

## Book review

# Managing and leading in inter-agency settings (Better partnership working series)

*Edward Peck, Helen Dickinson*  
*Bristol: The Policy Press, 2008, 134 pp*  
*ISBN 978 1 84742 025 1*

This book is part of a series of five short and accessible texts examining 'better partnership working' and is designed as an evidence-based and theoretically-informed analysis of a number of linked themes—this one concentrating on the issues of management and leadership and why these matter in partnerships. The introductory preamble provides a clear purpose for both the book, and the series for which it is a part. Each text is designed to be a concise, stand-alone and accessible piece such that a wide audience is able to get to grips with the complexities of the subject as well as provide illustrative case examples and opportunities for reflective thinking.

Given the breadth and depth of material on management, leadership and partnerships this was clearly a tough brief for the authors. However, Peck and Dickinson rise to the challenge beautifully in managing to provide a sound, comprehensive and thoughtful examination of the subject in an informal and easy to read style of writing. As the nature of the book would predict, complex concepts and references to major pieces of work come densely packaged with little room to provide case exemplars or practical illustrations. At the beginning, then, the reader fears acting like an eager child in the face of an over-stuffed Christmas stocking—great interest is found in the first package discovered but the child is then compelled to move quickly on to the next, and the next, without necessarily taking everything in. However, remarkably, the authors' keen eye for establishing the importance and place of the various arguments, linked to an integrated thread of reasoning and argument, makes reading this potentially complex material both understandable and enjoyable—a kind of travelogue for management and leadership in inter-agency settings that fits neatly into the pocket (as indeed it does, being only 198 mm by 129 mm in size).

This is amply demonstrated in Chapter 2 which examines what leadership and management mean and what the research tells us for its importance to partnership working. Such a collection of abstract concepts become crystallised into a very clear story and exposi-

tion of the debate. In essence, the authors observe from the evidence the way in which networks and partnerships in health and social care delivery have emerged as organizational responses to the consequences of the break-up of public sector monopolies fuelled by New Public Management. In the process, the leadership of partnerships has been undertaken by senior managers—often in a spirit of 'over-optimism'—whilst their management relies on middle-managers acting as 'boundary-spanners' at the coal-face of brokering relationships between partners.

The often sub-optimal performance of networks and partnerships, and an understanding of their various forms, are explained in Chapter 2 with reference to the leadership and management theories outlined in Chapter 1. What we learn from this is that effective management or leadership of networks and partnerships requires a specific 'boundary spanning' function to effectively broker different types of partnership, but is otherwise not entirely different in terms of process from the managerial leadership styles one might adopt within single organizations. Up to a point this argument convinces, though a minor quibble might be that the subject gets sidelined as partnerships/networks and leadership/management are separately explained. For example, we know from the networks literature reviewed by the authors that managers require some central form of control for networks to function effectively [1]. We also know that different 'types' of network respond best to different 'forms' of leadership/management—for example, regulatory powers in hierarchical networks; the centralization of resources and/or information in competitive networks; and charismatic leadership in enclave networks.<sup>1</sup> We also know from situational and transformational leadership and management theory that adapting styles to suit or transform the context of operations is regarded as optimal to achieving outcomes. Hence, there is a general if not direct relationship between what we know about network management principles with theories of leadership. To be fair to the authors, in examining what they term the 'partnership life cycle' (p.53) the need for leaders to adjust their styles at different junctures is implied—for example, in the need for charismatic and entrepreneurial leadership during the activation (set up) stage, to the need for a committed network manager (boundary spanner) to enable

enthusiasm and activity to be maintained during the mobilisation (delivery) stage.

Chapter 3 tackles in more depth three ‘hot topics’ in the debate—how to govern the performance of networks; leadership (sense-making and performance); and leadership (place-making). In the first of these three, it becomes clear that good governance should only try to exercise that much power that remains synergistic with the collective understanding of the partnership agreement (implicit or explicit) and where it builds legitimacy for the network itself. The importance of leadership, in the two guises further presented, is convincing in that it reflects the original arguments presented in Chapter 2 in the apparent failure of, but need for, leaders to ‘follow-through’ from network initiation to roles in nurturing, shaping and maintaining legitimacy.

The fourth Chapter of the book attempts to bring together a range of potential useful frameworks and concepts to help the manager (as opposed to the leader) make sense of the complexity of managing partnerships through utilising various conceptual models. Of the five chapters, this appears to be the weakest as it picks and chooses a few (interesting) discourses rather than—as Chapter 2 did admirably—develop links to the wider literature in this field such as that to

be found in change management or industrial relations. However, as the chapter implies, practical management and leadership of inter-agency partnerships requires a subtlety that bespoke frameworks or guides will never truly explain.

Finally, Chapter 5 provides some recommendations for policy and practice that summarise the debate and its implications well. Clearly, the authors show there is no magic bullet to managing inter-agency partnerships. For me, I will take away from this book how effective leadership and management of partnerships remains primarily an ‘art form’, albeit one that needs to be derived from an inherent understanding of the complexities of partnership working and potential leadership/management responses that this book so ably presents. As a student and teacher myself of organizational management, leadership, networks and integrated care this book is going to be placed conveniently close as a handy source of reference—perhaps it may even slip into my pocket.

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## References

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