



Leadership in Place-based systemic approaches

September 2026

Facilitated by NELP

Special thanks to guest presenters Cheryl Goodman and Melanie De Meester.

NELP email: NELP@shu.ac.uk

NELP website: evaluatingcomplexity.org



Session Outline

Welcome and introductions

Leadership – Condition 5

- a. Strategic Leadership - condition 5a
- b. Shared Leadership - condition 5b

Breakout room activity

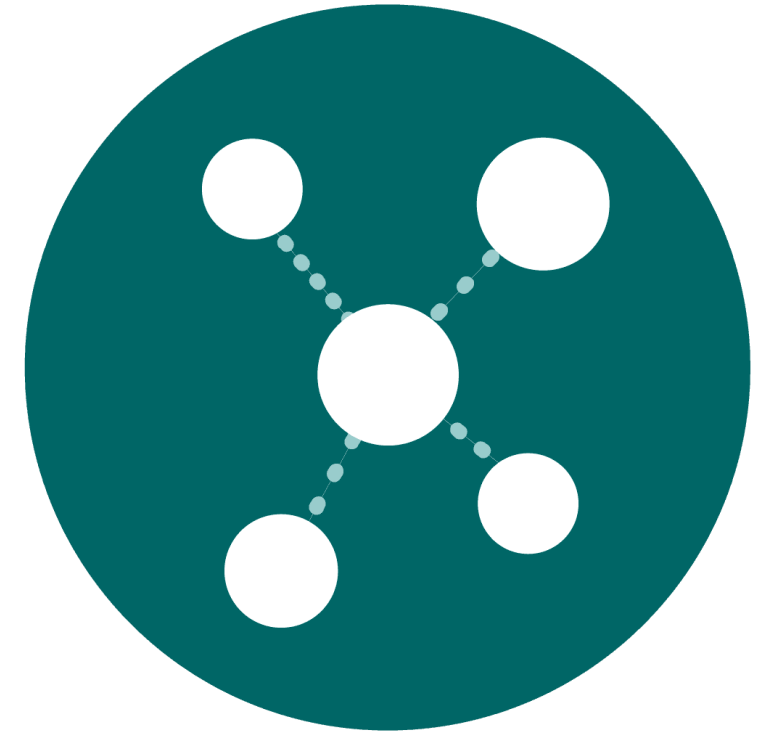
Break – 5 minutes

Place examples of leadership

- a. Strategic leadership – Place example
- b. Shared leadership– Burnley

Plenary

Close





Welcome and introductions



Breakout Buzz session



Please introduce **yourself** and **your Place**

Do you have any lingering questions about **Leadership**?

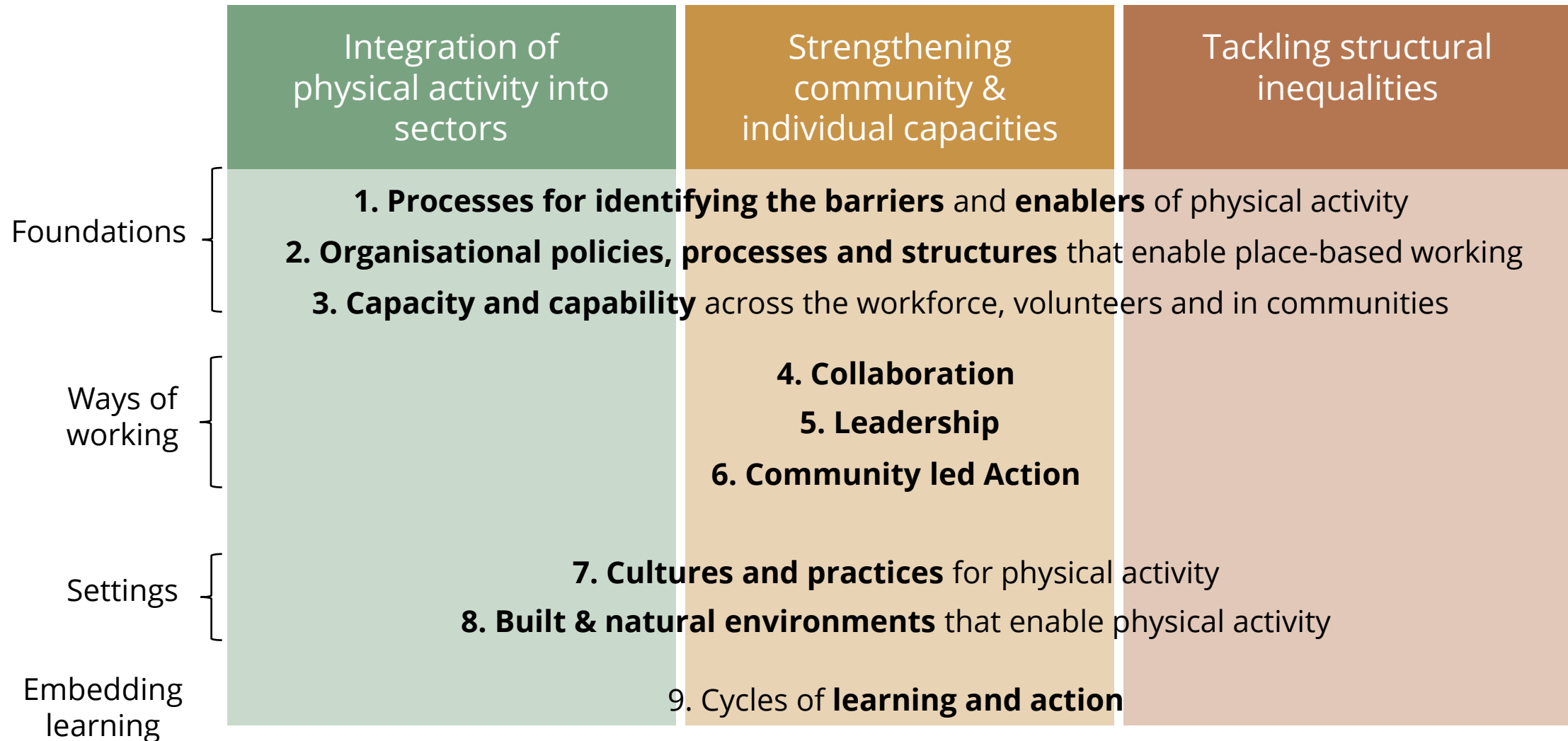
Please feel free to post questions in the chat throughout the seminar.

National Evaluation and Learning Partnership

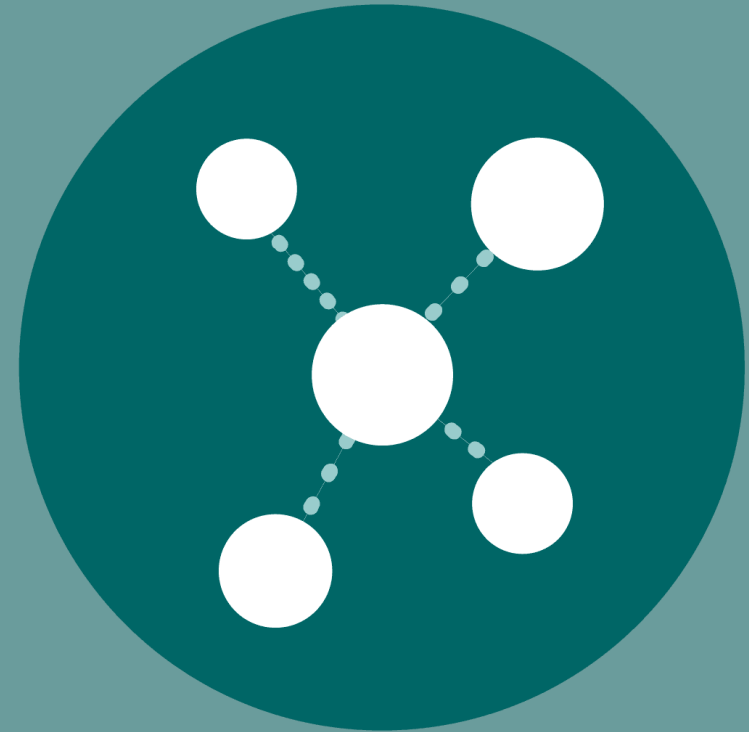


- The Sport England Strategy *Uniting the Movement* aims to tackle stubborn inequalities in physical activity
- Addressing inequalities requires public services, residents, voluntary organisations and other stakeholders to take coordinated action across multiple influences to address the causes of inactivity - *Place-based Systemic Approaches* (PBSA)
- The National Evaluation and Learning Partnership (NELP) works with Sport England, local partnerships and communities to support learning and evaluation, to develop understanding of how to address inequalities in physical activity.
- Over 100 Place Partnerships are now funded by SE and supported by NELP
- In Autumn 2025, 63 places participated in our Configurational Comparative Analysis evaluation

System Maturity Conditions for Place-based Systemic Approaches to Physical Activity Inequalities



Leadership



Leadership



Condition Definition:

Policymakers, workforce, volunteers and residents act together to build on strengths and remove barriers for tackling physical activity inequalities.

Learning seminar Sub-Condition Definitions:

- A. Strategic Leadership:** Strategic leaders, across sectors, promote place-based systemic approaches to tackle physical activity inequalities
- B. Shared Leadership:** People at all levels take on roles and responsibility to tackle physical activity inequalities and can act autonomously

System Maturity Matrix:

You can access the full [System Maturity Matrix](#) via our website – **www.evaluatingcomplexity.org** - for a more detailed explanation of how these conditions.

For more information on this condition, please visit the [Leadership](#) section which is available via our website.



Findings

Strategic Leadership



Strategic leadership

Strategic leaders, across sectors, promote place-based systemic approaches to tackle physical activity inequalities

Where strategic leadership is embedded, we would find:

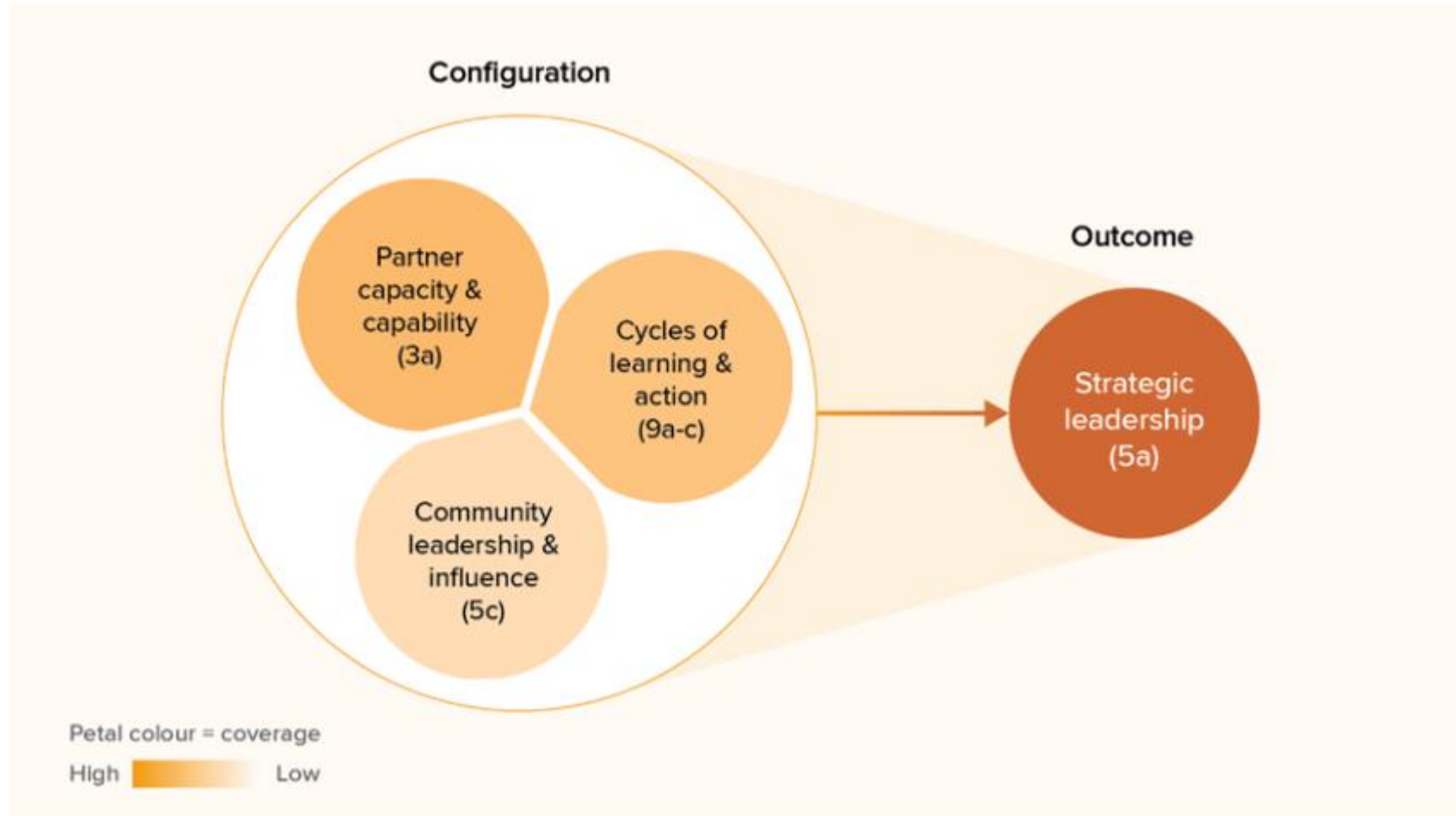
Widespread, sustained visible leadership and long-term commitment, within the place, for place-based systemic approaches to tackle physical activity inequalities.

Policy and practice supports commitments to prioritise physical activity.

Leaders use their influence and facilitate diverse contribution to decision making and enable others to act.

Leaders use their positions to effectively challenge contradictory policies and practices.

Configurational Analysis – Strategic leadership: Increasing maturity 2024-5



Strategic Leadership: Maturity 2025, 6 Places

How these conditions relate to Strategic Leadership



- Investment in partner capability and capacity, including systems leadership training, may help to cultivate systemic approaches to strategic leadership
- This investment also promotes integration of evaluative practice described in cycles of learning and action
- Strong community leadership and influence may be enabled through strategic leaders changing policies and practices
- and/or strategic leaders may be persuaded to work in a more place-based and community-oriented way when communities have such influence within the power structures.
- Direction of causality is uncertain, and it may be that strong strategic leadership drives investment in building capacity and capability and cycles of learning and action. It is likely that these effects work in both directions.

Explanatory account for strategic leadership



IF: strategic leaders within the Place engage in development of systems leadership (part of 3a)

THEN: they provide sustained, visible leadership and long-term commitment to the PBSA to tackle PA inequalities, across organisations within the place

BECAUSE: Leaders recognise the value of these ways of working, seeing the importance of creating and protecting resources and spaces for cycles of learning and action, and including diverse contributions to decision making

In Practice

Places may create protected learning and reflection action sessions where partners and community leaders can test ideas, reflect together, and decide next steps. This builds mutual trust which give those with power confidence to share decision making and action across the system.

What might strategic leadership look like?



By adding a dedicated role that is regularly travelling to meet with organisations across the Place to the partnership, we will be able to upskill the network and ensure that changes are sustained and enhanced.

The capacity roles for full-award are viewed as “hosted” by an organisation based on the most suitable employer, but the work programmes will be overseen by the steering group, to ensure roles are collaboratively working for the benefit of the partnership.



Findings

Shared Leadership

Shared leadership

People at all levels take on roles and responsibility to tackle physical activity inequalities and can act autonomously



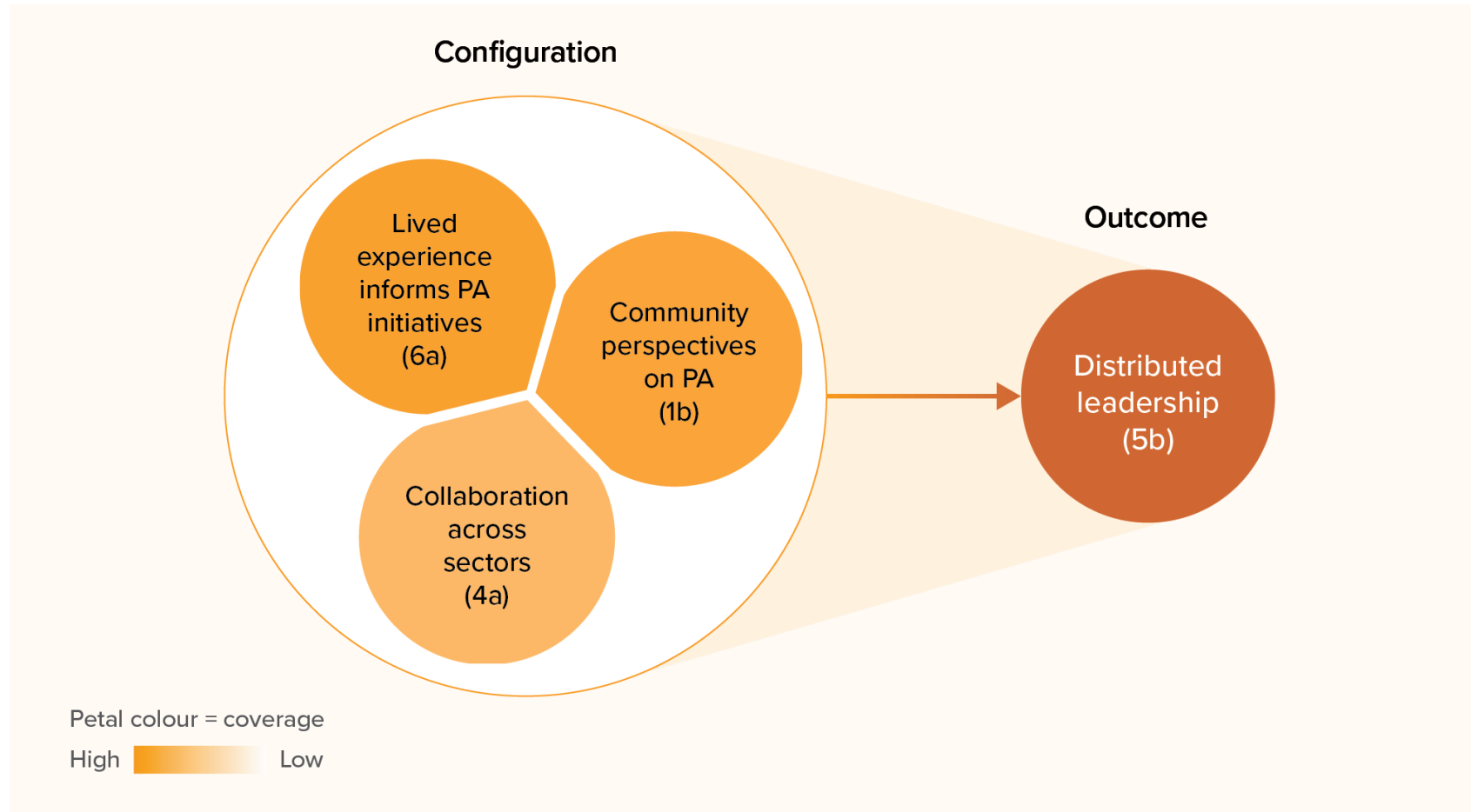
Where this is embedded, we would find:

There are multiple people at all layers who take informed decisions and actions, aligned with the shared vision to address physical activity inequalities.

They take on roles and responsibility and feel in control of what they do.

They highlight things that are not working and there are effective ways to influence upwards/more widely to resolve systemic challenges.

Configurational Analysis – Shared Leadership



Shared Leadership: Maturity 2025, 17 Places

Explanatory account for shared leadership



IF:

- knowledge, perspectives and action are fragmented and
- there is a shared recognition of the value of community insight rooted in lived experience (1b)
 - there are cross-sector collaborative spaces in which shared purpose is cultivated (4a),
 - and co-production of action on PA (6a)

THEN:

People at all levels take on roles and responsibility to tackle physical activity inequalities and can act autonomously

BECAUSE:

- this** enables development of conditions for shared leadership across organisations and hierarchies:
- co-ownership / collective responsibility
 - a sense of influence and control (autonomy)
 - motivation and confidence to initiate action and take responsibility

How do we enable/develop shared leadership?



Bringing in different perspectives but importantly contrasting the misalignment between organisational priorities and community realities

Participants feel ownership and influence over decisions rather than being consulted superficially...they feel valued, trusted and able to influence outcomes.

Action enabled and motivated through collective recognition of shared experiences – empowerment arising from connecting with others



Examples of shared leadership

Reorientating the Active Partnership team towards greater place-based working has included trialling a matrix style of working through a multi-disciplinary team, a relocation of office working space and a change to working pattern where team members are literally place-based 2 days a week.

Mixing up colleagues from across the system “layers” adds a richness and helps to avoid the reaction of some participants in relying on the idea that “we can’t do anything because the senior leaders need to do it” or vice versa.



Breakout room - activity

How can strategic leaders make shared leadership possible?

Strategic Leadership



Place case study – Strategic leadership



Place Partnership A is showing maturing signs of strategic leadership through increased visibility and collaboration with cross sector organisations.

Systems leadership training has promoted adaptive and collaborative mindsets which have influenced leaders across sectors. Whilst there are positive changes with co-produced strategies being championed by local leaders to tackle physical activity inequalities, there is still a reliance on key influencers. It is hoped that continued attention towards systems leadership will lead to more influencing voices across sectors.

Place case study – Strategic leadership



To enable the maturity of strategic leadership, Place partnership A has developed a strong culture of continuous learning, moving partners beyond reporting and delivery towards reflection, experimentation and shared sense-making. Live feedback loops and participatory evaluation tools are now embedded in programmes and networks, enabling partners to adapt and refine initiatives as learning emerges.

Burnley

Shared Leadership



The background is a solid teal color. On the left side, there are several concentric circles of a slightly lighter shade of teal, creating a subtle pattern.

Plenary

Condition Community

Feedback

Please let us know your thoughts via this [link](#)



Leadership in Place-based systemic approaches

September 2026

Facilitated by NELP

Special thanks to guest presenters Cheryl Goodman and Melanie De Meester.

NELP email: NELP@shu.ac.uk

NELP website: evaluatingcomplexity.org