooled budgets to new arrangements for organisational governance.

In Jessop's terms this expansion 'is not meant to return Britain to a discredited corporatism . . . but, rather, to address the real limitations of the market, state and mixed economy as a means of dealing with various complex economic, political and social issues' (Jessop 2000: 11). Labour expanded the use of public-private partnerships, overcoming previous ideological barriers to partnership with the private sector (Corry et al. 1997). Partnership also became a significant theme in Labour's approach to tackling complex policy issues: neighbourhood renewal, social exclusion, community safety, child poverty and other 'wicked issues'. In such areas it emphasised the need both for better horizontal integration (partnership working between public sector organisations, voluntary sector bodies and private sector companies) and for stronger vertical integration (between central, local and community tiers of government). This emphasis reflected concerns about the hierarchical, 'silo' relationships built into the UK system of government and comparative weakness of horizontal relationships both in central government and at local and regional levels (see Chapter 4 of this volume). There was considerable interest in ways of addressing cross-cutting issues through a 'whole systems' approach to public policy (Pratt et al. 1998; Stewart et al. 2000; Wilkinson and Appelbee 1999). Labour also talked of the need for partnership between those involved in the shaping of policy and those affected by its delivery.

These developments have been linked to an emerging paradigm shift in the public policy system in the UK. The market-based paradigm of the Thatcher years supplanted a postwar paradigm based on state hierarchies. The problems of fragmentation produced by the market paradigm was now leading to the emergence of a new paradigm which was:

... outcomes-focused, in that the design must be based on the best available evidence of 'what works'; it is holistic, the assumption being that many policy problems will be found not within the boundaries of single organisations, but on the interface between them, and the nature of the problem, rather than existing structural forms, should determine the delivery systems - 'form follows function'; prevention, or early intervention, is preferable and cheaper than cure or late intervention; and culture change highlights the notion that with many wicked issues, only the active involvement of the citizens trapped within the problem will secure a solution. (Richards et al. 1999: 10)

While in the Thatcher and Major years the predominant focus had been on the efficiency of organisations as discrete units, the modernisation agenda

emphasises inter-organisational collaboration and policy coordination, both encompassed by the phrase 'joined-up government'. Changes in the Prime Minister's Office and the Cabinet Office were introduced to coordinate policy across government. A proliferation of central groups or task forces were charged with the task of integration (the Social Exclusion Unit, the Performance and Innovation Unit). A specific government minister was appointed to 'bash heads together' to overcome barriers (the 'Cabinet enforcer' role). There were also attempts to integrate funding and performance indicators through mechanisms such as the Fundamental Spending Review and Public Service Agreements. A number of 'Czars' were appointed to drive through change, give high profiles to policy agendas such as the government's anti-drugs strategy, and to coordinate policy implementation. The Cabinet Office report *Wiring it Up* provided a challenging analysis of the barriers to joint working in central government and proposed a range of strategies to address them in the longer term (Performance and Innovation Unit, 2000a).

The government placed particular emphasis on developing new policy initiatives through integrated local action. The Performance and Innovation Unit's report *Reaching Out* (2000b) listed thirty-two government-inspired, area-based initiatives requiring local partnership working. These included a series of zonal initiatives to bring local agencies together to develop holistic solutions to local problems, offering additional funding and greater flexibility in how funds were spent for successful bidders in order to foster local innovation. The first wave of Education Action Zones was established in 1998, bringing together local education authorities, voluntary organisations, businesses and schools to raise educational achievement in areas of low educational performance. Employment Zones similarly drew together a wide range of partners (including the private sector) in areas of high, long-term unemployment, while Health Action Zones aimed to reduce health inequalities by focusing the activity of different agencies - NHS bodies, local authorities, voluntary organisations and businesses - in areas of high need. Health Action Zones were based on the principle of recognising that health, social and other services were interdependent and needed to be planned and organised on a whole systems basis to deliver seamless care and tackle the wider determinants of health (NHSE 1999). The 'whole systems' emphasis on horizontal collaboration was present in a number of key documents and initiatives: for example, the introduction of multi-agency Health Improvement Plans, the Crime and Disorder Partnerships, the Sure Start programme, local economic development and neighbourhood renewal strategies, and the requirement that local authorities develop 'local strategic partnerships' with other agencies to coordinate action.

Holistic or systemic imagery also ran through a range of policy documents highlighting the need for *vertical* collaboration between central and local government, communities and users. The first report of the Social Exclusion Unit summarised the failure of past initiatives aimed at tackling the problems of 'poor neighbourhoods' as resulting from 'the absence of

effective national policies to deal with the structural cause of decline; a tendency to parachute solutions in, rather than engaging local communities' (Social Exclusion Unit 1998a: 9). The need for 'bottom-up' involvement was also stressed in the *Service First* programme, which replaced the Citizen's Charter. A Department of Health discussion document, *Partnerships in Action*, criticised boundary disputes between health and social services and suggested a holistic, systems-based approach:

We must deal with every link in the chain, from the strategic planners to people accessing services in their local community. Past efforts to tackle these problems have shown that concentrating on single elements of the way services work together... without looking at the system as a whole does not work. (Department of Health, 1998c: 5)

The discourse implied a dissolution of hierarchical power relations as, for example, in notions of a new relationship between central and local government based on partnership, or of partnership between professionals and users.

Notions of holistic government are emblematic of the 'new' governance based on coordination through networks rather than markets or hierarchy. It is viewed in terms of plural actors engaged in a reflexive process of dialogue and information exchange. It is based on the idea of horizontal self-organisation among mutually interdependent actors, rather than hierarchical relationships. Network forms of governance must, then, be viewed as conceptually separate from partnership as structure (Lowndes and Skelcher 1998). Networks are informal and fluid, with shifting membership and ambiguous relationships and accountabilities. They may become formalised into official partnerships, but may also operate loosely across organisational boundaries. They are characterised by compromise rather than confrontation, negotiation rather than administrative fiat (M. Stewart 2000). The role of government is to enable, steer and coordinate rather than to control. Stoker, for example, argues that government requires a 'light touch':

Steering involves government learning a different 'operating code' which rests less on its authority to make decisions and instead builds on its capacity to create the conditions for positive-sum partnerships and setting or changing the rules of the game to encourage what are perceived as beneficial outcomes. (Stoker 2000: 98)

There is an assumption that networks of actors will engage in finding solutions to problems and that organisations will develop strategies that incorporate the advantages and benefits of partnership working.

The limits of partnership

Labour's focus on delivering 'joined-up' or 'holistic' government led to a great deal of experiment and action. The government introduced new

funding arrangements, common performance indicators, integrated ICT and other forms of infrastructural shifts to help overcome some of the barriers to collaboration that had impeded partnership working in the past. The policies directed towards fostering partnership working did, however, vary. Partnerships and joint working can have a number of objectives:

- to create an integrated, holistic approach to the development and delivery of public policy;
- to overcome departmental barriers and the problems of 'silo' management;
- to reduce the transaction costs resulting from overlapping policies and initiatives through coordination and integration;
- to deliver better policy outcomes by eliciting the contribution of multiple players at central, regional, local and community tiers of governance;
- to improve coordination and integration of service delivery among providers;
- to develop new, innovative approaches to policy development or service provision by bringing together the contributions and expertise of different partners; and
- to increase the financial resources available for investment by developing partnerships and joint ventures between the public, private and not for profit sectors.

It is difficult to generalise about how well the partnerships set up under Labour met these objectives because of the wide range of structures and relationships encompassed by the term. Partnerships range from loose networks to more stable groupings with defined structures and protocols. They involve relationships that range from a base of formal contracts to the more elusive processes of reciprocity and trust. Different issues are raised by attempts to overcome departmental boundaries in central government in order to develop a more integrated approach to policy (the usual meaning of 'joined-up government'); the creation of partnerships between the public and private sectors; multi-agency partnerships between service delivery organisations (e.g. health and social services); and local partnerships involving voluntary and community sectors in, for example, regeneration initiatives. To add to the complexity, it may well be that formal bodies with well-defined structures and procedures are sustained by a loose network of key individuals who 'make it work'; or that a formal contract is underpinned by informal relationships of trust which help resolve conflict and reduce transaction costs.

Stoker (2000) notes a number of different steering techniques used by government: cultural persuasion, communication, finance, monitoring and structural reform. Cultural persuasion (promoting partnerships) is a relatively weak instrument but may create an enabling climate supporting local flexibility. Communication (facilitating learning and encouraging access)

promotes capacity-building and can be used to support the development of local networks without threatening flexibility. New financial regimes or new structures may facilitate network modes of governance but may also create new rigidities: as one line of differentiation is overcome, new ones are delineated as boundaries are redrawn and interests regrouped.

My aim is not to distinguish between different types of partnership but to explore the ways in which they were overlaid on each other to produce a possible shift in the mode of governance. Labour's use of partnerships as a way of governing encompassed a range of approaches, only some of which facilitate the growth of network-based modes of coordination. Much of the early focus of the Social Exclusion Unit was on communication and persuasion in an attempt to build sustainable responses to the problems of deprived communities and social exclusion. The emphasis here and in the zonal initiatives was on new forms of funding, joint resourcing and the development of outcome-based evaluation linked to cross-cutting performance indicators. The initial aim was to promote flexible forms of collaboration, experimentation and innovation.

This initial emphasis on flexibility and innovation in these initiatives can be contrasted with the more prescriptive and formalised 'duty of partnership' within the Crime and Disorder Act (1998) and the Health Act (1999). The Crime and Disorder Act had at its core a statutory requirement for local authorities and police services to develop strategic partnerships to reduce crime and the public's fear of crime. New bodies which spanned the responsibilities of mainstream agencies – Youth Offending Teams – were established, with a new breed of worker (who may come from any of the agencies concerned) to manage them. Not only the structures but also many of the activities which such partnerships must undertake (e.g. crime and disorder audits) were specified in some detail and there was a strong element of vertical direction and control.

Such statutory partnerships may become bogged down in bureaucratic structures and power struggles, as happened in previous attempts to foster partnership working between Health Authorities and Social Service Departments. Joint structures set up following the Community Care reforms of the 1970s and 1980s produced little impact on the core organisations and tended only to produce short-term and piecemeal projects (Audit Commission 1986). The Health Act (1999) and other health reforms attempted further to institutionalise relationships between health and social services (e.g. through the governance arrangements of the new PGCs and Trusts) and to make collaboration mandatory (through Joint Investment Plans and Health Improvement Plans). At the same time, new flexibilities for pooled budgets in health and social services created the capacity for stronger network development as actors developed new ways of delivering services. Badged funding (as in the Social Services Modernisation fund) began to be used to promote longer-term preventative work. A focus on financing outcomes – rather than outputs – was a driver for the development of longer-term capacity-building activity. However, this was vulnerable to shifts in

mainstream programmes as government priorities changed. Uncertainty about the future of earmarked resources tended to produce a focus on shorter-term rather than longer-term partnership goals (Glendinning and Clarke 2000).

These different approaches reflected differences between individual ministers and their departments, and oscillations in Labour's overall approach as it struggled to reconcile its long-term agenda of addressing intractable problems with the need to retain control over delivering its agenda. As Murray Stewart comments in his analysis of community regeneration partnership initiatives:

The difficulty confronting the Blair government in managing this complex vertical/horizontal system is that whilst in principle the aim is to devolve downwards to regions and local government, in practice the centre (ministers and officials) retains tight control. Whilst integration and joining up is embodied in the rhetoric of policy, in practice few of the interests are willing or able to concede the flexibility across programmes which genuine joint action requires. (M. Stewart 2000: 4)

Views from within government also acknowledged the difficulties, albeit from a rather different perspective. For example, Sir Richard Mottram, a civil service Permanent Secretary, noted how 'joining up' as a way of governing was cross-cut by other policy imperatives:

The government has a number of desirable aims for improving our system of governance. . . . They include – in the jargon – seeking cross-cutting approaches with a long-term, outcome-based focus. The Government wants, and has developed, better patterns of cooperation with other levels of government and is seeking with them to build capacity at the community level. At the same time, as for all governments, there is the compelling need for (quick) results, the emphasis, wholly reasonably, is on delivery, delivery, delivery.

These goals are not necessarily incompatible but nor are they without potential conflict. Thus the quickest way confidently to get results may be seen to be through top down command with the familiar plans, zones, targets and money coming down in tubes to match the various Whitehall silos. Some of the people at the centre can, in my experience, be just as keen on this sort of approach as some in departments and, if pressed on why, can point out – entirely correctly – that looser, more involving, less standardised and directed approaches have been tried in the past and found wanting.

The ultimate test which will be applied with particular rigour is: 'What works?' Those keen – like me – for partnership working of various kinds and for more freedom of manoeuvre for those on the ground must show that it delivers more than the alternative. (Mottram 2000: 2)

This quotation highlights the possible tension between 'joined-up government' and more directive, hierarchical forms of governance. It also suggests tensions within the government's agenda. Labour had long-term ambitions for change which implied a shift towards governance systems based on networks and partnerships, collaboration and trust. At the same time,

however, there was a political imperative to demonstrate 'quick wins' and to do so the government turned to more familiar recipes in order to exert greater leverage. These different imperatives created a number of tensions in the development and operation of partnerships. For example, Jessop (2000), J. Davies (2000) and other studies highlighted a number of difficulties produced by the positioning of local partnerships within central government policy agendas. They note how prescriptive and bureaucratic funding regimes tended to undermine local capacity. Problems were created by the attempt to impose best practice from above, as opposed to encouraging diversity and allowing horizontal communication and learning among partnerships. Tensions existed between the use of local partnerships to deliver centrally-determined policies and their capacity to be driven by local perceptions of needs and priorities. The focus of local partnerships was shaped by what is perceived to be a general centralising trend in government policy. The next sections explore ways in which such tensions were experienced within partnerships themselves.

The dynamics of partnership working

The 1990s also saw an explosion of 'how to do it' manuals and guidelines for partnerships and a number of more academic analyses of the difficulties of partnership working. While the former tended to highlight the importance of shared values, joint goals and other normative features associated with an optimistic model of partnership, the latter drew attention to a number of difficulties based on lack of trust, problems of accountability, inequalities, differences of power and the problems of the sustainability of partnership working over time (Huxham 1996; Huxham and Vangen 1996). Such problems are experienced within partnerships themselves but their origin may lie elsewhere: in the interaction between the external and internal collaborative environment created by such factors as the policy approach of government, the impact of funding regimes, and the cultures of parent organisations. However well a group may work at building collaboration and trust, it may nevertheless come unstuck because of external shifts or ambiguities. Such shifts took place in government priorities and strategies, and the purpose of partnerships was influenced by changing priorities in mainstream programmes. For example, as the programme of the Social Exclusion Unit developed over time, it became linked to a series of specific government targets – for instance on school exclusion – and the use of more prescriptive policy instruments linked to narrower forms of output, rather than outcome, measures. The experience of Education and Health Action Zones was of a shift to much narrower targets, more tightly linked to ministerial agendas, in place of their initial diverse and multiple policy objectives.

The dynamics of partnership were also influenced by shifts in partner organisations as they adapted to changes in national policy, changed strategic direction or adopted new structures and roles. Some private sector

partners underwent significant changes in direction as they reassessed the risks and costs of public-private partnerships. The requirement that local authorities adopt new political structures based on elected mayors or Cabinet government began to influence the dynamics of local partnerships. The picture was also influenced by the sheer number of partnership-based initiatives launched by government. Many organisations became enmeshed in multiple and often interlocking partnership relationships, with different life-cycles and funding mechanisms adding extra sets of complexity and uncertainty to the work of the agencies and individuals concerned.

The combined effect of these processes was to create a series of dilemmas or tensions for partnerships (Newman 2000b). These were resolved in particular ways depending on the way in which external constraints or opportunities were interpreted by participants. Such (temporary) resolutions can be mapped using an adaptation of the framework introduced in Chapter 2. Four of the principal imperatives which influence partnership working are those of *accountability* (having proper structures, formalised roles and transparent procedures), *pragmatism* (getting things done, meeting targets), *flexibility* (adapting fast to changing conditions, expansion), and *sustainability* (fostering participation, building consensus and embedding networks to ensure long-term development). Each of these is likely to be present in any partnership, though the balance between them may be uneven and may shift over time. The model (see Figure 6.1) is intended as a way of capturing or mapping the balance between different imperatives within any particular partnership. The terminology (towards . . .) is deliberately meant to suggest pulls or trajectories of movement rather than static categories or ideal types.

The vertical axis of the model represents the way in which partnerships are positioned in or shaped by their external environment. The top quadrants suggest a focus on self-steering or co-governance, while the bottom quadrants are more directly influenced by policy directives and performance management systems. The horizontal axis of the model represents aspects of the internal dynamics of partnership. The left-hand end suggests a dominant focus on the internal structures and procedures which are needed to ensure accountability (lower left-hand quadrant) or to build long-term network capacity (upper left-hand quadrant). The right-hand end of the horizontal axis suggests a dominant focus on external adaptation, with much less regard to internal structures and processes. The focus may be on pragmatism in order to respond to government incentives or targets (bottom right-hand quadrant), or on developing flexible networks in order to survive in a competitive and fast-changing environment (upper right-hand quadrant).

The different imperatives, each linked to a particular model of governance, are not necessarily reconcilable. For example, the kind of structural arrangements put in place to deliver accountability or ensure fair conduct may limit flexibility. The setting-up of clear operating procedures and accountable structures tends to create barriers to fast action. A pragmatic

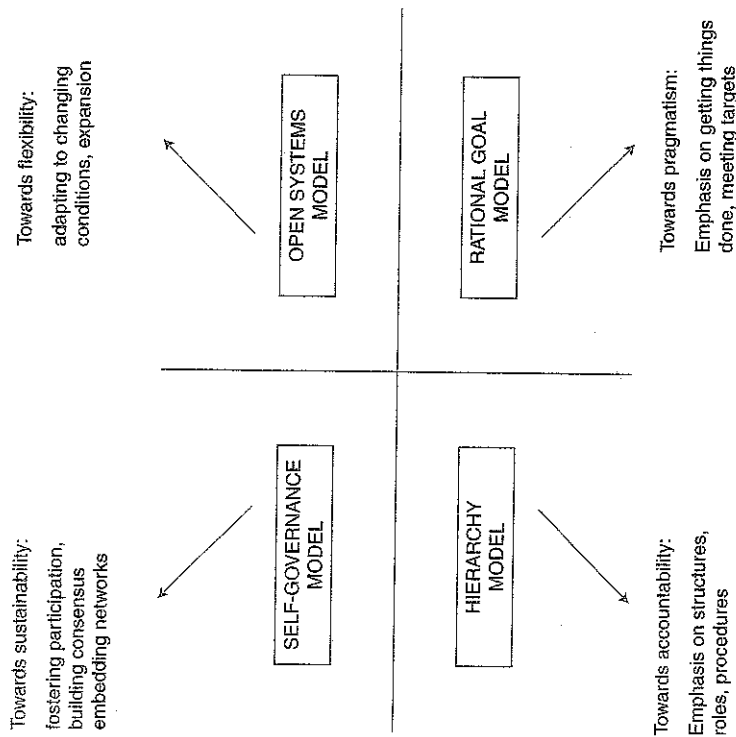


FIGURE 6.1 The dynamics of partnership working

focus on the delivery of short-term goals may limit sustainability by inhibiting capacity-building within partner organisations or with local communities. The inclusive and participative activities which help build sustainability are precisely those which may be sidelined under pressure to deliver a bid or an outcome to a tight deadline.

Few partnerships fall neatly into a single quadrant: most are based on some form of compromise or equilibrium between the different models. The equilibrium may change over time, perhaps with a focus on openness at the beginning being constrained as the need for delivery against time-limited goals becomes pre-eminent. Lowndes and Skelcher (1998) propose a life-cycle notion of partnership in which the early stages are characterised by relatively fluid membership and indistinct boundaries, the mid stages by closure and more formal arrangements, and the final stages by a return to networking as organisations negotiate ways of maintaining commitments. But partnerships may also experience 'institutional drift', leading to inappropriate patterns becoming embedded and reproduced. For example, a fluid, initially responsive network may drift towards structure in an

attempt to create institutional stability, a stability that is inappropriate to an uncertain and unstable environment. The internal dynamics of partnerships or networks may also be influenced as they adapt to new requirements or shifting external conditions. Each model produces specific problems whose resolution may require a re-balancing to accommodate other values, as illustrated below.

Towards accountability: here the focus is on partnership institutions (e.g. joint structures, joint planning mechanisms, joint governance arrangements) designed to formalise the interaction between organisations and regulate decision-making processes. The focus on formal accountability through the following of 'due process' does not, however, necessarily deliver *democratic* accountability: 'Accountability is couched in terms of managerial and technical project and programme management rather than in terms of political accountability to community and electorate' (M. Stewart 2000: 6). The mechanisms through which partnership boards are accountable to parent organisations or the wider public may be obscure. Many mandatory partnerships, or partnerships where there is low trust between organisations, are pulled towards a strong emphasis on structures and procedures (e.g. the now superseded joint planning structures between health and social services, or the newer crime and disorder partnerships). A focus on structures, systems and procedures may mean that decision-making is slow, leading to pressures to move towards pragmatism or flexibility. However, formal structures or procedures influence, rather than determine, internal partnership dynamics. Many such bodies do deliver productive collaboration, though often this takes place despite, rather than because of, formalised partnership arrangements. That is, the formalised institutions may be largely symbolic with emphasis being placed on one or more of the other models in day-to-day decision-making.

Towards pragmatism: the emphasis here is on joint activity around specific – and often short-term – objectives. Collaboration may be 'thin', driven by external requirements or obligations, rather than self-generated. This thinness is often a result of compliant responses to external demands (e.g. delivery against government performance targets for which collaboration is required) or more proactive responses to opportunities (e.g. bidding for government, European or other funding to a tight timescale). An emphasis on this model can be viewed as a product of short-term shifts in policy, or the use of incentive-based policy instruments. Adaptiveness is high but the capacity to deliver sustained outcomes may be low. The emphasis is on getting on with the job, not necessarily addressing process issues, and the partnership may not significantly affect the core strategies or cultures of mainstream organisations. However, the networks that develop may have a longer-term impact, and create movement towards longer-term responses represented in the values of flexibility and sustainability. Where the demand for pragmatism produces behaviour that transgresses the informal or formal decision-making rules of parent organisations, however, there may be a call for a tighter emphasis on accountability and transparency.

Towards flexibility: here collaboration tends to be driven by longer-term goals. It is 'thicker' in that collaboration is entered into on a voluntary basis in order to pursue particular strategies or set up initiatives to adapt a fast-changing environment more quickly than parent organisations can move. Networks are dynamic and fluid, held in place by network members rather than statutory requirements or incentives. Collaboration is entered into in order to deliver mutual goals (e.g. local economic development) rather than comply with government requirements or partnership demands, though the goals may result from shifts in government policy. Adaptiveness is high because of the emphasis on fluidity and flexibility: partnerships driven by this imperative are less vulnerable to short-term shifts in policy so may have the capacity to deliver longer-term change. However, there may be tensions between the partnership and the mainstream cultures of the parent organisation since the pace and nature of change in each will differ. Problems may occur when there is a distance between joint, network-based projects and parent organisations which may leave projects in a kind of organisational limbo (Hardy et al. 1992). This may create a pull within the network towards greater sustainability, or alternatively a pull back by parent organisations to ensure stronger structures of accountability.

Towards sustainability: here the focus is on setting up processes through which the capacity of partners – organisations, communities, user groups – can be developed over time. There is likely to be a focus on 'empowerment' and 'participation', bringing in and supporting users, community members and front-line staff to generate momentum and take responsibility for actions and outcomes. Culture change and learning in participating organisations may be emphasised in order to embed new forms of activity. New sources of leadership in community initiatives or collaborative projects may be sought to provide continued momentum. However, tensions between long-term, sustainable goals (overcoming inequality, building community capacity, preventing ill health) and mainstream policies requiring delivery against short-term targets may be particularly sharp. Coupled with this, the difficulties of achieving long-term change may lead to temporary pulls towards pragmatic responses, or the abandonment of the goal of sustainability altogether. Where it is pursued with some success, on the other hand, there may be calls from previously excluded or marginalised groups for new structures or protocols that devolve power and provide greater accountability.

Power, trust and leadership

The framework described in the previous section can be used to help map some of the dynamics of power, the social relations of leadership and trust, and the patterns of inclusion and exclusion which may result (Newman 1998a). The economic models which underpin much of the analysis of partnership tend to focus on opportunistic power – the power of one party

to take advantage of another. Yet power may be formal or informal; may be coercive, remunerative or normative. Power is also discursive. The discourse of partnership speaks of equality, shared values and high trust, creating an illusory unity which masks fundamental differences of power and resources and directs attention away from the need to engage with the gritty political realities of divergent interests and conflicting goals. Naïve or optimistic views of partnership focus on what the parties have in common and ignore power differences and inequalities. The history of relations between the voluntary and statutory sectors is littered with examples of the difficulties resulting from power inequalities.

Leadership, as a form of power, is often marginalised in discussions of partnership (but see Huxham and Vangen 1999). Where leadership is discussed, the emphasis tends to be on the need for emergent, participative and power-sharing approaches (see for example Luke 1998). This stands in stark contrast with the perceptions of many public sector practitioners of the reality of partnership working and the need for stronger, more directive leadership to bid for funding within short timescales or deliver the outputs desired by government performance requirements. Mapping issues of power, trust and leadership using the framework suggests the following:

Towards accountability: a tendency to marginalise difference through the setting-up of structures which regulate conflict and act as a control on power-bargaining. Leadership is positional, reflecting the positional power of the representative from the lead organisation (e.g. the local authority). Trust may be low but is institutionalised through mechanisms guaranteeing transparency and fairness. However, this may not succeed in winning the trust of groups marginalised by or excluded from formal decision-making processes.

Towards pragmatism: a tendency to marginalise difference in the search for a small, more tightly focused group which can work to a common agenda. The less powerful are likely to be left out of the process. Leadership tends to be based on personal power and influence, and tends towards being directive rather than inclusive. Decision-making is fast and informal. Trust is based on a calculation of risks and stakes involved in collaboration. There is little investment in building trust but a reliance on negotiation and bargaining or the direct exercise of power – what Hudson et al. (1999) view as 'economising on trust'. While transaction costs are initially low because of the speed and informality of decision-making, the low investment in trust may increase transaction costs in the long term by acting as a barrier to the development of self-governing, sustainable networks.

Towards flexibility: a tendency to ignore issues of power and to marginalise those at a distance from the network hub. Leadership may be vested in an individual at the hub of interlocking networks and with the capacity to mobilise external resources, but tends to be opaque (difficult to pin down, fluid). There may be considerable competition for leadership roles. Trust is based less on calculation and more on experience, knowledge, reputation and investment in personal relationships. This kind of trust reduces

transaction costs but can be misplaced where changes in network membership or strategic shifts in partner organisations undermine the investments made.

Towards sustainability: a tendency to acknowledge difference and to draw on divergent interests and views in the development process. Differences of change. Leadership is inclusive and empowering. Trust is fostered through an investment in 'principled conduct' (Cropper 1996) based on fair dealing in the distribution and appropriation of benefits, and fairness in procedure. Such conduct will have the effect of creating a reputation for being a good partner, and contribute to the sustainability of partnerships. Sustainability may, however, be undermined where principled conduct by one party is not matched by the behaviour of others. For example, the use of partnership success by one party to enhance its own reputation and thus expand its own resource base can lead to a sense of betrayal on the part of its erstwhile partners, leading perhaps to a desire for formalised and institutionalised procedures in future ventures.

Voluntary and community sectors may be positioned as marginal players in partnerships developed by local authorities or the partnership boards of area-based initiatives. Their collaboration is required to add legitimacy to funding bids but they may experience particular sets of tensions. These are mapped on Figure 6.2. This highlights the way in which issues of power and patterns of inclusion and exclusion may influence the internal dynamics of partnerships and the strategies developed by individual players. Many local groups and small voluntary organisations now consider that their token involvement in partnerships set up by central or local government is not worth the time and investment required, and some have engaged in a tactical withdrawal from the partnership game. Others have undertaken a pragmatic repositioning to secure new sources of funding or to enlarge their role. The view from localities is that tight timetables and rigid frameworks are inimical to fruitful partnership. They act as constraints, limiting the number of actors drawn into the process, causing resentment among excluded groups (the very groups on whom the longer-term capacity to deliver project outcomes may depend). The pragmatism-versus-empowerment line of tension is particularly sharply experienced by voluntary and community groups. Many express dismay at the tactics of mainstream agencies produced by their struggle to meet tight deadlines for bidding. Some adopt tactical responses of their own that may result in a loss of local credibility and the erosion of trust among community stakeholders.

The government's use of partnership cuts across all of the dimensions of the model. An emphasis on innovation in government policy, as in some urban policy initiatives, tends to foster networks which provide the degree of flexibility required to respond to new conditions, challenges and incentives. On the other hand, mandatory partnerships, in which structure and systems are specified in government guidelines, will pull in the opposite direction. A strong focus on performance exercised through tightly

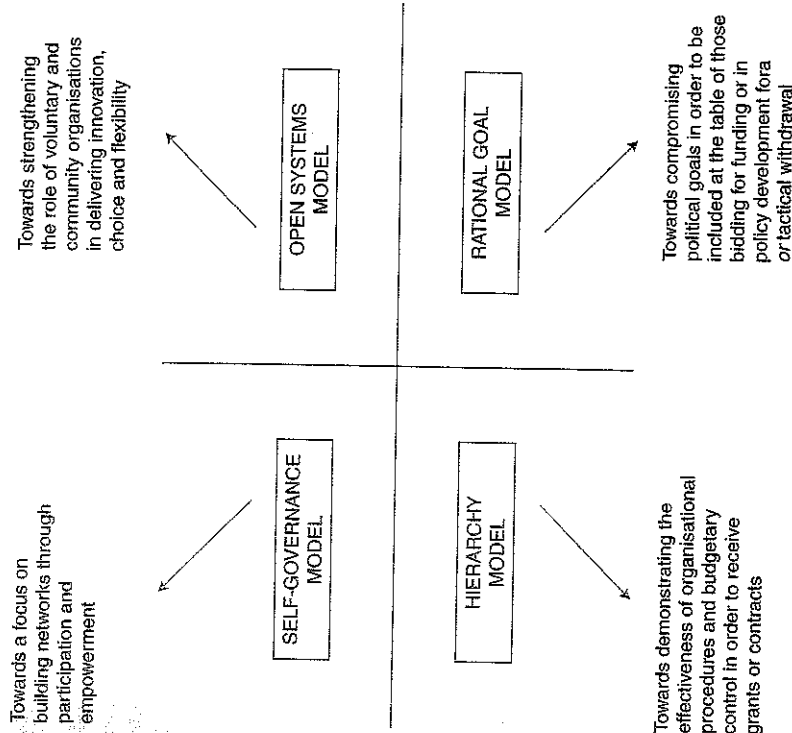


FIGURE 6.2 *Dilemmas for community and voluntary sector partners*

specified, output targets, as in health and social care, will tend to pull partnerships towards the lower right-hand quadrant, with its emphasis on short-term pragmatism. Looser, outcome-based targets may, however, act as a catalyst for the development of more sustainable activity over a longer timeframe. The process of performance review, the promotion of best practice and threats of intervention for non-delivery will tend to force partnerships towards the bottom quadrants of Figure 6.1, imposing rigidities and acting as a constraint on the development of self-managing networks.

Overall, the dominant 'pull' exerted by the policy approach and performance regime of the Labour government has been towards the bottom quadrants of the model – towards vertical or hierarchical governing rather than horizontal, network-based governance. This has presented difficulties for promoting and sustaining collaborative activity. Clarence (1999) contrasts the collaborative discourse of government with the continuation of a

performance management regime based on economic rationalism developed under previous Conservative governments:

These two approaches run counter to each other and have created tensions in government policy and programmes. The tensions evident in the Labour government's agenda have had an effect on networking and partnership working at the local level and impacted upon the ways in which local authorities have responded to the opportunities offered by the expectations of central government. (Clarence 1999: 2)

Similar tensions are produced by the performance regime in mainstream services. Glendinning and Clarke (2000) suggest key features of the performance approach in health and social care which run counter to partnership working. One is the sort of evidence sought. The dominance of performance measures based on simple, accessible and ready-made indicators, and the pervasiveness of mono-organisational rather than system-wide or multi-organisational measures, militates against partnership effectiveness. In the struggle to overcome barriers to partnership working between health and social services a number of attempts have been made to align performance management systems. However, the flow of government policies – on social services modernisation, on the reduction of hospital waiting lists – have continued to exert considerable pressure towards a focus on core business. The centrality of health to the government's political agenda has led to an ongoing pressure for discrete targets. This suggests that a shift from hierarchy and markets towards governance through collaboration has been marginal, rather than central, to the modernisation agenda. Despite attempts to develop cross-cutting performance measures, the structuring of audit and inspection regimes has tended to follow departmental and service boundaries rather than reflect cross-cutting or joined-up objectives.

These issues have been located in broader contextual tensions between the requirement that different organisations continue to produce year-on-year efficiencies and the requirement that they collaborate to deliver broad policy outcomes on cross-cutting agendas. While there have been some attempts to develop cross-cutting performance indicators, the predominant focus of the external reviews of performance is on the efficiency of an organisation in delivering whatever happens to be its core business (managing housing stocks, catching criminals or educating young people). As a consequence, new policies – however broad in concept – have often resulted in a series of relatively small-scale projects based in different agencies. While each has had value in its own terms, these have tended to suffer from a lack of integration (each partner has shaped initiatives in a way which matched its own agenda) and a lack of continuity (projects were often based on short-term funding arrangements). However, government policy is only one variable in shaping the dynamics of partnership working. The next sections consider the impact of the organisations from which partnerships are formed, and the influence of practitioners.

Organisational cultures and professional identities

Understanding the dynamics of partnership means looking not only at what happens in collaborative arrangements but also at the dynamics of 'parent' organisations from which they are constituted. One of the problems is that developments in organisational theory are not very 'joined-up' with developments in theories of collaboration and partnership. They intersect around ideas of networked or virtual organisations, but little attention is paid to the impact of increased collaboration on mainstream, hierarchical organisations such as the professional bureaucracies of health, social services and local government. Various authors have highlighted factors that limit the collaborative capacity of such organisations. Benson notes the importance of the decision criteria which flow from an organisation's defence of its own interests in conditions of resource dependency (Benson 1975). Hardy et al. (1992) suggest a number of barriers to collaboration, arising from structural, procedural, financial and professional differences, but also follow Benson in highlighting the importance of status and legitimacy and the barriers to collaboration posed by an organisation's concern to deflect threats to its autonomy or domain of authority and influence.

The tensions between different imperatives noted in Figure 6.1 apply as much to the internal dynamics of organisations as to the dynamics of partnership. Organisational cultures are likely to be 'skewed' towards specific values. Cultures which value probity, accountability and control are unlikely to exhibit the flexibility required by partnership working. They may create tensions between the cultural values of boundary workers, seeking to pull the organisation towards flexibility and responsiveness, and the central control functions of the organisation. Collaboration also requires a degree of internal flexibility which may challenge traditional forms of control. This may lead to problems in securing legitimacy for partnership activity, leading in turn to difficulties in getting the organisation to 'sign up' to partnership decisions. The constraints imposed by the strategic centre of an organisation on partnership activity on the boundary – constraints of performance management, of delegation of power and authority, of sustained financial commitment – may closely replicate those imposed by government on local partnership bodies. The growth of the 'scrutocracy' of inspection and audit, described in Chapter 5, has intensified internal forms of organisational control, and increased the vulnerability of staff to charges of organisational or professional failure. An over-preoccupation with internal issues – securing accountabilities, building systems of control, developing skills and capacities – has tended to limit the ability of organisations to develop the kinds of network and partnership needed to respond to shifts in the external environment.

Analysis of partnerships and joined-up government have tended to focus on the difficulties created by the boundaries *between* organisations, producing differences in language, culture and perceptions of strategic

interests. But boundaries *within* organisations have also changed as a result of government policies. The reconfiguration of professional boundaries in health around new models of patient care has offered greater potential for partnership working, especially in primary care. In local government there have been attempts to use the Best Value framework to create greater integration of services to specific client groups or localities. However, such shifts have affected only some parts of some organisations. Many mainstream hierarchies have remained strongly bounded, and the interconnections between core services and partnership initiatives have remained weak. This is in part due to a suspicion by agencies that such initiatives are a substitute for sustained expenditure in main programmes, and in part to the cultural gap existing between initiatives and the mainstream. For example, research by Stewart et al. suggests that the infrastructure had been in place from which connections between area-based initiatives and mainstream programmes might be developed, but that many local programmes had proceeded relatively independently from the processes of planning, strategy and objectives of mainstream programmes (M. Stewart et al. 2000). This suggests that any conclusion that there was an overall shift towards a new style or mode of governance is flawed. However, partnership working and network membership have had significant consequences for the experience and orientations of participants.

Professional roles, boundaries and identities

Considerable difficulties for practitioners are created by the gap between the idealistic language of policy documents, with their normative exhortations to find new ways of working across boundaries, and the realities of the day-to-day dilemmas which flow from competing policy imperatives. Discussions with practitioners from different sectors reveal widely different meanings of partnership, accompanied by significant differences of norms (how to do it) and values (whether collaboration is to be valued for its own sake). The response of practitioners to Labour's agenda has depended on their earlier experience of partnership working and the lessons learned, both positive and negative. Work with groups of senior managers suggests that responses have been contradictory: on the one hand, many are cynical about the repeated emphasis on partnership, impatient about the amount of time wasted on often fruitless meetings, and doubtful about the benefits. On the other hand, there has been a willingness to engage with the focus on innovation and to enjoy the new freedoms involved in some forms of partnership activity. For those engaged in the plethora of new projects and initiatives there has sometimes been a welcome release from traditional organisational constraints and the possibility of new career routes – or at least sources of motivation and satisfaction – opening up. This does not necessarily imply a narrow instrumentalism – there has been a match between new Labour values and the values of many public sector workers, leading to an enthusiasm for delivering aspects of the new agenda. At the

same time there has been a suspicion about how far government intends to follow through on its attempts to deliver joined-up policy and practice, and a frustration with the continued lack of joining-up at the centre. For directors and chief executives there have been problems of balancing the drive to create momentum for change through collaboration while continuing to deliver on mainstream performance. And, while the former is that it is the source of new funding streams, there has been a strong perception that it is the latter that really counts in terms of league tables and core funding.

The responses of individual participants have been shaped by factors such as organisational culture, professional background, career aspirations and orientation to the political values of new Labour. For example, strongly hierarchical organisational cultures have been less likely to produce positive collaborative experiences for practitioners. Strong hierarchies also tend to be linked to narrow promotion criteria based on performance against core business (e.g. departmentally based policy work in the civil service) and militate against non-traditional career routes. Partnership activity has been viewed by many as a backwater away from the main arenas where promotion potential is judged. Occupations whose professional power base was perceived to be under threat have sometimes sought to dominate partnerships as a means of extending their arena of control. Some members of occupations with an uncertain future – for example, the probation service – responded by attempting to strengthen boundaries and reassert their territory, while others used opportunities presented by the new structures and roles of, say, Youth Offending Teams, to carve out new opportunities. Those with strong public service values that are viewed as aligned with Labour's policies tended to welcome what they perceived to be a shift away from the competitive ethos of New Public Management towards more positive frameworks of action. Partnership activity, then, carries the potential for important realignment of roles, boundaries and identities of those working in the public sector. Such realignments have taken place over a decade or more of experience of partnership working but have intensified with the new forms of legitimacy to such work accorded by the discourses and policies of Labour. It demands a shift from command and control and towards governing through influence and what Rhodes (1997) terms 'diplomacy' in conditions of uncertainty and ambiguity.

The way in which notions of partnership are incorporated within specific organisational cultures help constitute the identities of internal and external stakeholders. Whether these follow an optimistic model, based on reciprocity, trust and collaboration, or a so-called realistic model based on instrumentalism, bargaining and pragmatic compliance (Hudson et al. 1999) has profound consequences for the shaping of group cultures and individual identities. My emphasis on the constraints to partnership working should not detract from the importance of the power of those engaged in partnership working to shape agendas and to forge networks and alliances with the capacity to have a long-term impact. While 'joined-up government'

may remain an aspiration rather than an achievement of Labour, this does not detract from its power as a discourse, a discourse that has produced important shifts in the languages and practices of public management and a reshaping of the notions of leadership, strategy and organisational culture on which it draws. The influence of this on roles, relationships and flows of power and influence have an impact far beyond the life-cycle of any particular partnership.

Towards a new governance?

The arguments of this chapter suggest that the explosion of the discourses of 'partnership' and 'joining up' under new Labour has not been matched by an expansion of network-based forms of governance. First, the policies used to promote partnerships have included a range of approaches giving rise to different trajectories of change, only some of which suggest a move to network forms of governance. In so far as Labour has represented a qualitatively different approach – an explicit use of partnership as a way of governing – this has been cross-cut by the continuance of forms of governance based on hierarchy and markets. The new paradigm has run alongside the old, rather than displacing it. The discourse of partnership, joining up and governance by steering has been traversed by others based on directive forms of coordination and control, as suggested by the quotation from Mottram earlier in this chapter.

Secondly, there has been a disjuncture between the language of policy documents and enacted policies. Notions of partnership carry normative connotations and have distinctly moral overtones. The optimistic and even idealistic language of partnership and collaboration can be contrasted with the reality of partnership working that results from the detail of policy proposals and implementation methods. Hudson et al. (1999) argue that Labour's approach represents a shift from an optimistic to a more realistic image of partnership:

Exhortations to be decent about joint working have been replaced by a panoply of incentives and threats . . . and amount to a very different model – the realistic model. The basic assumption here is that individual and group interests are multiple and divergent, and that the net result is competition, bargaining and conflict. (Hudson et al. 1999: 199)

But rather than one model replacing another, it would seem that policy instruments have oscillated between exhortations towards partnership invoked by the optimistic model and the constraints imposed by the realistic model, leading to considerable difficulties for practitioners caught between them.

Thirdly, the politics of partnership have constantly evolved rather than remained static. Organisations have learned a new realism at the same time

as government has developed a more pragmatic approach, based on the assessment of the potential costs as well as benefits of collaboration. There appeared to be an increasing emphasis on partnership and collaboration as tools to be used selectively – within the overall rubric of 'what works' – rather than as a universal panacea for defects in the design of policy and management systems. That is, partnership working became embedded as a politically legitimated but essentially *managerial* strategy to be selected as appropriate by government as it learned from its experience (about the costs as well as the benefits of partnership) and adopted new political priorities. The strategies for delivering mainstream services were relatively unaffected and integration between special projects and parent organisations tended to be weak. There may, then, be no sustained long-term shift in the mode of governing.

However, different questions can be raised about the proliferation of partnerships in the context of the changing role of the state. The 'new governance' literature tends to view networks in terms of their capacity to enlarge the range of actors involved in shaping and delivering policy. Individuals and communities with whom responsibility is shared may thus become 'empowered'. This perspective is strongly present in Labour's own discourse, for example in its talk of the involvement and empowerment of stakeholders outside government. But rather than partnerships being situated in a 'hollowing out' of the state, it may be that they can be viewed as a further dispersal and penetration of state power. The spread of an official and legitimated discourse of partnership has the capacity to draw local stakeholders, from community groups to business organisations, into a more direct relationship with government and involve them in supporting and carrying out the government's agenda. Partnership-based policies and programmes (especially those concerned with regeneration initiatives) have drawn community groups and organisations into new forms of collaboration and interpellated community leaders as actors in the public policy process. The impact of Labour's focus on joined-up government and partnership, then, may lie in constituting new kinds of legitimate subject and forms of relationship, and opening up new opportunities for engaging with and influencing the process of change. Partnership arrangements have enabled a wider range of actors to be discursively constituted as participants in the delivery of government policy. The government may have relinquished some forms of direct control (involved in governing through hierarchy) but may, in the process, have been 'purchasing wider *effective* control, an ability to manage, influence and manipulate local policy arenas and institutions more effectively' (J. Davies 2000: 20, original emphasis).

Labour's emphasis on holistic and joined-up government, and its use of partnerships as a means of delivering public policy, can be viewed as enhancing the state's capacity to secure political objectives by sharing power with a range of actors, drawing them into the policy process. From the perspective of the voluntary and community sectors, partnerships may represent 'dangerous liaisons' (Taylor 1998), implying a process of *incorporation*

into the values of the dominant partner. The power to engage actors discursively, and to draw them into the government's agenda, can be seen as complementing the apparent reduction in state power resulting from the break-up of the old bureaucratic hierarchies through which control over policy implementation was traditionally conducted. Such an analysis also leads to rethinking 'fragmentation' – the break-up of state power – in terms of a process of *dispersal* of power (Clarke and Newman 1997: Chapter 2 and Chapter 9 of this volume).

Questions can also be raised about the notions of partnership with users and communities which pervade the discourse but which get scant reference in analyses of central/local or inter-agency collaboration. Attempts to forge such partnerships open up debates about the nature of 'representativeness', issues of equality and diversity, and the problems and possibilities of enhancing public participation. The inclusion of users, communities and citizens in public policy decision-making networks and collaborative projects is of critical importance. It has a major impact on the sustainability, legitimacy and accountability of partnerships as a means of coordinating public policy and public services, and in the possible failure or success of networks as a mode of governance. These are discussed in the next chapter.

7 Public participation: the politics of representation

Modern Local Government: In Touch with the People, (title of a White Paper on local government, Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions 1998)

'Men in suits make me fall silent' (title of a paper on the experience of black and ethnic minority women in urban regeneration, Razzaque 2000)

In this chapter I explore recent policy developments around the themes of democratic innovation¹ and public participation,² and ask how far these can be viewed as signifying a form of governance adapted to an increasingly complex, diverse and dynamic society (Kooiman 1993). The governance literature highlights the development of a plural and differentiated set of connections between state, service deliverers, users, citizens and other stakeholders. These connections are viewed as providing greater flexibility and sophistication than the blunt instrument of party voting, especially since the dispersal of state power means that representative bodies can no longer control decision-making. New forms of connection between state and citizen are viewed as a means of responding to the fragmentation of authority and the problem of accountability in complex societies (Hirst 2000; Mulgan 1994; Peters 2000).

Democratic innovation and public participation, however, raise some significant theoretical and political challenges. First, direct public involvement in debate and decision-making cuts across the existing institutions of representative democracy, potentially undermining the role of officially elected representatives (MPs or local councillors). Secondly, such developments raise questions about our understandings of 'the people' who are to be consulted and involved, including questions about what notions of equality and difference are to be incorporated into the process of participation. Thirdly, new forms of decision-making can present challenges to state power, in both local and central forms. Such challenges centre on the issue of how discussions and decisions within new fora are connected to the policy processes of the state.

This chapter explores each of these challenges in turn. It begins by situating democratic innovation and public participation in the context of shifts in public policy and the politics of the Third Way. It goes on to discuss some of the developments in participatory democracy, and the challenges these raise for assumptions about representation and accountability. The