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Measuring the performance of partnerships: Why, what, how, when?

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1 **THE FULL VERSION OF THIS PAPER, INCLUDING FIGURES AND TABLES, CAN**
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3 **Measuring the performance of partnerships: Why, what, how, when?**

4

5 **Abstract**

6 Partnerships have become increasingly prevalent across a wide range of sectors for the
7 delivery of services and implementation of policy. Partnerships are seen as a more
8 effective way of delivering policy interventions than state-led or 'top-down' approaches.
9 Evaluating partnership performance is therefore crucial in order to determine whether
10 partnerships really are better than more traditional methods of policy implementation. To
11 date, however, partnership effectiveness has often been conceptualised as cumulative;
12 the result of a set of variables acting in a one-dimensional, linear way which results in
13 the ability (or not) of a partnership to achieve its goals. This paper highlights the
14 shortcomings of such a linear conceptualisation of effectiveness and argues instead that
15 when evaluating partnerships, effectiveness should be viewed as a non-linear, multi-
16 faceted composite which changes in space and time.

17

18 **Introduction**

19 Partnership working is characterised by a coming together of organisations and
20 individuals to resolve conflict or address specific issues which cannot be resolved by the
21 organisations or individuals acting alone. Such approaches are also increasingly seen
22 as a way of empowering individuals to take an active role in identifying and delivering

23 their own needs, and in improving the effectiveness of policy interventions (Cabinet
24 Office, 2010).

25 The literature is clear about the proliferation of such approaches and yet recognises
26 that, to date, there has been a lack of empirical evidence to suggest whether they are
27 any better at achieving their aims than more traditional policy interventions (Dowling et
28 al., 2004, Stojanovic and Ballinger, 2009). In addition, some authors have questioned
29 whether these new institutions simply act as vehicles through which the state continues
30 to enact its own policy goals in a top-down manner, rather than empowering more
31 inclusive participation in policy formulation and implementation (Holzinger et al., 2006,
32 Imrie and Raco, 1999, Jordan et al., 2005, Kearns, 1992). The need to evaluate the
33 effectiveness of partnership approaches is therefore clear, yet there is little agreement
34 in the literature on the theoretical and methodological frameworks that should be used.
35 Indeed, a 'one size fits all' approach to evaluation is unlikely to be appropriate given the
36 diversity of the types of partnerships and collaborations that exist and the complexity of
37 the environments in which they operate.

38 The purpose of this paper is to comment on the various approaches that have been
39 developed to evaluate partnership effectiveness, and to suggest an alternative
40 conceptualisation of effectiveness which might offer a more accurate reflection of the
41 dynamic nature of partnership performance. The paper begins with an examination of
42 the theoretical basis which underpins approaches to evaluation. The various purposes
43 of evaluation are discussed, as is the evolution of different methodological approaches.
44 Questions of 'what', 'how' and 'when' to evaluate are addressed. Next, some of the
45 practical challenges which arise in measuring the performance of partnerships are

46 discussed and the difficulties in choosing and applying appropriate measures of
47 success are highlighted. An alternative conceptualisation, which recognises the
48 importance of changes in the context and process of partnership action, is suggested.

49

50 **Why evaluate?**

51 Although the development of theories of evaluation is relatively young, its growth over
52 the past twenty years has been exponential. Indeed, in their review of the development
53 of different approaches, Pawson and Tilley (1997, p.1) suggest that the impulse to
54 evaluate has become endemic:

55 The enterprise of evaluation is a perfect example of what Kaplan (1964) once called the 'law of
56 the hammer'. Its premise is that if you give a child a hammer then he or she will soon discover the
57 universal truth that everything needs pounding. In a similar manner, it has become axiomatic [...]
58 that *everything, but everything needs evaluating*. (original emphasis).

59 Definitions for the term 'evaluation' are as diverse as the approaches used and the
60 environments and participatory mechanisms within which it is applied (Chess, 2000,
61 Oels, 2006). Chelimsky and Shadish (1997, p. xii), however, neatly sum up the term as
62 being '*about determining merit or worth*'. Evaluation can serve many different purposes,
63 and the approach taken will depend on the motivation which lies behind the drive to
64 evaluate. Capwell *et al.* (2000) note six primary reasons for evaluating:

65 *(i) To determine the achievement of aims or objectives*

66 A common way to measure performance is by assessing the achievement of stated
67 aims or objectives, usually at the end of an intervention, programme or partnership (*ex*
68 *ante* evaluation). *Ex ante* evaluation is a type of summative assessment and is one of
69 the best understood purposes for evaluation (Chess, 2000). The success of a

70 programme is assessed in terms of its ability to deliver planned outcomes and the
71 results are often used to compare programmes to determine which approach works best
72 in any given situation.

73 *(ii) To improve programme implementation*

74 Another of the important drivers for evaluation is the need to provide feedback and
75 assess progress during the lifetime of a programme, in order to forecast the likelihood of
76 achieving objectives and to make any necessary adjustments to ensure success (mid-
77 term evaluation). This type of evaluation is also summative, as it is designed to measure
78 performance against specific criteria. However, this approach also includes elements of
79 formative evaluation by examining the way that a programme is being implemented and
80 by seeking ways to improve delivery (Chess, 2000).

81 *(iii) To provide accountability to funders, communities and other stakeholders*

82 Providing measures of financial accountability is another well understood purpose of
83 evaluation. In assessing performance, decisions can be made on the benefits of a
84 programme relative to the costs associated with its implementation. In times of funding
85 restriction, cost-benefit analysis can provide important insights into how limited
86 resources can be used to maximum effect (Oels, 2006).

87 *(iv) To increase community support for initiatives*

88 Increasing community support can be an important mechanism for raising the profile of
89 an initiative and thereby securing further funding and support for the future development
90 of the initiative. Reflecting on and evaluating the performance of an initiative can provide

91 useful data, which can then be disseminated through various media to help engender
92 support and widen the engagement and participation of stakeholders.

93 *(v) To contribute to the scientific basis for interventions*

94 Evaluation for information on the achievement of programme outcomes or long-term
95 changes represents another type of assessment; that of impact evaluation. Tracking the
96 long-term outcomes from an intervention or programme, however, can be difficult to
97 achieve and expensive. Difficulties include showing that changes are achieved as a
98 direct result of the intervention rather than other external variables. Although impact
99 evaluation demands an ongoing commitment to continue monitoring activity long after
100 the intervention has ceased, this type of evaluation can offer long-term data which can
101 help to provide the basis for future policy decisions (Chess, 2000). In addition, this type
102 of evaluation may also be driven by academic interest in establishing empirical evidence
103 from which to refine and adapt theoretical models (Oels, 2006).

104 *(vi) To inform policy decisions*

105 Evaluation data can be used for policy development in two specific ways. Impact
106 evaluation data can be used to '*move political will and make investments in particular*
107 *areas more likely*' by providing empirical evidence of the success of particular types of
108 intervention (Capwell et al., 2000, p.19). Evidence from evaluation can also be used in a
109 reflexive manner to refine existing policy objectives and make them more effective in
110 practice through a process of policy learning (Sanderson, 2002). This type of embedded
111 evaluation forms a crucial element of adaptive management practice and is particularly
112 prevalent in environmental policy initiatives (Day, 2008, Hockings et al., 2000)

113 The six reasons for evaluation listed above provide an indication of the wide variety of
114 purposes for evaluation. These purposes, in turn, form the basis for the identification of
115 criteria against which aspects of partnership should be evaluated.

116

117 **What to evaluate, and how to evaluate it?**

118 As the imperative to develop collaborative approaches to address social and
119 environmental issues has burgeoned, so too has the variety of approaches to evaluation
120 (Pawson and Tilley, 1997). Table 1 provides a range of examples to highlight the
121 different contexts within which partnerships exist and some of the approaches taken in
122 evaluating them. Some studies, such as those by Bramwell and Sharman (1999),
123 Fletcher (2003) and Barker (2004) have evaluated elements of the process of
124 collaboration. These authors have found that certain factors, such as the ability of
125 stakeholders to participate in decision making and implement agreed actions, are
126 crucial in enabling partnerships to achieve their goals. Other authors, such as
127 Backstrand (2006), have highlighted the impact that the institutional context in which
128 partnerships operate can have in enabling or preventing partnerships from achieving
129 their goals. In practice, current evaluation programmes tend to draw on a range of tools
130 from multiple approaches, in order to avoid the shortcomings associated with using one
131 single approach.

132

133 ***Positivist approaches***

134 Approaches centred on the positivist tradition attempt to isolate the specific 'ingredients'
135 of programme success from the mass of potential variables. This type of evaluation

136 relates most closely to laboratory-based 'experimental' methods, whereby the impact of
137 a single variable on performance is measured, and all other variables are excluded. The
138 central objective of this type of evaluation is to demonstrate a causal relationship
139 between the action and the output: namely did the application of *x* cause the observed
140 change in *y*, for example. In this type of evaluation, quantitative indicators based on
141 desired outputs may be selected. So, for example, in the evaluation of a coastal habitat
142 management programme, an indicator might be selected to show the total area of
143 wetland habitat restored by the end of the programme (Ehler, 2003). This type of
144 positivist output indicator measures the level of attainment of a specific target or goal,
145 generally at the end of a programme (Dixon and Sindall, 1994).

146 A key difficulty with the positivist approach is the heterogeneity of contexts within which
147 partnerships operate. Given this heterogeneity, it can be extremely difficult to isolate the
148 specific causal factors and then to apply them in a vacuum. Real-world situations are
149 inherently complex and partnerships and programmes are subject to a range of dynamic
150 endogenous and exogenous variables. The positivist approach therefore offers little
151 benefit to partnership evaluation because it fails to take account of the spatial and
152 temporal complexity in real-world situations and ignores the effect of this complexity on
153 partnership performance.

154 ***Constructivist approaches***

155 Constructivist approaches to evaluation emerged in the 1970s, as a reaction against the
156 positivist experimental paradigm (Pawson and Tilley, 1997). Instead of attempting to
157 find the generic principles behind an intervention, constructivist approaches focus
158 instead on the actors and processes within a partnership and the impact that their

159 perceptions and understandings have on the success of partnership actions (Guba and
160 Lincoln, 1981). In constructivist approaches, qualitative methods are the dominant
161 paradigm. The constructivist approach led to one of the most important changes in
162 evaluation research: namely the shift away from a focus on quantifying outputs towards
163 a qualitative emphasis on the processes involved. As a result, evaluation research
164 began to recognise the diversity of understanding and expectation about a programme
165 and its likely performance, that exists between stakeholders, practitioners and policy
166 makers and the resultant impact that those multiple views could have on the success of
167 the intervention (Guba and Lincoln, 1981).

168 There are difficulties, however, in focussing almost exclusively on the process of
169 partnership rather than the outcomes. By viewing programmes or interventions as sets
170 of negotiated understandings between different groups of stakeholders, each context is
171 argued to be entirely unique and so provides no help in establishing external validity
172 (Pawson and Tilley, 1997, Blamey and Mackenzie, 2007).

173 ***Pragmatic evaluation***

174 In response to the difficulties associated with isolating the specific factors for success in
175 complex environments, and the need for evaluation which could inform policymaking, a
176 new suite of evaluation approaches called 'pragmatic' evaluations emerged during the
177 1990s. Pragmatic evaluation links the choice of evaluation tools (quantitative, qualitative
178 or a mixed method) directly to the purposes of the research (Patton, 1997). The ability
179 of multi-sector partnerships to raise the profile of an issue beyond immediate partners
180 and to bring it to the attention of the general public and policymakers is an example of a
181 pragmatic evaluation goal. This type of evaluation has been used to evaluate the

182 success of development initiatives such as Local Strategic Partnerships and rural
183 development programmes (Goodwin, 1998, Geddes et al., 2007). Evaluation of the
184 performance of these types of partnerships provides insight into the reality of purported
185 new governance approaches by indicating whether new policies have been developed
186 as a result of the partnership process (Forsyth, 2005).

187 As with positivist and constructivist approaches, however, the narrow scope and focus
188 of pragmatic evaluation, driven by the specific needs of the end user can result in strong
189 internal validity but weak external validity. The consequence is often that the wider goal
190 of understanding *why* a specific intervention works in a specific context is lost (Chen
191 and Rossi, 1983, Chen, 1990).

192 ***Theory-based evaluations***

193 The approaches to evaluation described above are characterised by their focus on
194 methods. Given that none of these method-led approaches was fully able to meet the
195 needs of evaluating multi-dimensional partnership interventions, an alternative pluralistic
196 approach called 'theory-based evaluation' was developed during the 1990s (Sullivan
197 and Stewart, 2006, Chen, 1990). Theory-based evaluations grew out of programme
198 theory and attempt to map the entire process of partnership, rather than inferring that
199 success is the result of specific inputs and outputs (Cronbach, 1982, Dickinson, 2006,
200 Cronbach, 1963, Hall, 2004). Two main theory-based approaches predominate:
201 'realistic evaluation' and 'theory of change'.

202 ***'Realistic evaluation' and 'theory of change' approaches***

203 The 'theory of change' and 'realistic evaluation' approaches use theoretical and
204 contextual understandings of the drivers for collaborative action to inform the evaluation
205 process by shaping the specific research priorities and guiding the questions that the
206 evaluation will seek to address (Blamey and Mackenzie, 2007, Connell and Kubisch,
207 2002). Important differences exist, however, between the two approaches (Dickinson,
208 2006). The 'theory of change' approach is prospective: the evaluation process is
209 embedded within the programme itself and is an iterative process. This type of
210 evaluation is better suited to strategic evaluations of large-scale, multi-site or whole
211 community programmes because of its stronger emphasis on programme outcomes
212 and how change is being achieved. 'Realistic evaluation', on the other hand, is
213 retrospective, with the evaluator remaining outside of the partnership being evaluated,
214 and is better suited to micro-scale evaluations where the local conditions can provide
215 important insights into why specific components of a programme work in a particular
216 context.

217 The 'realistic evaluation' approach divides programmes into three components; the
218 context within which it operates (C), the mechanism used to deliver the programme (M)
219 and the outcomes achieved (O). The same programme applied in differing contexts, it is
220 theorised, can therefore lead to a variety of outcomes or CMO configurations. These
221 different configurations provide a cumulative understanding of what works, for whom,
222 and under what circumstances (Befani et al., 2007).

223 Hasnain-Wynia *et al.* (2003) provide an useful visualisation of the key characteristics
224 and measures of a 'realistic evaluation' approach, as used in their evaluation of
225 community care network partnerships (Figure 1). The framework shown in Figure 1 also

226 encapsulates elements of Waddock and Bannister's (1991) 'interaction amongst
227 partners' by acknowledging the role of previous collaboration experience, and
228 community perceptions and understanding of the need for partnership action, under
229 'environmental characteristics'. The various conditions which exist prior to the
230 establishment of a partnership, together with the specific geographical context within
231 which it will operate, will have a significant impact on multiple aspects of the process,
232 and are therefore treated as an integral element of the evaluation.

233

234 **When to evaluate?**

235 An important limitation in all of the approaches to evaluation described above is their
236 application as linear processes (Dickinson, 2006, Sanderson, 2002). This linearity
237 presents particular difficulties for the evaluation of partnerships which have no specific
238 time frame or life expectancy, and therefore no clearly defined or obvious point at which
239 they should be evaluated (Rowe and Frewer, 2004). The point at which an evaluation
240 of partnership performance is undertaken will clearly have an impact on the findings of
241 that evaluation (El Ansari et al., 2001). Levels of effectiveness in partnerships may
242 change in response to internal dynamics or external contextual changes. Therefore, the
243 point at which evaluation takes place may be crucial in understanding the reasons for
244 success or failure. For example, viewed from a single temporal standpoint, a
245 partnership may seem efficient, networked and progressive when it may in fact have
246 undergone a series of crises or flux based around specific issues, the *resolution* of
247 which has resulted in the emergence of new collaborative cohesion and the
248 achievement of stated goals.

249 Questions surrounding when to evaluate also affect the external validity of the findings
250 of an evaluation. The difficulty of identifying the specific point in a partnership's life that
251 evaluation should be undertaken is compounded if a comparative methodology is also
252 used. For example, if a number of partnerships are selected for comparative study, they
253 are unlikely to have begun to collaborate at exactly the same point in time, and will have
254 taken differing lengths of time to reach maturity. Therefore, if partnerships with similar
255 objectives, but operating in different contexts, are compared in order to determine the
256 impact of context on partnership effectiveness, differences in their effectiveness may be
257 because they are at different stages of development rather than because of differences
258 in the way that they operate. Comparative evaluation of partnership performance
259 therefore needs to draw on a detailed understanding of the endogenous and exogenous
260 changes which have occurred during the lifetime of the partnership in order to draw
261 robust conclusions about partnership effectiveness.

262 The way that partnership effectiveness is conceptualised over time also has important
263 implications for the way that the effectiveness of policy intervention is evaluated. Figure
264 2 illustrates graphically different typologies of time. 'Clock' time (Figure 2 (a)) refers to:

265 *'the continuum – that is, time as a non-spatial dimension in which events occur*
266 *in apparently irreversible succession from the past through the present to the*
267 *future'* (Ancona et al., 2001, p.514).

268 'Cyclical' time (Figure 2 (b)) refers to the recurring patterns which occur in the
269 continuum of time, such as the seasons of the year, for example. 'Life-cycle' time
270 (Figure 2 (d)) may include a cyclical process, but is delineated by clear start and end-
271 points and, unlike cyclical time, is not necessarily repeated. Each of these typologies

272 views time as progressing in a specific linear direction. Current approaches to
273 evaluation use this linear conceptualisation of time to view effectiveness as a
274 cumulative attribute, increasing through accretion over time (Figure 3). However, this
275 paper argues that such a cumulative and linear view of effectiveness is inaccurate, as
276 variables within and outside of partnerships do not remain static, but can change (in a
277 positive or negative way) according to internal and external dynamics.

278 Contrasting with notions of linear time is 'event' time. Event time may be predictable
279 (Figure 2 (e)) in that an event is regularly repeated, or it may be repeated at irregular
280 intervals (Figure 2 (c)) or it may be a singular event which is not repeated. This non-
281 linear conceptualisation of time may be a more useful and accurate way to understand
282 how the effectiveness of partnerships develops. Figure 4 illustrates the
283 conceptualisation of effectiveness as a variable process.

284 As can be seen in Figure 4, effectiveness changes in response to both positive stimuli
285 (light stars) and negative stimuli (dark stars). In this non-linear conceptualisation, the
286 level of effectiveness at any one point is the product of a suite of variables, or
287 determinants of effectiveness, acting from both within and outside of the partnership,
288 and which combine to produce a composite, termed 'effectiveness'.

289

290 **Practical challenges in measuring the performance of partnerships**

291 Partnership approaches vary considerably in the way that organisations and individuals
292 work together to achieve common goals. Partnerships exhibit differences in terms of
293 their scale, structure, composition and agency (Rowe and Frewer, 2004, Selin, 1999). In
294 addition as discussed above, partnerships operate within dynamic policy and

295 institutional contexts and are themselves subject to change in terms of stakeholder
296 engagement and resource availability (Sanderson, 2002). As a result, measuring
297 partnership performance is difficult.

298 As a first step, it is important to set clear and unambiguous criteria for assessing
299 success. However, achieving this goal in practice is not straightforward and will depend
300 on the chosen evaluation methodology. Difficulties exist in agreeing which indicators of
301 success to use and in reaching consensus on the level of achievement of each indicator
302 (Dixon and Sindall, 1994). In addition, conceptualisations of 'success' may vary
303 between individual stakeholders, particularly if the partnership has been established or
304 led by a top-down imperative and participants have had little or no opportunity to be
305 involved during the early stages of partnership formation (El Ansari et al., 2001,
306 Glendinning, 2002).

307 Partnerships may achieve a wide range of benefits which are not necessarily identified
308 as target outcomes. For example, a partnership in a coastal environment may not have
309 achieved its stated objective of publishing a management plan, but may still have
310 developed a shared sense of purpose and cohesion amongst divergent stakeholder
311 groups, which later facilitates the implementation of other partnership actions
312 (Stojanovic and Barker, 2008). In this respect, there may be value in the act of
313 partnership itself (Asthana et al., 2002).

314 Examining the effectiveness of a single local partnership in inherently complex 'real
315 world' environments carries its own set of specific difficulties. The challenge becomes
316 even greater when attempting to evaluate the same criteria across multiple case studies

317 in order to achieve comparability (Freeman and Peck, 2006). Specifically, the differing
318 contexts and spatial scales within which partnerships work, can have a significant
319 influence on the way that the same set of management principles are interpreted and
320 implemented (Dahl-Tacconi, 2005). For example, differing legislative and policy
321 environments can lead to significantly different ways of enacting agreed actions and
322 interventions. Changes in one variable, such as staff turnover within partner
323 organisations, for example, may lead to significant changes in other variables, such as
324 the availability of resources or the confidence with which representatives can make
325 decisions (Fletcher, 2007, Freeman and Peck, 2006). The differing cultural contexts of
326 partner organisations, and mismatches in the spatial scales at which these
327 organisations work, can also have an impact on the way that partnerships operate
328 (Freeman and Peck, 2006, Evans, 2004). Evans (2004), for example, has described the
329 degree to which individual or personal agendas and interests shape, promote or restrict
330 the achievement of collective objectives.

331

332 **An alternative approach: Mapping the ‘determinants of effectiveness’ through**
333 **time**

334 Given the challenges to evaluation noted above, dividing partnerships into three
335 elements, namely: *context*, *process* and *outcome*, as espoused in the ‘realistic’
336 approach to evaluation, offers a useful framework within which to work (Figure 5).
337 Associated with each of the three elements is a set of ‘determinants of effectiveness’
338 (Kelly, 2009, Kelly et al., in press). These determinants of effectiveness have been
339 drawn from the literature on evaluation across a broad range of fields and are

340 considered to be the key generic ingredients for successful partnership working
341 (Asthana et al., 2002, Dowling et al., 2004). An empirical study which tests this potential
342 new approach has been undertaken and a discussion of the key findings can be found
343 in Kelly et al. (in press).

344 Determinants of effectiveness associated with the context within which a partnership
345 works include a 'pro-partnership' political and cultural climate, in which partnership
346 action is seen as the most appropriate method for dealing with the identified issue, and
347 which is particularly important in driving the early stages of partnership formation.

348 Determinants of effectiveness associated with the process of partnership include; the
349 degree to which all relevant stakeholders are identified and given an opportunity to
350 participate in the process; the level of commitment that stakeholders have to remain
351 actively engaged in partnership activity; and the degree to which levels of trust exist
352 between stakeholders from different sectors. The important determinants of output and
353 outcome effectiveness include; the extent to which stakeholders are prepared to abide
354 by collectively agreed actions; the degree to which partnership objectives have been
355 realised; and the ability of the partnership to shape and influence future policy (Oels,
356 2006).

357 Each individual determinant plays an important role in contributing to the overall
358 effectiveness of the process and to the perceptions of effectiveness held by
359 stakeholders within and outside of the partnership (Hasnain-Wynia et al., 2003). There
360 can be elements of overlap of course between the determinants, as benefits which
361 emerge from the *process* (such as increased levels of trust and understanding between
362 stakeholders, for example), may also be viewed as partnership achievements or

363 *outcomes* (Chess, 2000). This interconnectedness is shown in Figure 5 by thin black
364 arrows which link the determinants of process effectiveness to the determinants of
365 output/outcome effectiveness. In addition, a large arrow links the achievements of the
366 partnership back to the context within which it operates, to highlight the notion that
367 partnership activity is embedded within the places and spaces in which it operates, and
368 will therefore have an impact on that context throughout its actions and achievements.
369 This influence may be both positive and negative. For example, if there has been little
370 experience of partnership working prior to the new collaboration, as the partnership
371 progresses, stakeholder perceptions of the purpose and value of the partnership
372 change (either positively or negatively), altering their willingness to continue to
373 participate and influencing the opinions and perceptions of other stakeholders outside of
374 the partnership who may be considering joining.

375 Attaining consistently high levels of achievement of the determinants of effectiveness is
376 difficult and unrealistic. It is much more likely that performance will be fluid and dynamic,
377 with good levels of achievement of different determinants at different times. Successful
378 partnerships may therefore be characterised by the maintenance of good levels of
379 achievement across multiple determinants over a prolonged period of time (Kelly, 2009,
380 Kelly et al., in press). The goal of evaluating partnership effectiveness should therefore
381 be to identify why partnerships have failed to achieve high levels of the key
382 determinants of effectiveness and to provide insight into how any decline in
383 performance can be improved. Each of the challenges noted above highlights the need
384 for evaluation approaches which reflect not only the context, mechanism and outcomes
385 of a particular partnership, but also *changes* in those three elements over time.

386

387 **Conclusions**

388 Although collaboration has become one of the most common ways of delivering policy
389 and managing complex environments, there is little empirical evidence to demonstrate
390 whether such approaches are more effective than more traditional top-down methods of
391 intervention. No single research paradigm is universally applicable. The choice of
392 theoretical perspective and practical evaluation method will depend on the purposes,
393 users and sponsors of the evaluation. Early evaluative techniques were rooted in the
394 positivist experimental paradigm, whereby researchers looked for the 'universal truths'
395 of causality by isolating and testing specific 'factors for success'. Later, a constructivist
396 paradigm emerged and the focus shifted away from an evaluation of programme
397 outputs onto the processes of collaboration itself. More recently, a pluralist approach
398 has become the central paradigm, whereby the context within which programmes and
399 partnerships operate is examined, alongside the more traditional measures of
400 processes, outputs and outcomes.

401 A particularly useful approach is that provided by 'realistic evaluation'. 'Realistic
402 evaluation' offers a number of advantages over alternative strategies in that it
403 acknowledges the need to build on knowledge of 'what works' in order to progress
404 understanding, whilst also accepting that differing contexts can lead to important
405 differences in outcomes. In this way, 'realistic evaluation' provides an opportunity to
406 define 'what works when'.

407 Existing approaches, however, have failed to acknowledge the impact of change on the
408 various components which comprise partnership effectiveness. Changes in these

409 variables are likely to result in changing levels of effectiveness over time and this
410 perspective has significant implications for the point at which evaluation is undertaken,
411 particularly for those partnerships which are not delimited by specific time frames. An
412 alternative approach is posited, based on analysis of changes over time in key
413 'determinants of effectiveness'. Tracing changes in the achievement of the determinants
414 of effectiveness can highlight not only whether a partnership is likely to achieve its
415 goals, but also why it has performed as it has, and what is needed in order to improve
416 performance in the specific local context within which the partnership operates.

417

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