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**Evaluating Good Practice in Coaching Delivery between Governing Bodies of  
Sport and County Sports Partnerships in the United Kingdom**

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## **Abstract**

Forty nine County Sports Partnerships (CSPs) work together with National Governing Bodies of sport (NGBs) to support and develop sports coaching in the UK. Partnership has been promoted as a key means by which agencies are able to address complex issues but to date there has been little, if any, research into the effectiveness of partnership working between NGBs and CSPs in their support of coaching delivery. NGB officers ( $n=13$ ) and CSP Coaching Development Managers (CDM or equivalent) ( $n=23$ ) were asked (via online questionnaire and telephone interviews) about their experiences of partnership working. Findings demonstrate that successful partnership working relies heavily upon “buy-in” from both parties and an adequate amount of funding to support coach development. The paper concludes by suggesting that it is likely that partner agencies may need to be persuaded about the value of partnership working due to the required investment and the perceived burdens of collaboration.

**Keywords:** sports coaching; partnership, national governing bodies, county sports partnerships.

## **Introduction**

In England, between 2012 and 2013 nearly 7 million people received sports coaching of some kind while over 2.6 million volunteered in a sporting role and nearly 5 million took part in competitive sport (Sport England, 2013a). The economic significance of sport is clear with more than £20 billion added value to the English economy in 2010 (Sport England, 2013b). Following the London 2012 Olympic Games considerable attention has been paid to elite and school sport in order to ensure a sustainable Olympic legacy (Brookes & Wiggan, 2009) and Sport England, the non-departmental public body of the UK government’s Department for Culture, Media and Sport (responsible for grassroots sport) is committed to distributing £400 million between 2013 and 2017 to the National Governing Bodies

of sport (NGBs) in order to support efforts to increase the number of people playing sport and to nurture sporting talent (Sport England, 2012a). At the heart of this investment is the ambition of realising a “world leading” community sports system predicated on partnership working between Government, Sport England and NGBs to develop modern sports club networks, high quality sporting opportunities and talent identification pathways (Sport England, 2008).

### **Partnership and Policy**

Armistead, Pettigrew, and Aves (2007: p212) suggest that partnership represents “a cross-sector, interorganisational group, working together under some form of recognized governance, towards common goals which would be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to achieve if tackled by any single organisation.” As such, partnerships reflect formal institutional-level working arrangements (Whittington, 2003) involving the mobilisation of common interests drawn from a number of areas with which to devise shared strategies for specific concerns (Butterfoss, 2007; Sullivan & Skelcher, 2002). Participation involves the sharing of goals (Butterfoss, Goodman, & Wandersman, 1993; Francisco et al., 1993) the exchange of information and resources (El Ansari & Phillips, 2004; Huxham & Vangen, 2005) and the building of organisational capacity (Butterfoss, 2006; Roussos & Fawcett, 2000). Partnership literature has highlighted multiple perspectives of partnership. For example, social exchange theory posits that the type and quality of partnership contributions made by an individual is based upon an assessment of the relative benefits and costs of participation (Tekleab & Chiaburu, 2010). Further, a resource dependency perspective couches participation as a calculated response to the need for organisational survival (Zakus, 1998). Both perspectives highlight that working

in partnership is not a neutral act. For example, from a social exchange perspective partner behaviour is regulated by perceptions concerning reciprocity in which mutually satisfying exchange relationships increase the type and quality of partner contributions (Tekleab and Chiaburu, 2010). The tendency for individuals to maximise benefits and minimise costs highlights individualistic behaviour which, when individuals perceive that the consequences of an exchange are comparatively less rewarding than for the other party, the relationship may be terminated (Hogg and Vaughan, 2010). The resource dependency perspective brings also into focus the complex nature of participation. Fundamentally concerned with the need for organisational survival, this perspective highlights the challenge of maintaining organisational autonomy whilst simultaneously entering relationships that yield the resources on which survival depends. In response, organisations use various strategies for example, denying the legitimacy of other organisations in order to avoid the influence of others where possible (Pfeffer and Salancik, 2003). While these perspectives provide insight into the potential bases for partner participation they are essentially dry concepts which focus on theory rather providing any practical means of assessing partnerships within the sport context with which this study is concerned. Attention is now turned to a discussion of partnership working in sport development.

Partnership working in sport development is not a new phenomenon (Robson, 2008). In the UK, sport has, in recent years, been couched in its broadest sense to include physical activity as a principal means of addressing public health issues (i.e., obesity) in addition to broader social problems including crime and social exclusion (DCMS / Strategy Unit, 2002). This approach was allied to a public health discourse that extolled the virtues of partnership between agencies and

individuals working together to tackle complex health issues (Department of Health, 2004). Emanating from the political desire of former (New) Labour administrations that sought to transform the state into an enabling partner in order to renew a sense of participatory democracy via networks of cooperative institutions and individuals (Bennett, Fuller & Ramsden., 2004; Bevir & Rhodes, 2003; Newman, 2001), partnership was endorsed as a means of encouraging the involvement of communities in local politics to improve transparency and local autonomy over services (Daly & Davis, 2002; Sullivan & Skelcher, 2002).

For example, the creation of Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) that facilitated closer consultation with the users of local services (Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, 2001) became a central feature of the local political landscape (Geddes, Davies & Fuller, 2007). These have traditionally included representation from local authorities, voluntary organisations, local businesses, educational institutions, community and neighbourhood organisations, employment services, and the private sector (Bennett et al., 2004) and are widely premised on the notion of joint rather than parallel working (Asthana, Richardson & Halliday, 2002; Bennett et al., 2004). As such, they are assumed to create more inclusive local governance that is better tuned to the needs of communities (Geddes, 2006). However, the common emphasis on the virtues of collaboration without any substantive evidence to support claims for their use (Glasby, Dickinson & Peck, 2006) reinforces the assumption that partnerships are a “social good” and has allowed discussion concerning their utility to move from questions of whether partnership working is desirable to one which takes this for granted (McLaughlin, 2004).

Despite the notion that political institutions no longer possess the capacity to address all of the problems facing contemporary society (Hirst, 2000), the shift to network governance is likely to be characterised by “persistent asymmetries” (Rhodes, 2007, p. 1253), between the power of national government and those at the local level. Indeed, with reference to the sports policy sector, Grix & Phillpots (2011) have usefully highlighted how new forms of governance have largely come to rest on asymmetrical power relations and unchanged patterns of resource dependency at both elite sport and mass participation levels. Furthermore, as McDonald (2005) makes clear, there is a significant disconnect between ideals of efficiency, effectiveness and inclusiveness and the reality of partnership working in practice. As such, the notion that the locus of governmental power has shifted away from the centre to a series of networks can be challenged. While partnership working has become an endemic feature of the sports development discourse in England (Mackintosh, 2011), it remains relatively unexplored in comparison with other fields (cf. Butterfoss, Goodman, & Wandersman, 1996; Kegler, Steckler, McLeroy, & Malek, 1998; Rummery, 2003) which is surprising given the emphasis placed on partnership across the broader policy spectrum. To develop the evidence base in the sports development setting the aim this study was to compare the views of staff working within organisations directly involved in the delivery of sport policy in the UK in order to investigate effectiveness of partnerships between CSPs and NGBs. In order to orientate the reader attention is now given to partnership approaches within the sport context before presenting a discussion of partnership working in practice.

### ***Partnership approaches and sport in England***



In England County Sports Partnerships (CSPs) operate as quasi-governmental strategic bodies to coordinate the delivery of community sport from NGBs and public and private sector partners. In England, County Sports Partnerships (CSPs) operate as quasi-governmental strategic bodies to coordinate the delivery of community sport from NGBs and public and private sector partners. CSPs are supported by funding from Sport England which, together with UK Sport, is responsible for sporting participation and success in the UK. Accountable to the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, Sport England invests significant exchequer funding in NGBs, schools, colleges, universities and sporting organisations to develop and implement programmes that specifically target an increase the number of people playing sport. In contrast, while also accountable to the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, UK Sport is concerned with developing world class talent by investing in athletes, facilities and consultancy in order to maximise sporting success on the world stage.

Evolving from the 45 Active Sports Partnerships that were established in 1999 to plan, review and deliver the local programmes in partnership with NGBs, local authorities, universities and schools, CSPs were established in the early to mid-2000s and supported with long term funding from 2004 (Sport England, 2004). This was in response to a perceived need to modernise sport development by clarifying the functions of agencies involved in service design (Bloyce & Smith 2010; Department for Culture, Media & Sport [DCMS] / Strategy Unit 2002; Sport England, 2007). As a nationwide system spanning 49 of England's counties, CSPs are teams of professional staff funded by Sport England tasked with securing greater efficiency and local consultation through partnership with a particular emphasis on facilitating purposeful interaction between sport organisations, especially NGBs, to

oversee the implementation of key sport strategies (Bloyce & Smith, 2010; Bullough, 2009).

NGBs have been referred to as the custodians of sport (UK Sport, 2003) with roles to plan and promote sport-related activities, oversee rules and regulations, and to develop talent and participation pathways. As such, NGBs represent the cornerstone of many UK sport initiatives given their involvement with partners from diverse settings including schools, university and community organisations. In contrast to CSPs, as a level of organisation above sports clubs, NGBs operate independently of the sports councils and government and have specialised knowledge of their particular sport, overseeing 100 different sports in the UK (Taylor & O'Sullivan, 2009). The direction of NGB development has been driven by the wider neo-liberal modernisation agenda that was instigated by the New Labour and adopted by successive governments thereafter. This involved an experiment which linked minimal state involvement with a strong outcome orientation that targeted greater efficiency in policy making (Sullivan & Skelcher, 2002). This approach was enshrined in *Game Plan* which was principally concerned with achieving greater efficiency within the sport policy context (DCMS/ Strategy Unit, 2002). Representing a new policy direction for sport and physical activity, *Game Plan* was a policy document which outlined greater flexibility for sports organisations in the ways in which services were delivered. Rather than providing a carte blanche for sports organisations to operate with complete autonomy, a series of performance indicators were established to align the objectives of developing sporting talent and increasing sport participation overall (Walters, Trenberth, & Tacon, 2010). These essentially tethered sports organisations to centrally-determined monitoring and evaluation measures in order to encourage greater

cohesiveness and efficiency (Houlihan & Green, 2009). The performance indicators established the expectation that NGBs would use their resources effectively to simultaneously improve elite sport and to broaden grass-roots sport participation within the general population (Taylor and O’Sullivan, 2009). *Game Plan* brought into focus a number of shortcomings in NGB governance particularly in relation to a lack of transparency, financial control, and monitoring and reporting (UK Sport, 2003) which has resulted in the development of a Competencies Framework that promotes better management, improved financial processes, and strategic planning (Walters et al., 2010). Consequently, in order to receive Sport England funding NGBs are now obliged to outline Whole Sport Plans which detail how investments are to be used to secure sport outcomes including talent development and the numbers of people playing sport as part of the broader Sport England’s aim of increasing participation and UK Sport’s aim of developing and maximising the performance of UK elite athletes.

Following changes to sport policy brought about by the London Olympic Games CSPs fulfil a principal role in creating Sport England’s world leading community sports system (Grix & Philpotts, 2011; Sport England, 2008). Underlining the government’s broader commitment to greater efficiency and performance, Sport England (2008) outlined the key objectives for which CSPs are responsible including: “Excel” i.e. support for the development of talented individuals into elite performers; “Grow” i.e. increases in the number of people in the community playing sport, and “Sustain” i.e. ensuring that sport participants are satisfied with their experiences. This, and more recent strategies for example, *Creating a Sporting Habit for Life* (DCMS, 2012), highlight the significant steering powers of Sport England over CSPs and the potential limits to bottom-up

community-led grass roots initiatives (Phillpots, Grix & Quarmby, 2011). Grix and Phillpots (2010) argue that this represents something of a paradox in that it is apparent that CSPs operate to ensure consistent delivery of pre-determined sport policy objectives and compel partners for example, NGBs, to cooperate in return for funding and resources rather than providing an explicit forum in which sport initiatives are jointly agreed between diverse partners.

Further support for this argument is provided by Harris and Houlihan (2011) who highlight that CSPs need to foster a strong set of beliefs concerning partnership objectives which are reinforced through a resource dependent relationship with their partners including finance, development expertise and brokering skills. This perspective represents partnership as a calculated response to the need for organisational survival and is indicative of the wider sporting context in which it is recognised that stakeholders often compete for similar resources (Babiak & Thibault, 2008, 2009). These arguments help to frame the present study which aimed to investigate the effectiveness of partnerships between CSPs and NGBs. Despite the centrality of CSPs and NGBs to contemporary sport policy in England there has been little, if any, research assessing the effectiveness of these collaborations.

Sport England has challenged organisations (including CSPs and Sports Coach UK) to engender a greater level of depth and quality in their support of NGBs given their focus on: developing more coaches and supporting existing coaches; prioritising resources towards making a tangible impact on increasing and/or sustaining adult sports participation, and focus on making a real difference in specific sports and specific development areas. To ensure that an effective local workforce is in place to support the delivery of NGB plans, Sport England (2012b)

recommend that CSPs should support NGBs by focusing on eight coaching objectives aimed at building on previous successes enjoyed through the development of the England Coaching Networks (ECN). The overarching aim of the ECN is for CSPs to provide support to NGBs in delivering a coaching workforce which will positively impact the NGBs' 16+ and England Talent Pathways. These eight coaching objectives are listed in Table 1. As comprehensive as the objectives are it is likely that measuring progress toward achieving them will provide significant challenges, particularly with regard to identifying outcome measures and managements processes that are adequately able to deal with local complexity. A recent review identified some initial successes including the provision of more than £1 million of bursary funding to support coach training and development, and progress in increasing the number of coaches supported by CSP interventions (Sports Coach UK, 2014). However, a key challenge concerns how to demonstrate the impact of the ECN to NGBs in a meaningful way so as to secure the commitment of local coaches and higher level strategic decision makers (Sports Coach UK, 2014). Consequently, it is clear that the ambitions set out in the ECN are likely to require significant effort from both CSPs and NGBs in order to ensure that decision making, delivery and assessment of the ECN is supported by effective organisational collaboration.

[Table 1 here].

### **Partnership working in practice**

Babiak and Thibault (2009) suggest that the main challenges in partnership working can be attributed to seven key factors comprising: (i) environmental constraints; (ii) diversity on organisational aims; (iii) barriers in communication; (iv) difficulties in developing joint modes of operating; (v) managing perceived power imbalances; (vi) building trust, and (vii) managing the logistics of working with geographically dispersed partners. Such assertions are supported by Hayhurst and Frisby (2010) who highlight tensions between the various parties involved in high performance sport are attributable to power imbalances, competing values and differing political motives. A further challenge is the practical reality of establishing processes that are able to adequately accommodate partnership functions. Research by Frisby, Thibault, and Kikulis (2004) concerning partnerships between Canadian local government sport/recreation departments and not-for-profit commercial organizations found that managerial structures were commonly inadequate, suggesting that a lack of clear planning, indistinguishable or vague role definition and insufficient human resources may all negatively impact the functioning of partnerships. From a non-sport perspective, Alexander (1998) contends that within partnerships further complexity can occur through unclear performance criteria, measurement of targets, compliance with government regulations, and the unreliable nature of funding provision. Such challenges are apparent in the UK where the diversity of representatives common to partnership working between sport and non-sport organisations also increases the complexity of managing contrasting external and internal demands (Babiak & Thibault, 2008). Recent evidence from across the UK sport sector suggests that partnership working is inherently unequal, asymmetric and reflective of state-led policy with strong

managerial control and tightly defined objectives (Grix, 2010; Grix & Phillpots, 2011; Phillpots et al., 2011).

Reflecting the assertion that partnerships in the sport context are inherently asymmetrical and characterized by resource dependencies, a small number of investigations in the sport management context have highlighted competition for resources, power imbalances and contrasting political motives of the various parties involved (Babiak & Thibault, 2008, 2009; Hayhurst & Frisby, 2010). These tensions often arise from the assumption that partner agencies share common goals and understandings, a factor which is particularly apparent when organizations concerned with the delivery of both high performance sport and sport-for-development come together (Green, 2004). However, partnership approaches have been firmly established as a critical component of a broader policy approach that aspires to secure increased sport participation, greater efficiency and local consultation (Bloyce & Smith, 2010; Houlihan & Green, 2009) both in the UK (Robson, 2008) and beyond (Babiak and Thibault, 2009). Despite the emphasis on partnership working at the community level (Houlihan & Lindsey, 2008; Lindsey 2009), there is a paucity of research concerning collaboration as a mechanism for coordinating coaching development and delivery in support of community sport and physical activity development, or the implications for those involved. One reason for this lack of evidence may be the diversity of interests associated with partnership in the UK sport context which is inherently contested and thus has the potential to create competition for legitimacy between partners, rather than a focus on optimal collaborative functioning (Babiak, 2009; Babiak & Thibault, 2008, 2009). Nevertheless, Bolton, Fleming & Elias (2008) have highlighted how partnership working in the public sector has moved from being a desirable strategy to a mode

of operation which is essential for the survival of the industry itself. Hence, it is important to establish models and strategies that are able to elicit effective partnership working practices.

In integrating extensive management, sport management and political science literature from North American and Europe, Parent and Harvey (2009) propose a management model for sport and physical activity community-based partnerships featuring a feedback loop comprising three core elements; antecedents, management and evaluation. This encompasses a number of management aspects including goals, leadership, communication, commitment and satisfaction which highlight the inherent complexity of partnership working. The model presents a structural overview of key partnership processes which involves a cyclic process of feedback and review. Firstly, partnership antecedents establish the foundations for partnership working and relate to the purpose, environment, nature of partner organizations including their motives, governance arrangements, and planning. Secondly, management relates to factors integral to the viability of the partnership including communication, decision making, leadership and commitment. Finally, evaluation concerns the type of evaluation processes adopted for example, summative, and measures of effectiveness for example, partner satisfaction.

Highlighting a continuous processes whereby management and evaluation feedback into the antecedents the model identifies a number of components considered as important for building, managing and evaluating sport and physical activity partnerships (Parent & Harvey, 2009). However, as the authors acknowledge, the model focuses on the basis rather than all-inclusive components (Parent & Harvey, 2009), and being derived from a review of literature requires further empirical testing. Usefully, the model is grounded within sport management



literature and provides critical insight into the complex reality partnership working. Underlining key aspects of the model devised by Parent and Harvey (2009), Lindsey (2009) makes a convincing case for the need to focus on the context in which collaboration takes place particularly factors at the local level which demonstrate that the concept of collaboration translates in different ways. In this respect, there is a need for the development of more critical focus on both the internal and external aspects of partnership working in order to establish what might help sport practitioners to better understand the realities of partnership working in practice.

### **Context and method**

Since there is a dearth of literature exploring partnerships between CSPs and NGBs this study aimed to compare the views of staff working within organisations directly involved in the delivery of sport policy in the UK in order to investigate effectiveness of partnerships between CSPs and NGBs. To address this aim, two research objectives were established: (1) to quantitatively assess what is important for effective partnership working; (2) to qualitatively investigate the experiences and perceptions of CDM and NGB officers in order to understand what is important for successful partnership working. A sequential mixed methods design (Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007) was implemented which is distinguished from other research by the integration of quantitative and qualitative components (O’Cathain, Murphy, & Nicholl, 2008) and have been promoted as useful research responses to increasing complexity in social problems (Greene & Caracelli, 1997). Following Bryman (2012), the principal reason for this particular research approach was that of “completeness”, that is, the use of two methods within a single piece of

research to provide a more sophisticated response to the research problem and a more comprehensive understanding of partnership participation between CDMs and NGBs. This approach rests within the compatibility thesis that embraces the potential of employing a variety of methods from across the epistemological spectrum for the purposes of addressing research questions more fully (Johnson et al., 2007; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). As such, deploying quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis methods facilitated a more “complete” understanding of partnership participation between CDMs and NGBs.

### ***Thematic model***

Based on a review of literature a thematic model (Figure 1) was developed in order to bring together diverse variables from sport partnership and health promotion settings that were conceptually relevant to the present context. The model provided a framework for assessing a number of interrelated partnership aspects including variables relating to partnership structure, member variables, and measures of effectiveness. Consistent with existing research in the sport and health contexts (*cf.* Babiak & Thibault, 2008; El Ansari & Phillips, 2004; Frisby et al., 2004; Parent and Harvey, 2009; Shaw & Allen, 2006), partnership variables including management, leadership, communication and decision making were posited as being essential to partnership viability. Management involves the implementation of partnership activities including decisions regarding planning and member coordination planning (6, Goodwin, Peck, & Freeman, 2006) and provides an essential structural characteristic to ensure stability (Rogers et al., 1993; Shaw & Allen, 2006). Leadership is important for encouraging partners to adopt and pursue a partnership’s mission (Roussos and Fawcett, 2000) and requires a range of

interpersonal and practical skills including communication in order to help guide the partnership towards its goals (Alexander, Comfort, Weiner, & Bogue, 2001; Butterfoss, Lachance, & Orians, 2006). The presence of potentially heterogeneous groups and organisations within partnerships underlines the importance of decision making which may contribute to a climate of inclusiveness and help establish shared goals (Foster-Fishman, Berkowitz, Lounsbury, Jacobson & Allen, 2001).

In contrast to structural partnership variables, member variables related to individual perceptions of involvement in the partnership including contributions, benefits, costs, and a sense of ownership. These aspects have been highlighted as important to participation in partnership (Chinman, Anderson, Abraham, Wandersman, & Goodman, 1996; El Ansari & Phillips, 2004). Partners with a sense of ownership are likely to place the work of the partnership over and above the concerns of individual partners (El Ansari & Phillips, 2001). Consistent with the social exchange perspective, participation in partnership may increase if benefits of participation can be maximised and costs minimised (Chinman & Wandersman, 1999), although it is likely that the relationship between benefits and costs is complex. El Ansari and Phillips (2004) found that even when members perceived that the costs were less or equal to the benefits the ratio between the two was rated as unfavourable or worse. Hence, the way in which partners weigh benefits and costs is likely to be unequal and subject to a number of internal and external partnership factors.

In the absence of definitive partnership outcomes, four measures of effectiveness conceptualised the intermediary outcomes that arose as a consequence of the interaction of partnership and member variables. Synergy concerned the combining of partners' skills and resources that enables organisations to achieve

more than might be possible when acting independently (Butterfoss & Kegler, 2002; Lasker, Weiss, & Millar, 2001). While synergy essentially represented the added value of partnership working, satisfaction and commitment represented partner perceptions concerning the quality of partnership activities and impacts. Research has also identified that management, leadership, communication and decision making influence partner satisfaction and commitment (El Ansari et al. 2008; Kegler et al. 1998; Rogers et al. 1993). Partners who perceive a high level of satisfaction and commitment will likely provide greater contributions to support the partnership's mission (El Ansari, Oskrochi, & Phillips, 2008). Further, the inclusion of partnership outcomes provided a means of assessing the product of partner activities with respect to the goals of the ECN, and of each organisation's agenda.

[Figure 1.]

### ***Participant sample***

Participants were included in the study based on the criterion that they were working in partnership to deliver CSP or NGB programmes. Thus, in order to investigate partnership working at the point of delivery senior staff (including CSP or NGB directors) were not included, the focus being on NGB delivery officers and Coaching Development Managers (or equivalent) working within a CSP as the critical link with NGB officers. In order to recruit as many NGB and CDM staff as possible the research was advertised via CSP and NGB networks and via a short presentation at the CSP Coaching Leads Conference (UK) which took place in May 2013, attended by approximately 100 CSP and NGB officers. Coaching Development Managers from all CSPs (n = 49) were invited to take part in the

research via the quantitative survey and qualitative interviews. For the quantitative survey a link to the online survey was emailed to all CDM or equivalent officers in CSPs. A snowballing strategy (Bowling, 2005) was implemented where each CDM contacted was asked to suggest a key NGB partner who had been central to the delivery of the ECN in their area. This yielded NGB informants who were then located and contacted (n = 32). Criteria for inclusion specified that respondents needed to be CSP staff, particularly Coaching Development Managers engaged with an NGB officer, or an NGB officer, particularly Development Managers, engaged with CSP staff to address shared aims and objectives in coaching development. Ethical compliance was ensured via a data collection protocol that made clear participation was entirely voluntary and that participants could withdraw at any point.

### ***Procedure for the quantitative component***

The quantitative component elicited responses from participants on a range of partnership variables in order to provide a means of comparing perceptions in respect of partnership working between CDMs and NGB officers. Quantitative data were collected via an online questionnaire from 36 respondents, the majority being CDMs (62.2%, n = 23). The self-reported questionnaire assessed participant perceptions on a range of partnership and member variables and measures of effectiveness. It was compiled by the modification of the Coalition Self-Assessment Survey (CSAS), a partnership assessment tool exploring partnership structure and processes (Kenney & Sofaer, 2001). Informed by the thematic model which was used to guide data collection and analysis, the selection of CSAS provided a practical means of operationalising diverse aspects of partnership working into a

single data collection tool. Also included were variables which had been validated in previous partnership research elsewhere but not previously deployed in the present context specifically, benefits and costs (El Ansari & Phillips, 2004; Lachance et al., 2006) (Table 2).

[Table 2 here.]

Employing the statistical package SPSS (v.20), summative mean scores and standard deviations were computed for each of the scales measuring partnership and member variables and measures of effectiveness for the whole sample (See Table 2) in order to provide a practical means of exploring the data. Cronbach's Alpha was calculated for the main scales deployed as an indicator of internal consistency. Whilst an alpha score greater than 0.7 is generally deemed sufficient for inclusion in statistical analyses (Granner & Sharpe, 2004), one scale (contributions) reached only 0.64. Data from this scale were included in analysis because it is possible that, although alpha scores may not be deemed acceptable, measures with low levels of alpha might still be useful in research (Schmitt, 1996). It is acknowledged that Cronbach's Alpha provides only an estimation of scale reliability and may not necessarily provide accurate information concerning measurement accuracy. While it does not provide an indication of validity, the alpha scores were calculated in spite of the small group sizes in order to make a tentative step towards developing the evidence base in the sport development context.

The sample of 39 participants were categorised into two groups representing NGBs and CDMs. Comparative analyses were subsequently undertaken on the key scales where Mann-Whitney U tests were computed to detect differences across the

two comparison groups. Benefits and costs items were assessed individually to investigate participant perceptions more fully. Although non-parametric tests may have less power than equivalent parametric tests (Field, 2013), non-parametric tests do not rely on precise assumptions about the distribution of the sample (Bryman & Cramer, 1994) and were deemed appropriate to the sample. This provided a practical means of appraising the nature of partners' involvement in CSP-NGB partnerships at an indicator level whereby we were able to deploy scales previously validated in partnership research. These concerned three distinct constructs relating to partnership variables, member variables, and effectiveness. Using this approach it was anticipated that hitherto unexplored relationships between various aspects of partnership working at an indicator level would be revealed including associations between partnership and member variables, and measures of effectiveness. Implicit in this was a recognition that previous partnership research had identified a number of relationships between partnership and member variables and participation in partnerships. Hence, the investigation in the present study expected to reveal a nuanced understanding of partnership working that would help inform future practice and research in sport development. Participants were able to respond anonymously to the questionnaire survey and also to discuss their experiences with the researchers within the qualitative component. An online data collection tool ensured all responses remained anonymous and were not traceable to participants.

### ***Procedure for the qualitative component***

The qualitative component sought to investigate the perceptions, experiences and attitudes of CSP and NGB officers and to determine the key facilitators and barriers to successful partnership working. Qualitative data were collected via single semi-

structured telephone interviews with consenting participants ( $n = 12$ , CDMs  $n = 6$ ; NGBs  $n = 6$ ) to investigate the perceptions and experiences of staff employed to develop and implement coaching development strategies at the local level. This allowed them to express in confidence their personal responses to questions concerning their overall opinion of the England Coaching Networks, the impact of partnership on coaching, key drivers and challenges to perceived partnership success, and improvements for the future. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and anonymised to ensure participant confidentiality and permission was sought at the beginning of the interview for direct quotations to be used in any reporting material. Participants were informed that they could withdraw from the research at any point. A full transcript of the interview was offered to each participant for verification and/or amendment as required (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007).

Inductive thematic analysis (Waltz, Strickland, & Lenz, 2010) was used to analyze the data which involved a series of coding “text units” (or sections of text), initially into general themes and then through a systematic review of these into more detailed themes and subthemes. Memos, or notes, were attributed to each text unit specifically to move from description to potential meaning in order to understand the participants’ perceptions as a whole and to provide a voice for their experiences and opinions within the text. Following this, a systematic review of themes from both NGB and CDM data was conducted independently by two research staff before being jointly reviewed to confirm or amend themes to ensure they represented the participants’ experiences as best as possible.

## **Results and Discussion**



Sport England has challenged CSPs to engender a greater level of depth and quality in their support of NGBs by focusing on eight coaching objectives aimed at building on previous successes of the Local Coaching Support System Networks (CSSN) and subsequent launch of the England Coaching Network (ECN). The ultimate aim of the ECN is for CSPs to provide support to NGBs in delivering a coaching workforce which will positively impact the NGBs' 16+ and England Talent Pathways. Of the three core components of the conceptual model, there was least divergence between partners for member variables ( $MD = 0.86$  to  $0.98$  across all four variables). There was most divergence between partner perceptions for measures of effectiveness ( $MD = 0.34$  to  $0.68$  across all four variables), suggesting partners were less in agreement concerning the effectiveness than other areas of the partnership. Overall, CDMs ( $M = 7.3$ ,  $SD = 1.30$ ) perceived greater influence in decision making processes than their NGB counterparts ( $M = 5.6$ ,  $SD = 1.72$ ). This was reflected in the finding that more than half (52.2%,  $n = 12$ ) of CDMs were “very comfortable” with decision making processes compared to NGBs (33.3%,  $n = 4$ ). A radar graph was established to depict perceptions relating partnership and member variables, and measures of effectiveness (see Figure 2). The radar arms represent the variables under investigation and the webs indicate the scores for CDMs and NGBs according to each scale. Scores closer to the periphery indicate more agreement with the variable in question with the exception of costs which were negatively phrased whereby a narrower radius indicates more disagreement. Statistically significant differences are marked on the corresponding variables and  $P$  values are indicated.

[Figure 2 here].

Figure 2 suggests both CDMs and NGBs agreed that management, leadership and communication in the partnership was largely effective although in respect of leadership CDMs were in more agreement than NGBs that there was a clear vision in the partnership ( $M = 4.04$  and  $3.33$  respectively), and that leadership fostered consensus on key decisions ( $M = 4.13$  and  $3.42$  respectively for the leadership item “There is consensus on key decisions”). Turning to the member variables, there was a statistically significant difference between CDMs and NGBs for contributions ( $M = 3.87$  and  $3.10$  respectively,  $p = .004$ ), perceptions being most dissimilar for the item in-kind resources such as publicity, printing, equipment, facilities ( $M = 3.87$  and  $2.92$  respectively). In relation to ownership, CDMs reported the highest ( $M = 3.73$ ) compared to NGBs ( $M = 3.43$ ), although the difference did not reach statistical significance.

CDMs and NGBs reported similar levels of satisfaction ( $M = 3.80$  and  $M = 3.45$  respectively) but there was a statistically significant difference between CDM and NGB groups for synergy ( $M = 3.95$  and  $3.34$  respectively,  $p = .046$ ), NGBs perceiving a lower level of partnership synergy across all items, particularly “implementing coaching development programmes that are most likely to work” ( $M = 3.09$  versus  $M = 4.09$ ). Similarly, we noted a statistically significant difference for commitment between CDMs and NGBs ( $M = 4.36$  and  $3.68$  respectively,  $p = .021$ ), with a notable difference for “I feel that I have a voice in what the partnership decides” ( $M = 4.39$  versus  $3.36$ ). It was clear that NGBs rated outcomes lower than CDMs ( $M = 38.9$  and  $3.20$  respectively,  $p = .042$ ). Interestingly, both CDMs and NGBs rated “an effective England Coaching Network (ECN) has been established” the lowest across all outcome items ( $M = 3.26$  and  $2.40$  respectively) suggesting

efforts to establish the system had some way to go. CDMs and NGBs also differed in their commitment ( $M = 4.36$  and  $3.68$  respectively,  $p = .021$ ) which suggested that CDMs were more committed to the partnership than their NGB counterparts.

### ***Perceived benefits and costs***

Figure 3 depicts CDM and NGB perceptions on the individual items for perceived benefits and costs which have been identified as useful for articulating the effects of participation (Butterfoss et al., 1993; Chinman & Wandersman, 1999; El Ansari & Phillips, 2004; Kegler et al., 1998; Lachance et al., 2006). Overall, perceptions for benefits were similar between the CDMs and NGBs. The benefit item with least divergence between CDMs and NGBs was ‘Increasing my professional skills and knowledge’ ( $MD = -0.07$ ), the benefit item with most divergence being ‘Improving coach development programmes’ ( $MD = 1.14$ ). CDMs and NGBs both perceived the costs to be low indicating a positive balance between benefits and costs. The cost item with least divergence between CDMs and NGBs was “My skills and time are not well used” ( $MD = -0.13$ ), the cost item with most divergence being “There isn't enough impact on my target audience” ( $MD = -1.04$ ). For benefits there was a statistically significant difference between CDM and NGB groups for “Improve coach development programmes” ( $M = 4.48$  and  $3.33$  respectively on a seven-point scale,  $p = .003$ ) and for ‘Getting funding’ ( $M = 2.87$  and  $3.92$  respectively,  $p = .016$ ). One costs item “lack of impact on target audience” showed a statistically significant difference ( $M = 1.96$  and  $3.00$  respectively,  $p = .023$ ).

[Figure 3 here].

### ***Common aims: The pursuit of excellence***

A single overarching theme emerged from the analysis of qualitative data entitled “Common aims: The pursuit of excellence”. This represented participants’ perceptions concerning what participation in partnership activities was fundamentally about and aspects considered important for successful partnership working. Table 3 outlines the overarching theme and interrelated sub themes and their properties which are now discussed.

[Table 3 here].

#### ***1.0 Facilitating workforce development***

The first qualitative theme emerging from the research concerned CDM perceptions of successful partnership working in respect of facilitating workforce (specifically, coach) development by way of Continuing Professional Development and broader training opportunities (i.e. NGB awards), thereby providing an infrastructure from which “better quality” and “more rounded” coaches could emerge; where individuals could identify and develop “their strengths”, and where coaches could work inside their “comfort zones” either as generalists or “skill specialists”. Such pursuits were clearly articulated by one CDM who succinctly summarised her own role as: “...support[ing] NGBs with [the] local delivery of coaching objectives, to increase the number of coaches and to increase the quality of coaches”.

Another respondent saw it as her primary responsibility to promote partnership working both within the context of NGBs and beyond:

*It's ... about increasing opportunities for CPD and development in coaches more broadly. This includes helping them to access and draw-down the necessary financial support to fund their qualifications and professional development ... We have to be incredibly flexible in our approach to make this work ... it is complex because of the vast array of different organisations that are putting on courses...*

### *1.1 Quality assurance*

Common amidst the occupational aims of CDMs was the development of “good quality” coaches and the prioritization of “quality assurance” measures over and above the need to simply increase the size of the coaching workforce. This resounded strongly with the modernisation of NGBs that has sought to address issues of poor governance and performance (DCMS / Strategy Unit, 2002) and suggested that aspects of continuing professional development, the facilitation of high quality processes and the need to engage with delivery partners feature large in the orbits of contemporary coaching. Indeed, one of the ways in which successful partnership working was defined was via the establishment of strong links between NGBs and local coaching associations which, in terms of formal and informal CPD opportunities, meant that workforce development could be tailored to “local needs” via a “bottom up approach”. This would appear to extend the argument that partnership in the sport context is a principally a coordinating device (Grix & Philpotts, 2011) that facilitates the delivery of coordinated and consistent sport development strategy. Central to this were adequate lines of communication between CDMs and regional officers to ensure the pulling together of resources and the sharing of goals and ideas. Communication represents one of a suite of

partnership management skills including planning, conflict resolution, decision making and monitoring that have been identified as critical to partnership working in sport-based contexts (Babiak, 2009; Babiak & Thibault, 2008; 2009; Frisby et al., 2004; Shaw & Allen, 2006). In the present study, communication also related to the dissemination of perceived good practice through shared initiatives. As one NGB respondent noted: “One thing we have learnt is that we can learn a lot from other coaches and other sports and share good practice”.

### *1.2 Communication*

Communication was essential for demonstrating that the CDM-NGB partnership was a valued and integral part of the work of for both CDMs and NGBs. The ability to communicate directly and informally was critical to effective communication, ensuring that issues were addressed in a timely and efficient manner:

*It makes a big difference being able to just chat or have a quick catch up rather than sending emails or trying to keep track using meetings. I can get instant answers to queries and it means we understand each other much better and can respond to things straight away.*

### *2.0 Engagement and consistency*

For CDMs, partnership demanded both an interest and a desire on the part of NGBs to develop collaborative relationships:

*When working with NGBs, we ideally need to know what their targets are including their various areas of work. They're often not aware of*

*the schemes that are available or that we can deliver workshops for them. The key is letting them know that you're going to do something to help them ... It's about us linking everything together and making it work ... It's about building relationships – doing what you say you will.*

CDMs acknowledged that recent events at the national level in relation to strategic change had the potential to facilitate an overall improvement in partnership arrangements but it was also clear that without significant “buy-in” from NGBs such arrangements would not achieve their potential. As such, it was perceived that the single strategic goal of the new ECN would help to make the system clearer and more effective, particularly if there was a national mandate in place for NGBs to work with CSPs to ensure consistency over time. This suggests that CDMs should look to ensure that coaching objectives are negotiated with NGBs in the sense that they provide a clear set of coaching development objectives with which to channel partnership activities.

### *2.1 Clarity of purpose*

While partnership approached between CDMs and NGBs is likely to be underpinned by concerns over access to resources, particularly for NGBs (Harris & Houlihan, 2011), the present study identified that clarity in respect of coaching development priorities between CSPs and NGBs helped to facilitate cooperation, thereby fostering greater levels of respect and trust:

*It's simple things like informal meetings, keeping away from too many formalities, targets, things like that. When people are comfortable and*

*relaxed about things it's much easier to develop a common understanding of each other.*

Highlighting the interrelatedness of the themes, communication was central to this understanding in terms of providing a mechanism through which partners could discuss issues and, more widely, in terms of 'tapping into' local networks of appropriate organisations to provide a means of supporting longer term organisational aims. The perceived failure by NGBs to consistently communicate the wider aims and objectives of local, regional and national coaching strategies between partners provided the greatest challenge to successful impacts:

*Partnerships need to appreciate that what seem to be clear objectives at the beginning of a project might not remain so half-way or two-thirds of the way through. Goals change as projects progress; all parties need to be ready to inform all of the other partners of these changes in priority.*

## *2.2 Flexibility*

The failure to communicate the wider aims and objectives consistently was compounded by a joint recognition by CDMs and NGBs that there needed to be a greater understanding by CDMs of the differing demands of large, established NGBs in comparison to smaller, emerging sport organisations. Also, sports which were not culturally embedded in the wider sporting landscape required different approaches to coach education than those that were more established. Hence, flexibility in terms of how smaller emerging sport organisations were supported at



the grass roots level was essential to minimise tensions between the delivery of national sport objectives at a local level for the larger more established NGBs.

While CDMs cited facilities and resources as principal challenges, complex workloads were perceived as particularly problematic by NGB representatives who often appeared to be pulled in different directions by a number of competing demands, thus struggling to find the time to engage meaningfully in partnership processes. Negotiating this latter challenge was often a case of demonstrating to NGB staff the longer term benefits of engagement over and above the initial investment of time and resources in NGB–CSP partnerships. Hence, it would appear that the pursuit of tightly defined objectives and the concomitant pressure to meet particular targets had the potential to hinder the wider benefits of partnership working which include improved understanding of community need and aspiration, enhanced legitimacy and greater influence in local initiatives by local stakeholders (Audit Commission, 1998; Department of the Environment, Transport & the Regions, 2001; Huxham & Vangen, 2005).

These pressures were evidenced by the perceptions of CDMs that NGBs could be resistant to the establishment of partnership working as a consequence of the amount of time that was associated with the process. Once again, this highlighted the importance of funding whereby there was a clear pressure to provide appropriate up-skilling opportunities for coaches whilst simultaneously attempting to meet a series of overarching targets and demands within the confined budgets of the respective home organisations. This meant that demand was not always met: “The main challenge remains the way in which we run our coaching courses, particularly in terms of where we should run them. There is a demand, but we can’t always put on a course where the demand is”.

## **Conclusion**

Partnership working is nothing new to either sporting or wider organisational contexts. However, while partnership approaches in other fields have been the subject of considerable scrutiny they remain relatively unexplored within the context of sport. Despite the centrality of CSPs and NGBs to contemporary sport policy in England there has been little academic discussion of the nature and extent of these collaborations. Hence, the present research aimed to investigate the effectiveness of partnerships between CSPs and NGBs by assessing the views of staff working within these organisations. In particular, it has been our aim within this paper to compare the views of CDMs and NGBs on a range of partnership variables and investigate in-depth the experiences and perceptions participants engaged in partnerships between CSPs and NGBs.

Organisationally, it was understood that both CSPs and NGBs were committed to developing high quality coaching through a range of formal and non-formal opportunities. However, the quantitative findings demonstrated differences in commitment between CDMs and NGB representatives in respect of their participation in the partnerships. Given that positive perceptions of commitment are related to participation (El Ansari & Phillips, 2004), securing the commitment of all partners is likely to be crucial to achieving the positive outcomes with which participants in this study were concerned. This is likely to be a key challenge for CSPs whereby coaching development objectives have been largely pre-determined. However, the ECN might also serve provide a useful basis for a structured approach to purposeful engagement given that this was perceived to provide an element of flexibility within the prescribed national sport strategy. Thus, developing activities

around the ECN objectives might help secure commitment by providing space for partnership arrangements to evolve on a ‘needs-led’ and localised basis and support aspects of engagement and clarity which were important to the notion of pursuing excellence. However, our findings suggest that CDM and NGB partners were not convinced that an effective ECN had yet been developed and that further work was required to achieve this by appointing key personnel to specific roles for example, Coach Development lead and support staff, to ensure further development and partner commitment.

Overall, the leadership and management of partnerships was considered to be of a high standard across the respondent cohort. High quality management and leadership are critical for coordinating relationships (Butterfoss et al., 1996; Mitchell & Shortell, 2000). In the present study, these aspects appeared to facilitate significant levels of enthusiasm amongst partnership staff and allowed a considerable degree of flexibility within the construction of partnerships themselves. Further, the conceptual relevance of communication to the pursuit of excellence was clear in that it provided a means of demonstrating that the partnership was a valued and integral part of the work of for both CDMs and NGBs. Good communication is a central management skill in partnership settings (Alexander et al., 2008) particularly when informal and varied communication strategies are employed. Thus, ensuring that communication is clear and in keeping with partner preferences concerning style and frequency is likely to provide the foundation for the generation of trust and respect between partner agencies and help sustain the viability of CDM-NGB relationships.

CDMs and NGBs clearly differed in terms of their perceived contributions, synergy, and outcomes suggesting that CDMs and NGBs may perceive a sense of

inequity within the context of partnership-working. For example, while CDMs and NGBs did not differ significantly on benefits and cost items overall there were a number of areas including getting funding and lack of impact that militated against partnership effectiveness. While the small group sizes and potential for selection bias prevent any conclusive inferences to be made with respect to the quantitative data and comparisons thereof, based on the findings of the present study it is possible to suggest that strategies that focus on maximising the benefits of participation, as suggested by El Ansari and Phillips (2004), might provide a useful means of promoting participation in lieu of any discernible short term impacts. This is particularly important given that partnerships in the English sport context potentially resemble “enforced” partnerships which Grix (2010: p166) suggests are characterised by unequal, and asymmetric, power relations. As such, there is the potential for organisations to focus only on a narrow set of objectives which fail to encourage partnership working, the sharing of information and best practice. It is likely in the present context that, at times, partner agencies will continue to need persuading of the value of partnership and may be unwilling to invest in such relationships as a consequence of the perceived burdens of collaborative working. Hence, effective leadership and the ability to promote joined up action in support of clear and convincing objectives via the ECN may help to alleviate the challenges posed funding limitations and frequent turbulence within the UK sport development sector.

The findings in this study demonstrated that CSPs and NGBs were committed to developing high quality coaching through a range of formal and non-formal opportunities. While the small sample size is a limitation, it was clear from the data that the ECN appeared to function well as a flexible rather than a

prescriptive template for CDM-NGB interaction. The pursuit of excellence was a theme which characterised the perceptions of CDMs and NGBs and leadership and management of the partnerships were considered to be of high quality and essential to the success of the partnerships. While good communication, clarity of purpose and flexibility were important ingredients of partnership effectiveness it is likely that CDMs need to emphasise the benefits of partnership working to NGBs in order to build commitment and ownership and to counter the potential negative aspects of participation. The ECN provides a useful platform on which to establish partnership activities that support this approach and might help increase the sustainability of the partnerships, particularly during times when partners may be hesitant about contributing resources given a lack of funds and the short-term nature of sport development decisions in the UK.

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Figure 1: Thematic model

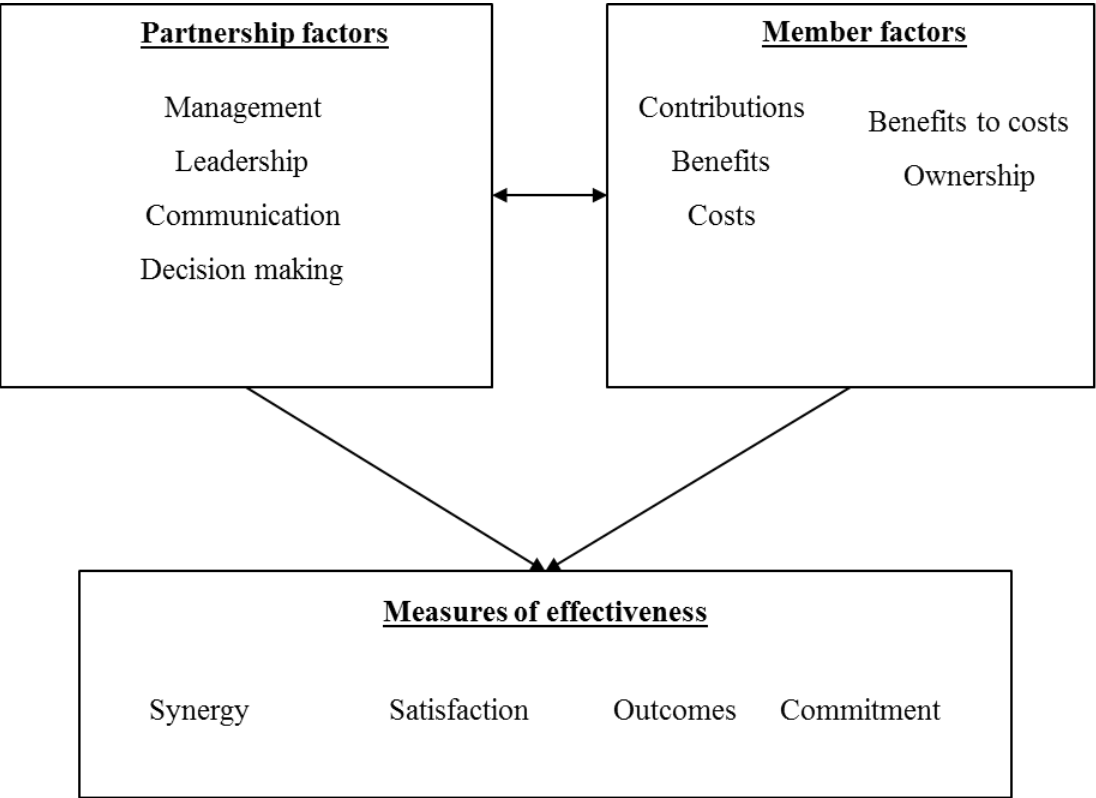
Figure 2: Description and comparison of main variables in the study

Figure 3: Benefits and costs of participationTable 1: ECN coaching objectives

Table 2: Description of variables

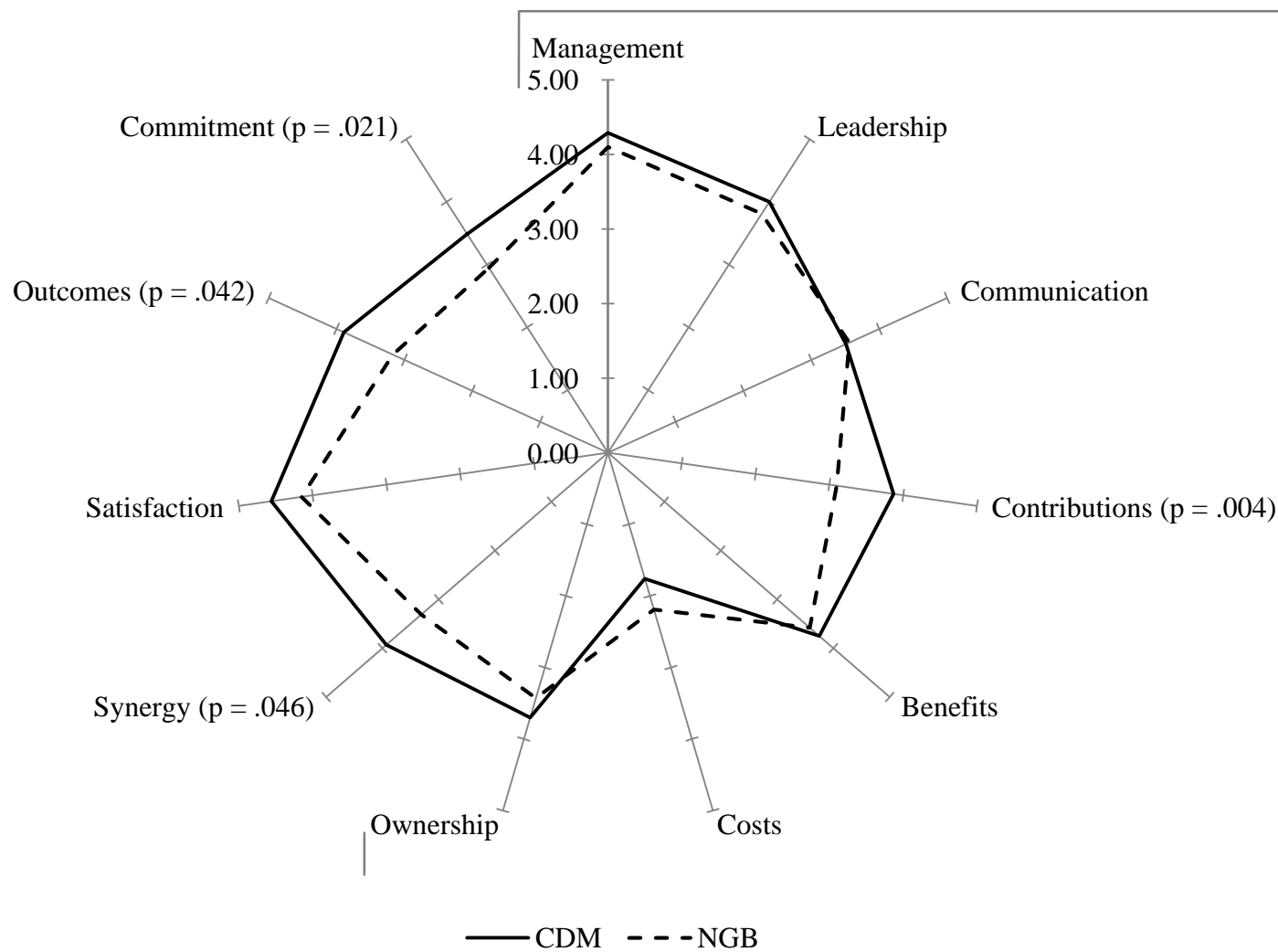
Table 3: Qualitative themes

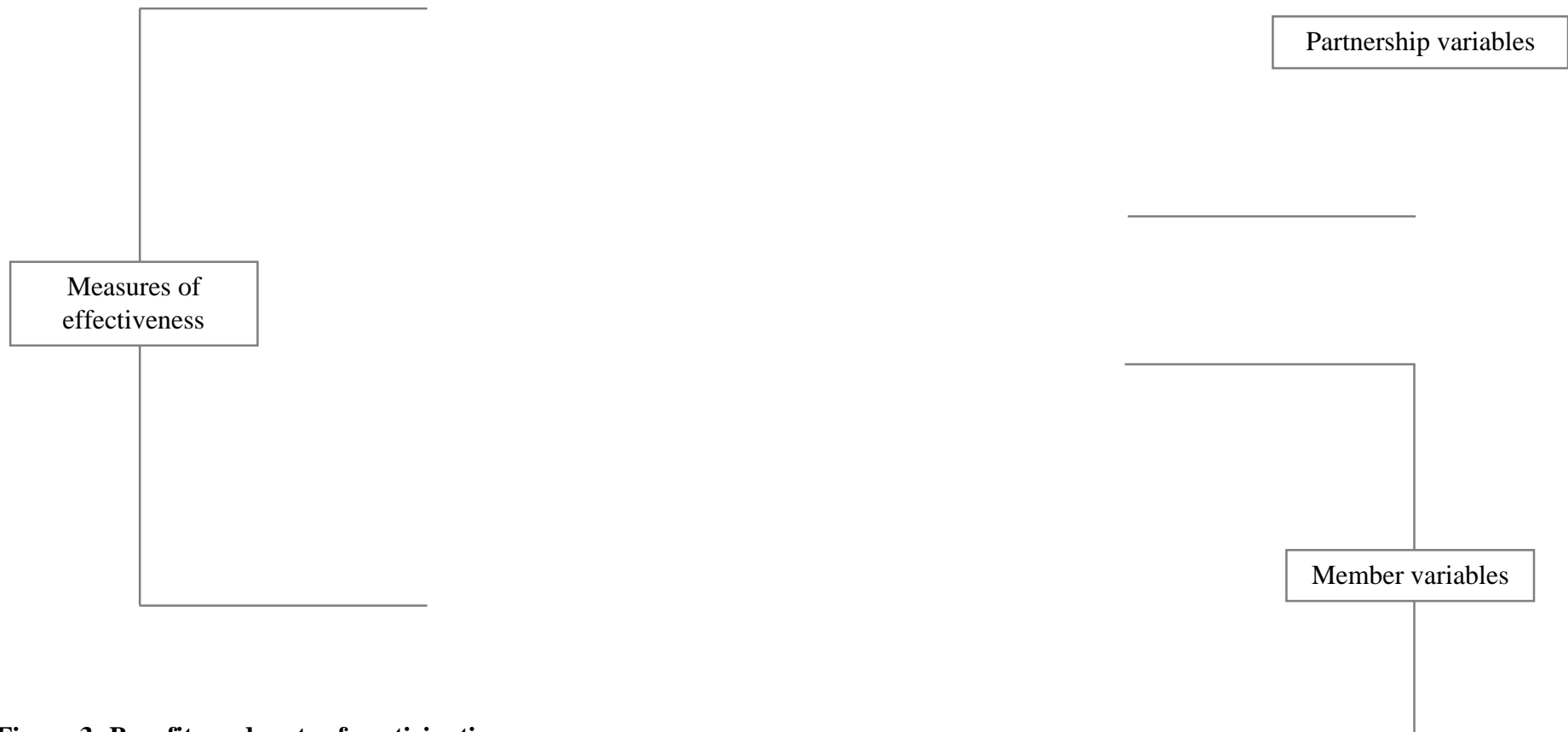
**Figure 1: Thematic model**



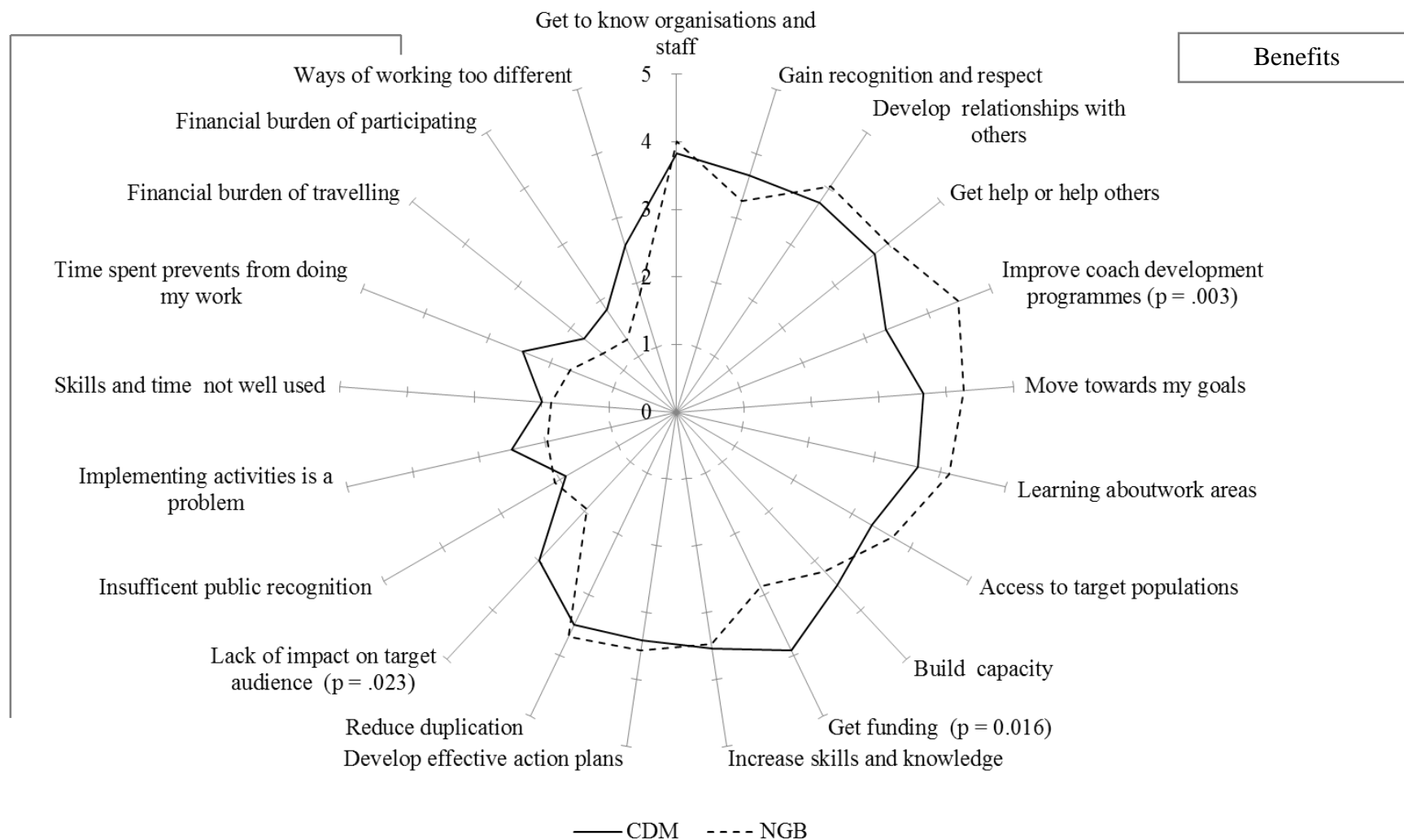


**Figure 2: Comparison of CDM and NGB perceptions**





**Figure 3: Benefits and costs of participation**



Costs



**Table 1: ECN coaching objectives**

N	Description
1	Support an increase in the number of qualified coaches within 49 CSPs, based on the workforce development needs of a NGB
2	Develop a local solution by which coaching data can be managed and coaches can be tracked to provide local intelligence reports fed back into NGBs or Sport England
3	Increase the number of NGB active coaches accessing needs-led continuous “professional” development opportunities
4	Facilitate the establishment of a support network for coaches within 49 CSPs to provide a community of learning
5	Identify and promote funding schemes/grants that will aid local coaches in obtaining CPD opportunities at a reduced cost
6	Create a pathway from the leaders programme into entry level coaching opportunities and CPD
7	Support coaches seeking to increase their coaching hours by promoting the availability of local coaching opportunities within 49 CSP area
8	Provide employment and deployment guidance to coaching providers operating within the CSP

**Table 2: Description and comparison of main variables in the study**

Variable	Description	Alpha	N items	Mean (SD)		P Value
				CDM	NGB	
<i>Partnership variables</i>						
Management <sup>a</sup>	The effectiveness of management capabilities at meetings. Items explored practical issues such as timekeeping and whether members perceived there to be a friendly and cooperative environment.	0.93	17	4.04 (0.49)	3.86 (0.75)	.375
Leadership <sup>a</sup>	Assessed both the effectiveness of leadership skills for example, resolving conflict and adopting inclusive leadership approaches.	0.87	13	4.02 (0.50)	3.81 (0.74)	.403
Communication <sup>a</sup>	Participants rated both the level and quality of communication in the partnership including whether communication was sufficient and the	0.87	9	3.53 (0.58)	3.61 (0.89)	.728

degree to which partners felt comfortable with communication processes.

Decision making	One item assessed the perceived extent to which participants were comfortable with decision making processes. Categorical responses included: 0 = don't know, 1 = Not at all; 2 = Somewhat comfortable; 3 = Very comfortable.	-	-	-	-	-
	A second item assessed perceived influence in decision making on a scale of 0 to 10, 10 indicating a lot of influence.	-		7.30 (1.30)	5.58 (1.72)	.065

*Member variables*

Contributions <sup>a</sup>	Assessed the quality of members' input. Items included the degree to which resources, such as staff time, had been committed to the partnership in addition to in-kind resources, such as publicity and equipment.	0.64	4	3.87 (0.58)	3.10 (0.86)	.004
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Benefits <sup>a</sup>	The relative advantages that had arisen as a consequence of participating in the partnership including social benefits, such as recognition and respect, and material benefits, such as access to funding and planning processes.	0.89	13	3.75 (0.54)	3.61 (0.98)	.741
Costs <sup>a</sup>	The extent of costs or disadvantages that arose as a consequence of participation including the extent to which members did not feel their efforts were being recognised and financial difficulties associated with partnership activities.	0.86	8	1.76 (0.72)	2.27 (0.94)	.129
Benefits to costs	The perceived ratio between benefits and costs. Five categorical responses included; 1 = there are many more difficulties than benefits; 2 = there a few more difficulties than benefits; 3 = the difficulties and benefits are about the same; 4 = there are a few more benefits than difficulties, 5 = there are many more benefits than difficulties.	-	-	-	-	-

Ownership <sup>a</sup>	The degree to which members felt connected with the partnership including the degree to which partners felt a sense of pride.	0.88	4	3.73 (1.14)	3.43 (0.98)	.300
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*Measures of effectiveness*

Synergy <sup>a</sup>	This was conceptualised as success through working together. Items included how well partners were able to achieve successes through working together e.g. creating innovative responses and responding to community needs.	0.93	9	3.95 (0.55)	3.34 (0.85)	.042
Satisfaction <sup>a</sup>	Assessed the satisfaction with the partnership including its accomplishments and the degree to which it was perceived as worthwhile.	0.88	6	3.80 (0.69)	3.45 (0.97)	.223
Outcomes <sup>a</sup>	The perceived outcomes of partnership activities including if the partnership had been responsible for programmes that would not otherwise have occurred, and the creation of an effective England Coaching Network.	0.87	11	3.73 (1.14)	3.20 (0.96)	.042

Commitment <sup>a</sup>	The degree to which partners felt a degree of responsibility or duty towards the partnership.	0.90	4	4.36 (0.77)	3.68 (0.87)	.021
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Notes: <sup>a</sup> Items rated on a 5-point scale: higher scores i.e. 5 indicated more agreement.

**Table 3: Qualitative themes**

Main theme	Sub themes	Properties
Common aims:  The pursuit of excellence	1.0 Facilitating workforce development	1.1 Quality assurance
		1.2 Communication
	2.0 Engagement and consistency	2.1 Clarity of purpose
		2.2 Flexibility