Challenges and Opportunities for Community Sport Coach Development

An appreciative inquiry project

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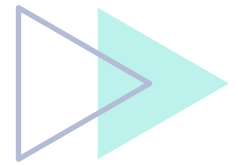
UK Coaching Leeds

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Executive Summary

Community coaches form the lifeblood of community sport provision working with a broad range of participants to achieve outcomes in traditional formalised sport, physical activity, sport for health, and sport for development settings. Yet, research suggests community coaches can feel isolated, undervalued, and disconnected from support (Cronin et al., 2023; UK Coaching 2022). They can feel overwhelmed by the tasks involved in coaching community sport including practical sport delivery in public settings and 'hidden' work such as planning, organising and orchestrating individuals (Carroll, 2023; Cronin, et al., 2023; Sport Wales, 2022). It is apparent that community coaches would benefit from support. Personalised support is likely to come through key personnel in coaches' own settings (i.e., localised) (Cronin, et al., 2023; Sport Wales, 2022; UK Coaching, 2022). However, little is known about how community coaches and local coach developers might be supported. Therefore, UK Coaching commissioned Northumbria University and Liverpool John Moores University to use appreciative inquiry-framed workshops to further our understanding of community sport coaches' and coach developers' everyday challenges and pilot a process of support for them.
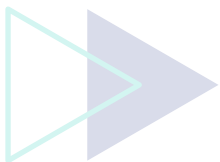
Method

A multi-cycle action research approach was adopted involving participants (N=58; coaches = 32; coach developers = 26) in a series of pilot appreciative inquiry (AI) framed workshops (N=27). Appreciative inquiry (AI) reflects a strengths-based approach that, counter to deficit (i.e. 'problem to fix') perspectives, encourages people to value (appreciate) what works well and envision what it would be like if this occurred more frequently. AI seeks to stimulate conversations that matter to those involved, (i.e., community sport coaches and coach developers) and generate positive actions. Through the workshops participants were collaborators in the research exploring and improving their practice through cycles of clarifying, appreciating, envisioning, co-constructing, and innovating. Data were collected through the workshops, researcher fieldnotes (N=27) and researcher review meetings (N=5). Analysis across these data generated insights into participants' experiences of coaching and coach developing in community sport including challenges they face, actions to enhance practice, and reflections on the AI-framed workshops as a tool for community coach development.

Key findings

The findings provide insights into the lived experiences of community coaches and community coach developers as well as the AI process used to support them. In the full report, we provide two tables of challenges, six narratives, along with nine themes and theoretical analysis to further illustrate and explore these findings.

Lived experiences of community coaches

The community coaches we encountered in the project are committed individuals who provide participation in a range of activities. These clubs are valuable community assets providing positive physical, social and emotional opportunities for individuals and the coaches themselves. During this valuable community work, coaches face a wide range of challenges both 'on and off the field' which contribute to feeling under prepared for the realities of coaching. These challenges include tensions in the community sport context (e.g., participation v performance, complexity of inclusion), the dynamic environment (e.g., weather or seasonality of the sport season), and can also include navigating the micro-politics of community clubs (e.g., agenda of powerful stakeholders). Coaches' biographies affect knowledge and skills (e.g., technical knowledge developed as a former player; organisational skills developed as willing parent or teacher) and their knowledge requirements. Here coach learning should be considered over time and across coaches' lives. This includes the time before coaches began their role, learning on formal coach education courses, but also the ongoing ad-hoc informal coach development that may occur during coach development workshops, between coaching sessions, and across seasons.

Lived experiences of community coach developers

Coach developers in our project were often club members who sought to enjoy their own sport, who also invested volunteer time in helping others to also have positive experience. Many of those individuals who support and assist coaches in community sport settings did not necessarily recognise the title 'coach developer'. In part, this is because coach developers fulfil a wide array of critical functions for clubs (e.g., club member, committee members, coaches themselves). Whilst linked to coaching, many functions are not directly aimed at improving coaches' performance instead may focus on general support and care for coaches or club development and administration (e.g., booking facilities). Here the forms and functions of coach development involve additional labour for already busy individuals. Thus, coach development typically occurs ad-hoc when other roles and tasks are fulfilled or when there is an explicit need/incident. When coach development does occur, its essence is rooted in a caring relational practice. It can manifest in varied ways (e.g., supporting coaches access to courses, mentoring, emotional support), and we received reports of coaches benefitting from the care provided by coach developers. Critically, much of the coach developers' action was not strategic nor informed by an explicit coach development framework but was rooted in their own coaching knowledge or experience. Tensions within clubs (e.g., agendas of powerful stakeholder including committees and coaches), often the result of a lack of understanding, appreciation, or clear guidance about coach development, can negatively affect the work and well-being of coach developers. These may be areas for further support to help these benevolent volunteers who support others in clubs.

Appreciative Inquiry is a promising process for in situ support of coaches and coach developers

The AI-framed workshops provided an impetus for coaches and coach developers to connect to share and discuss coaching. This time was valued as a form of coach repair and as a means of rekindling coaches' 'spark'. Such benefits may be achieved by simply bringing coaches together. However, through skilful facilitation and guided by the principles of appreciative inquiry, coaches and coach developers were supported to recognise strengths in each other and their clubs, envision and clarify the future, and formulate concrete realistic actions they could implement to develop coaches in their clubs (e.g., establishing a coaching forum, undertaking conscious attempts to change coach behaviour such as timing of feedback, planning a season long programme of CPD). These interactions led to some positive feelings amongst coaches and coach developers (e.g., feeling connected, rejuvenated motivation, sense of achievement when actions were complete). The impact was not uniform across all groups (e.g., smaller groups engaged better than larger groups, coaches and single sport groups engaged better than mixed groups and coach developer groups). AI also required facilitators to have an understanding of the principles, be flexible with time and skilfully navigate deficit thinking (e.g., less relevant focus on national issue and powerful voices in the workshops). Thus, the AI approach and workshop format provides a promising mechanism through which community sport coaches and coach developers can be supported, and future work should consider the potential of AI to provide situated democratic and positive change on a wider basis, beyond this pilot.

Recommendations

Based on the findings we recognise that coach learning and coach development can happen well in situ. **We recommend it is likely to be best supported with scaffolds, such as**:

1 Formally scheduled opportunities (time and space) for people to come together in their clubs, within their seasons, to reconnect, repair, rekindle and learn. This would recognise coaches as participants in clubs too and formally allocate time to their development. Organisations such as national governing bodies, leagues, tournament providers and clubs could consider how to implement this in 'naturally' occurring moments.

2 An evidence-based learning package(s) relevant to community sport clubs, coach developers, and coaches, that provides:

    a) Examples of club-wide coach development strategies or frameworks to support the place and practice of coach development within wider club strategies.

    b) Summaries of coach development methods, (e.g., AI, mentoring, think aloud), that may aid coach developers to support coaches in community contexts.

    c) Illustrative case studies of how these methods can be deployed by coach developers in community clubs to aid their everyday processes (e.g., recruiting parent/performer-coaches, inducting new coaches, supporting coaches with changing challenges across seasons).

    d) An awareness of power and micro-political contexts in community sport clubs.

    e) A recognition of individuals' capacity to act as agents of change (e.g., inclusion, diversity)

    f) The development of knowledge and skills to positively influence others (e.g., negotiation) in these contexts (e.g., supporting others to learn).

These learning packages may be provided through formal, non-formal or informal opportunities.

To further understand coach development and coach learning in the community context we recommend research:

3 Reviews and synthesises the evidence base on coach development in UK community sport clubs.

4 Provides empirical case study research that explores coach development within the context of community club development and in relation to sport management frameworks frameworks (e.g., club development).

5 Explores the effectiveness of AI when delivered in different contexts (e.g., new clubs) with local club coach developers as facilitators.

For clubs considering AI as a means of supporting coaches, at this stage we recommend:

6 Principle based training (i.e., AI is in situ, strengths based, involves facilitation with people) is provided for those who intend to deliver appreciative inquiry-framed workshops. Organisations such as UK Coaching, national governing bodies of sport, leagues, tournament providers and clubs could consider how to implement this.

7 Carefully deployed external support for coach developers intending to utilise AI (e.g., advice on AI workshops, co-delivering the first three AI workshops, mentoring coach developers across an AI season).

Background

Community coaches form the lifeblood of community sport provision working with a broad range of participants to achieve outcomes in traditional formalised sport, physical activity, sport for health, and sport for development settings. Yet, research suggests community coaches can feel isolated, undervalued, and disconnected from support (Cronin & Armour, 2015; Cronin et al., 2018; Sport Wales, 2022; UK Coaching 2022). They can feel overwhelmed by the tasks involved in coaching community sport including practical sport delivery in public settings and 'hidden' work such as planning, organising and orchestrating individuals (Carroll, 2023; Cronin & Armour, 2015; Potrac, Nelson, & O'Gorman, 2016; Cronin, et al., 2023; Sport Wales, 2022). This leads to high turnover in these roles (Ives et al. 2021; Sport Wales, 2022) and challenges with mental health (Carroll, 2023). It is apparent that community coaches would benefit from support.

Support for coaches is unlikely to come solely from formalised coach education courses that are typically highly structured with predetermined uniform curriculum (Dempsey, Cope, Richardson, Littlewood, & Cronin, 2021). Rather, personalised support is likely to come through key personnel in coaches' own settings (i.e., localised) (Cronin, et al., 2023; Sport Wales, 2022; UK Coaching, 2022). Indeed, in a recent report for UK Coaching, coaches expressed the need for relationships with "a carer who understands the coach's needs, and who seeks to support" (Cronin, et al., 2023). It is apparent that coaches would like someone to talk to, feel valued,

observe other coaches, and also support with planning and adapting sessions (i.e., content, management and delivery). Consideration should also be given to support needs based on coaches' specific biographies and circumstances such as being a parent-coach or living with mental health concerns (Carroll, 2023). Furthermore, the support should be on the coaches' terms i.e., in their context, and available when they need it (Sport Wales, 2022). Examples could include resources, discussions, observations, co-coaching to assist with planning which supports coaches' ability to cope with the complex, dynamic nature of coaching, facilitating coaches' confidence and competence in what they are delivering. In addition, the use of in person and online spaces to bring coaches together to share experiences, resources, and feel connected (Carroll, 2023).

Those that provide support for coaches are described by a range of terms (e.g., coach developer, mentor, workforce manager, head of coaching) (UK Coaching, 2022). For the purposes of this project, we adopted the term coach developer (CD) to encompass any person that supports community coaches' personal, professional, and coaching development. Little is known about those who are supporting coaches in community sport, what support they provide and need, who decides what support is provided or how it is provided. Therefore, this research and pilot programme were timely, and provided valuable insight into how to better support community coaches and coach developers.

Purpose

To explore how community coaches and local coach developers might be supported and feel connected. There was a specific focus on:

a) **Community coaches**
  • Understanding the lived experiences of community coaches including challenges.
  • Exploring how community coaches would utilise a coach developer.
b) **Coach developers**
  • Understanding coach developers' lived experiences working with community coaches.
  • Exploring how best to support local coach developers.

Methods

In this section we provide a brief overview of the methods adopted for this study. More detail is provided in Appendix 1.

Research design

A multidisciplinary multi-cycle action research approach was adopted for this project. This approach was ideal to understand the lived experiences of coaches and coach developers in community sport as well as pilot a programme of appreciative inquiry (AI) framed workshops. AI emphasises positive collaboration between researchers and practitioners as a means of appreciating existing strengths, previous successes, and opportunities for innovative practice.

Participants

A total of 58 participants (coaches = 32; coach developers = 26) engaged in the project. They formed 12 groups (6 community coaching groups – coaches + local coach developer from one club; 6 coach developer groups – mixed across sports/clubs). We sought diversity across the participants with regards to sport, demographic characteristics including gender, age of coached participants (e.g., child/adult), rural/urban, socio-economic background, ethnicity, disability, and UK geography.

Procedure

Each group was invited to engage in 3 workshops framed by Appreciative Inquiry (AI). AI is a strengths-based approach that, counter to deficit and 'problem to fix' perspectives, encourages people to value (appreciate) what works well and envision what it would be like if this occurred more frequently (Cooperrider, & Whitney, 2001; Cooperrider, et al., 2008; Enright, et al., 2014). AI seeks to stimulate conversations that matter to those involved, (i.e., community sport coaches and coach developers) and generate positive actions (Cooperrider, & Whitney, 2001). Through the workshops participants were collaborators in the research exploring and improving their experiences through cycles of clarifying, appreciating, envisioning, co-constructing, and innovating. Where practical, the first workshop for the coaches were conducted in person at a location convenient for the group. All coach developer workshops were conducted online via MS Teams platform. A total of 27 workshops were delivered (16 coach workshops and 11 coach developer workshops). Workshops lasted 60-120 minutes. Through the workshops, we supported participants to shape their activities during the pilot programme whilst also gathering in-depth and situated insights into their experiences.

Data collection methods

The action research and AI approach to workshops meant that they also served as focus groups for data gathering. Participants were collaborators in the process, exploring and seeking to improve their practice through cycles of clarifying, appreciating, envisioning, co-constructing, and innovating. These data provided insights into participants' experiences in community sport, coach support/development activity, and outcomes as a result of the workshops. Researchers' experiences delivering the workshops and their interpretations about coach learning and support were captured, shared and discussed through fieldnotes and review meetings.

Analysis approach

To make sense of the data, the research team completed a thematic analysis and produced six pedagogical case studies which present narrative stories (creative non-fiction) that ethically and evocatively share the lived experiences of participants. To provide in-depth insights, the data were analysed from a range of theoretical perspectives, generating nine themes that captured the experiences of community sport coaches and coach developers as well as the AI-workshop process.

Findings

The findings are presented in the following sections. They are presented in three forms. First, descriptive summary tables of the challenges coaches and coach developers face are presented. Second, six pedagogical case studies sharing creative non-fiction narratives of participants' experiences are presented. These provide layered and contextual accounts of coaches' experiences, coach developers' experiences, and the potential of AI to support coaches. Finally, nine themes along with multi-disciplinary theoretical interpretations capturing the lived experiences of participants and the AI-workshop process are provided. Together, these findings illustrate rich insights into community sport coaching and coach development.

Findings Part 1:
Challenges of Community Sport Coaches and Coach Developers

Coaches

The coaches in community sports clubs faced an array of challenges (see Table 1). Although important, only a proportion of these challenges were related to 'on the field' coaching. Many other challenges related to interactions with and actions of other stakeholders such as the athletes, parents, and club leaders. Limited understanding of the complexity of coaching, particularly when first getting involved in coaching and the club exacerbated many of the challenges.

Coach developers

It was clear that coach developers fulfilled a wide array of functions within their clubs and this came with diverse challenges. These are summarised in Table 2. Of particular concern and frustration was negotiating club micro-politics and a lack of guidance on how to progress coach development within their club. Some coach developers felt on their own, possibly the 'lone ranger' in the club supporting coaches and driving coach development agendas. The narratives and themes provide further insights into the challenges coach developers faced in their community sports clubs.

Table 1. Challenges reported by community sport coaches

Category	Example Challenge
Practice-related	Limited coaching knowledges (what and how to coach): • Sport-specific technical/tactical • 'How to coach methods' • Differentiation for range of participants' abilities • Variation in activities • Managing fluctuating numbers of participants • Maximising use of session time
	Creating a positive coaching environment for every participant: • Task-focused cf. outcome/winning focused • Based on participants' needs • Inclusive practice
	Desire for some structure (e.g., curriculum) but not feeling constrained by it.
	Differing coaching views/approaches amongst coaches can result in inconsistent messaging, approaches and priorities within groups and across the club.
	Competing personal priorities (e.g., coaching, work, family)
Management-related	Administration and organisation tasks (e.g., rosters, equipment, facilities, safeguarding procedures, kit, transportation, schedules, trips)
	Communication processes (e.g., effective use of WhatsApp, social media within groups)
Parent-related	Challenging parent behaviour: • Questioning/contradicting coaches' actions/decisions • Focused only on their child at expense of others/the team • Not listening to coach
	Achieving productive involvement from parents (e.g., engaged, informed, and supportive)
	Understanding parents' perspectives (e.g., backgrounds, circumstances)
Gaps in knowledge and education	Feeling under prepared for the complexity of coaching (e.g., parent to helper to coach)
	Perceive coach education provides insufficient preparation for realities of coaching
	Own development is desired, but not always made a priority
Participant-related	Participants' confidence. How to build / maintain participants' confidence (e.g., as a result of game outcomes or changes as they progress in the sport)
	Keeping participants' safe. Understanding and adhering to safeguarding principles
	Participants' motives. How to understand and cater for participants' motives
	'Whole person'. How to understand and coach the 'whole' person cf. the sportsperson
	Managing expectations. How to manage participation expectations of all participants.
Club development	Vision and framework • Lack of and/or inconsistencies in club direction/purpose. • How to get everyone on the 'same page'
	Financial • How to create affordable opportunities for catchment area
	Inclusive club • How to create a welcoming, inspiring club environment with opportunities for all
	Participant recruitment • How to develop club links with schools/universities. • How to increase diversity in membership

Table 2. Challenges reported by coach supporters/developers

Category	Challenge
Practice-related	Focusing coaches on development of their coaching: • Minimise burden of 'other' tasks (e.g., administration, organisation) • Move past solving immediate issues/problems • Avoid reproduction of 'outdated' coaching practices • Requires coaches' time and effort which as volunteers may be limited • Need to encourage and instil the value of practicing coaching
	Creating space and opportunities to work with coaches: • Fostering a supportive in situ community of coaches • Orchestrating informal development opportunities (e.g., use of existing activities) • Situated development (e.g., opportunities to observe, feedback, discuss practice)
	Developing coaches' awareness, knowledge, skills: • Self and practice, development needs, interpersonal skills, confidence • Openness to change/development
Wider roles	Recruitment and retention • How to encourage/support transition from participant/parent to coach • How to support coaches to continue to coach
	Getting coaches qualified • Ways to support the cost and process of formal coach education • Ensure the club gets a 'return' on 'investment'
Club-related	Club vision/model/framework for coach development: • Lack of guidance for a club 'system' or structure focused on coach development • Limited understanding of coach development, its value and resistance to change • CDs may have limited power and support to instigate club-wide changes • Limited sharing across clubs (e.g., coach development opportunities/activities) • CDs' esteem amongst coaches may be influential positively or negatively
	Gaps in knowledge of club membership • Who are members and what do they want from coaches? • Who are the coaches, who is qualified, who wants to get involved?
	Insufficient coaches to 'service' growth in membership • Where do these additional coaches come from? • How are they supported to develop? And by whom?
Training and development	Differentiating between coaching and the support/development of coaches: • Coach development is seen as an extension of coaching • Limited prioritising of CDs' own development
	Little training and support specifically for community sport coach development: • Limited NGB offerings • Valued skills not developed in training (e.g., interpersonal knowledge and skills) • Limited opportunities for development beyond the club (e.g., symposia) • Few in situ development opportunities (e.g., sharing practice and supporting)
Coach developer	CDs are a limited resource for coach development: • Volunteers with responsibilities outside the club (e.g., work, family) • May have multiple roles within the club • Tensions within clubs can lead to frustrations, feeling disempowered, conflict • Prioritising how their time is 'used' for coach development • May not prioritise self (e.g., enjoyment of participating and engaging with others)

Findings Part 2:
Narratives of Community Coach Development

The analysis of the data and themes generated were used to develop 6 pedagogical case studies. These creative non-fiction narratives share the lived experiences of participants. Each narrative is comprised of data from across the project and represents a collective experience rather than a single participant, club or context. This composite approach ensures confidentiality for participants, whilst enabling insights to be situated in realistic contexts and events (Armour & Chen, 2012; Smith & Sparkes, 2009; Potts, Didymus, & Kaiseler, 2022). The narratives, therefore, provide an ethical, evidence-based and relevant resource that coaches, coach developers, club committees, and governing bodies could utilise to enhance community coach development. To aid this, the narratives adopt the voice of the coach (Narrative 1 & 2), coach developer (Narrative 3 & 4), and workshop facilitator (Narrative 5 & 6) and prompt consideration of challenges, positive techniques, and operational steps that can support coaches and coach developers working in community sport clubs.

Narrative 1:
When it rains it pours

The following story follows a coach in her club coaching.

The story illustrates:
1. The challenges volunteer coaches face
   e.g., gaps in technical and tactical sport knowledge, development opportunities.
2. Balancing roles and managing expectations and needs
   e.g., logistics, parents, players, self.
3. Challenges of volunteer coach developers e.g., capacity.

Scene 1

"Another one down! Pass me those domes before these floodlights go out". Rebecca packed away her 5 footballs and 20 yellow cones, as joey walked over wiping the water from the 4 dome cones. Rebecca and Joey had coached the U12s for 2 years now, but this season was different, a bigger challenge. **"I can't believe I forgot the other bag of footballs, Joey. My mind has been lost trying to plan this session, I've been at it all day"**. **"Hey, I thought it was OK"** Joey reluctantly replied. Joey was Rebecca's assistant coach, but he had played football for years. He knew the game! **"Why don't I do the session next week, I haven't had a turn for a while. Perhaps you can have a turn watching"** Joey added. **"Yeah, let's do that"**. Rebecca replied, but her intrusive thoughts took over. *'Yeah, and you'll make it look really easy. I haven't not wanted you to help you just never offered. I just need some help. Surely there's another course or something I can do. Like, what do real coaches do to get better. I need some new sessions.'* **"And can you send me your session plan too please, I'd like to have a look at how you plan"**.

Scene 2
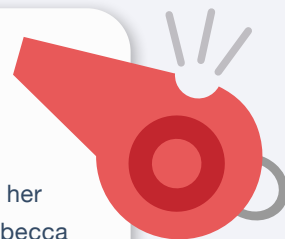
Three blows on the whistle. That's full time. Rebecca and Joey trudge across another wet, muddy pitch to congratulate the opposition, whilst out the corner of her eye saw her players parents point over with frustration. **"Your number 7 was fantastic today"** Rebecca commented. **"His first touch was unbelievable, he kept dribbling past our boys like they weren't there"**. *R*ebecca received a nod of approval from the opposition coaches and rushed to the players to keep their heads up. Some fifteen-minutes later Rebecca piled the tactics board into the boot of the car and sat in the drivers seat. **"Typical"**. *R*ains drops began to bounce off the window screen. Buzz, Buzz. And now what? Rebecca thought as she picked her phone up. **"Hello!"** It was Jim the clubs coach developer, although he didn't really like that title, **"How was today?"**.

Sigh, Rebecca placed her head in her hand, her stomach rolled **"Jim, just like I said the other day, I am at a loss here. It was OK when they were 10 and 11, 9-a-side wasn't too bad, but this is a brand-new game. I don't know the new formations, the opposition even scored from two corners – I don't know how to stop that, and, in all honesty, I want to give everyone fair playing time but some of them are really, really struggling. Do you think I should have just left my best players on? But then the parents? And well you know the clubs a development club. Isn't it?"**.

"Well…" Jim tried to calm Rebecca but was immediately interrupted.

"Like, today, they had this one player who was brilliant, he could have dribbled around anyone. I didn't have the answers. Should I have subbed one of our lads off? Or changed the formation? Whenever we talk at the club as a group of coaches, we just discuss getting an artificial pitch, rebuilding the club house, or making sure everyone has a kit. I need help on the pitch. I didn't get that from my coaching courses. I haven't had that from the club, and I still need it now".

Jim took a second or two **"Oh, OK, well I didn't know you felt quiet like that, I am happy to do some CPD session around some technical practices if that would help. Perhaps I can get something booked. Erm.. Would that help?**

Without any thought Rebecca replied **"Definitely, are you free this week"**.

"Erm… well I wasn't thinking just yet, I've got loads of things to do for the club this week. But…well, leave it with me and I'll arrange something. Enjoy the rest of your day!" Jim put the phone down.

'Pffft, enjoy the rest of my day! Its chucking down and we've just played like that, I just coached like that.' Rebecca switched on the engine and turned the radio up. *'Its time for a coffee'*

11:10

Jim
Incoming call…

Remind Me

Message

Scene 3

Rebecca's phone lit up: **Hi Rebecca, unfortunately we've had to postpone the game for tomorrow morning the pitch is waterlogged. Look forward to seeing you later in the season.** Within seconds Rebecca's face lit up too. Jim still hasn't managed to deliver the CPD session, he's been concentrating on that funding application and dealing with the parents from the U15s, so another game postponed suited Rebecca. *'I can take those balls out the car for another week'* she thought. *'An opportunity to relax, forget about football for a while and concentrate on myself for a change, but first I best text the parents...'*

A sarcastic thumbs up, Rebecca felt frustrated. An inner sense of turmoil passed over her. *'Great another job to do, ring the leisure centre. I may as well go tomorrow anyway and 'save face'. Navigating and balancing the expectations of the club, Joey, the parents, and players. I'm only a community coach!'*

19:45

U12s Parents
last seen Today, 05.55

10 OCTOBER 2023

I've just heard from the opposition for tomorrow. Our game has been cancelled. Enjoy your weekend

Parent A
👍

Parent B
👍

Parent C
Can we train Rebecca, can we get a 3G or something? The lads need training.

Parent D
Yeah, I agree can we get a pitch? We can pay a bit extra, I'm sure.

Well, I can see but I think the boys would enjoy the break. I'd like to have a day off too.

Parent C
Not a problem. I'm sure Joey could do a session if you wanted the day off? Joey, are you free?

Joey
Yeah, of course I can, anything for the lads. Rebecca, can you book a pitch? I will then pick up the balls tonight.

👍

Narrative 2:
Who is included and who is excluded?
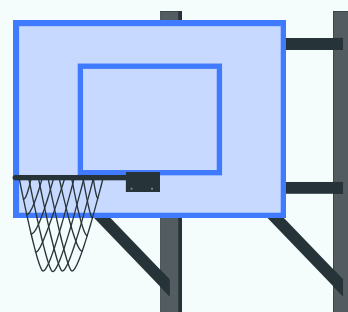
The following story involves three coaches (Jeff, Jane and John) at a disability sports club.

The story illustrates:

1. Tensions that abound in community sport coaching (e.g., participation v performance, club needs v governing body needs, club identity and mission).
2. How the physical environment can shape coach learning opportunities (e.g., opportunities for reflection on walks, classrooms for talks).
3. The complexity of inclusion.
4. How powerful people can shape coach learning.

Scene 1

A pile of small, coloured marker cones sits by the gateway. Stacked high, they lean to one side. Jeff highlights, **"Just like our team John, unbalanced."** Picked up just before they toppled over, the cones were the last piece of equipment left on the multi-use games area (MUGA). The club, with a small number of participants who attend a weekly session tries to avoid hiring the indoor hall. The hall is not only too big for the group, but too expensive to use every week. Especially for a burgeoning club that has only be operating for six months and was still finding its identity. Because of this, and when the weather allows, the club decided to enthusiastically embrace the MUGA; at least for the summer months. So far, the MUGA has worked well. It has been a place for Jeff, John and Jane to coach weekly sessions. These usually involved 20-30 minutes of a variety of fun physical activities, followed by 30 minutes of wheelchair basketball led by Jeff. Working well so far, the sessions appeared to be a highlight for a small group of participants. Like the cones, however, the MUGA also serves as a metaphor for the fledgling club; while it can do lots, its particular purpose is somewhat undefined, and it is also somewhat marginalised from the main building. Because of this, it usually takes two trips between the MUGA and the leisure centre to put all the equipment away. In Jane's absence, today it took three trips. Inevitably, the final walk often takes longer than it should. Not only because the MUGA is the furthest facility from the main building, but also because John and Jeff use the time to reflect.

John responds, **"Don't worry Jeff. Jane and I have been in touch with the 'national governing body'. They have offered to send us a coach developer in a few weeks. They will give us some ideas of what can be done better".**

Jeff retorts, **"Will there be a certificate? If not, I hope they can at least help us recruit a couple of low classification athletes, and particularly female ones. Last two tournaments, we have really struggled with balancing our team points. It is a right headache to get under the 14 points we are allowed as a team. Because we don't have enough very low classification athletes, it means we can't use our high classification athletes as much as we want. These high classification athletes are travelling a long way to not play very much, and a very, very, very long way, just to lose."**

After the equipment was put away, the discussion continued into the main leisure centre, and even into the car park. As John got into his car, he was left in no doubt of the need to recruit participants with low classifications. Such participants typically have more restricted movements and are accordingly awarded lower points on a scale. This is important because to ensure fairness, each team has a maximum number of points they are allowed to field at any one time. Jeff had repeatedly explained how if they had more participants with low points, then he could also play the athletes who score high on the scale. In his view, this would be a better-balanced team and the players with extra mobility would help them win. Especially because players with low points are not necessarily worse, and it would be good to have a few more so they could be rotated at tournaments. At the moment, however, the current squads' points meant that only one of the high point athletes were able to play at a time, making tactical substitutions very difficult in tournaments.

Scene 2

Later that week, John and Jane connected on a phone call. Jane had missed this week's session, so a quick call over lunchtime gave them a chance to confirm the coach developer's visit. Finalising the details, Jane summarised the call like she would her classroom lessons.
"Right, I have booked the leisure centre's meeting room. I have also asked them for a projector for a laptop. I have scheduled for an hour, before the normal session. Hopefully people will turn up. I am also hoping this coach developer will gives us some more ideas to diversify the sport. We need to open up the range of activities to increase numbers and get a good base of participation. We should be looking to include some boccia, para pentathlon, and blind running during the sessions. Give everybody a chance at something new. More variety of activities in the session would bring more people in, and everybody could get involved in something. It would really help the club grow."

John replied, **"yep all sounds good. Meeting room, set up like a classroom, before the usual session. I will confirm with the national governing body now."**

Scene 3

The coach development session.
"Hi everyone. I'm George from the 'governing body'. They are keen for me to talk to you about the value of membership and getting all the participants signed up. It is really important to get everyone insured. I also believe from John that you want me to talk about the classification system and improving performance in wheelchair basketball."

Jane sighed and thought *'I guess we are specialising rather than diversifying then'.*

Narrative 3:
What are you about?

The following story involves a scene with a coach developer supporting a club. To be clear the coach developer does not use an AI approach.

The story illustrates:
1. The multiple roles that coach developers have.
2. The tensions that exist in the community context e.g., participation, inclusion, performance.
3. How coach developers skilfully navigate the micropolitics of the setting, often using their coaching knowledge and not always with a clear coach development model.

"Evening all", said Baz cheerily as he entered the room in his club tracksuit.
"Sorry for being late Steve, been juggling kids. Sue is on nights, and I have to drop the twins at judo on Wednesdays".
Jo interjects with a grin.
"Not to worry, Baz. We couldn't really start till you got here. You are the most important cog in the wheel."
The others laugh. One reason for this was that they knew Kai from the governing body, was the main attraction. Steve adjusted his tie and assumed control.
"Well seeing as Baz is here now, I should start by introducing Kai. Some of you know Kai from the visit last year. You might remember the practical session. Kai had the kids loving it and left us with a few ideas. Tonight, Kai has come back to see how we are getting on and give us some pointers. It's all part of how we are trying to raise standards."
Kai proceeds to provide some biography, detailing early sporting experiences, subsequent coaching in local schools, then time coaching in the US and Thailand, before returning to the UK.
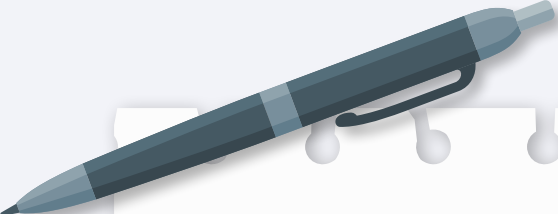
Now Kai has multiple roles including a bit of lecturing at the University, a couple of afternoon sports clubs in the local primary schools and lots of jobs with the NGB including assistant coach with the regional talent squads, running coaching courses, and providing a bit of mentoring/support for clubs. This is what brought Kai to the club. Now that capital has been established, Kai proceeded.
"So enough about me, how have you all been doing?"
Keen to portray the progress of the club, Baz moves his club branded water bottle out of the way and immediately responds:
"We have been working with the Raiders. They have been great. They invited us to watch a couple of their sessions, and we picked up some drills to use. Big emphasis on technical development. They even came down and watched a couple of younger sessions. Picked out a couple of under 12's to invite to their academy, Harper and Deven. I think they will get signed up, which is great."

The conversation continued and the discussion meandered. It covered the Raiders talent pathway, what they look for in young athletes, what the developing athlete needs, and how the NGB, that Kai works for in a part-time capacity, should be reorganising things to make it better. A good 20 minutes on Baz's favourite topic, professional sport. Sensing some frustration in Jo's body language, Kai steered them back on track.

"Ok, so how about the club here. What have the numbers been like?"

Seeing her opportunity, Jo jumped in.

"Yep, really good. Numbers through the roof at the boys' Saturday morning sessions. The girls' sessions have started on Monday nights, and they share the facility with the new disability group. Steve, Jane and I have tried some of your suggestions. You know, letting them choose partners and even which games to play. And bringing different equipment that they can use, like different size balls and stuff. During the session they choose which one works best for them, and it seems to help them have a good time."

"Love to hear that", Kai responds.

Steve adds,

"Yep, 12s have been going well too. What about the older age groups Baz?"

Baz responds,

"Both 16s and 18s are going well. Been working hard for a few months now. We put extra sessions on a Tuesday night, so they train three times a week now. We have lost a few because of exams, but we have a real competitive bunch now. Between both groups, some medals should be coming our way in the next few weeks. I was thinking, you know, maybe we should have a bit of presentation day or event, if they win."

Jo picks up on the idea,

"Maybe we should have one anyway. Afterall lots of the children deserve a medal, and it's not really about that anyway, is it? It's about coming together and making friendships, bringing the village together and having a good time. What do you think Kai?"

Sensing some tensions, and a feeling of being set up as an arbitrator between Jo and Baz, Kai tries to navigate skilfully.

"I like the idea of a presentation day. You know give out awards and get that feeling of competence and success (nodding to Baz). But also, an opportunity to connect all the parts of the club together (while looking at Jo). You know 'Grassville' do this a lot. They do an easter egg hunt, and a Halloween party. Give out a bit of recognition for all sorts of things and bond the club. It does take a bit of organising but is a good fund raiser. In fact, Steve, I usually do a practical coach development session for them to start the day. It gets all the coaches there and then after that the coaches stay for the drinks, food and fun. They call it hiding the vegetables, and I am the vegetables."

A little bit of laughter, a little bit of harmony, and some growing interest amongst the group. Steve reopens his notebook and starts writing. Dion and Riley, on the periphery to this point, are now leaning in and have opened their diaries too. Kai seizes the opportunity.

"I think we have some good skills in this group. We have people who are good at organising, some good at motivating and including people, and some good sports knowledge. I think you should all go for it. Have a day and show the village all the good work going on. It would be good to show each other all the successes too. Afterall, you shouldn't forget what you are, a community club."

Narrative 4:
It's all about priorities, whose priorities?

The following story involves two scenes over a period of a month in a community sport club. The story concludes by alluding to the role AI could play in community coach development.

The story explores:

1. The typically ad hoc, informal, and in-situ nature of coach development in this context.
2. The extra emotional labour potentially involved, in addition to the multiple roles people may hold.
3. The potential conflicts and pressures within clubs that take precedence over coach development.

Scene 1:
Remi, the club 'go to'

Heading towards the glow of the floodlights with the drizzle sticking to her face and hair, Remi was still thinking of her 'day job'. As she trudged to the entrance, she was still contemplating someone else's mistake. Something to solve tomorrow! Opening the door of the club house, her solemn mood changed, and a smile radiated across her face. She examined the scene; a cacophony of noise including shrieks of laughter from the youngsters, adults cajoling, and preparations in full swing. Some bags of equipment taken outside. Some players coming back in. Some sessions complete, and some getting started. Some children wet and tired, some dry and enthusiastic. All with contented smiles! Inside Remi thought, *'I love this place, it's part of me! Has been for over 30 years, playing, coaching, on the committee, fundraising and everything else in between! I have seen generations come through the club, an important part of growing up round here. A real community hub'.* Whilst she continues across the floor, Billy diverts her attention.

"Hey Remi, how's it going? You got 5 minutes? I want to 'pick your brains'! Mick said you are the 'go to' for everything!"

"Of course, I'll always have 5 minutes for one of our new coaches", Remi says smiling.

Inwardly she thinks, *'he's keen, but needs far more support than I can offer right now, and he needs more than a certificate, he needs to practice. But I only have 5 minutes and I need to get myself sorted. I have my own important training session tonight, preparation for the senior cup match on Saturday'.* Remi provides a few words, a couple of sage cliches, and a quick list of ideas to help with managing children's behaviour.

"Thanks Remi, really helpful", smiles Billy. **"I'll have a go with what you have suggested tonight."**

"No problem, you are doing good work Billy. Keep at it."

Now running late, Remi heads out to the session and scans the scene of activity in front of her. She thinks, *'there is some good work going on here. Pockets of excellent coaching. But it is inconsistent and there are areas where we can be better. People like Billy who we need to support better. They have so much potential. A bit of help would have huge benefits to them, to the players, the club, and all of us. I know it, the committee know it, and everyone else knows it! We say we are a caring community club; but we could do much better'.* Pulling a face, she thinks, *'I need to speak to Geoff, the 'Don' of the club, about this. Oh, the joys'.*

As she finally reaches the pitch, she hears Scott's friendly voice, **"About time Remi, we really need your help! Can you work your magic on this lot?"**
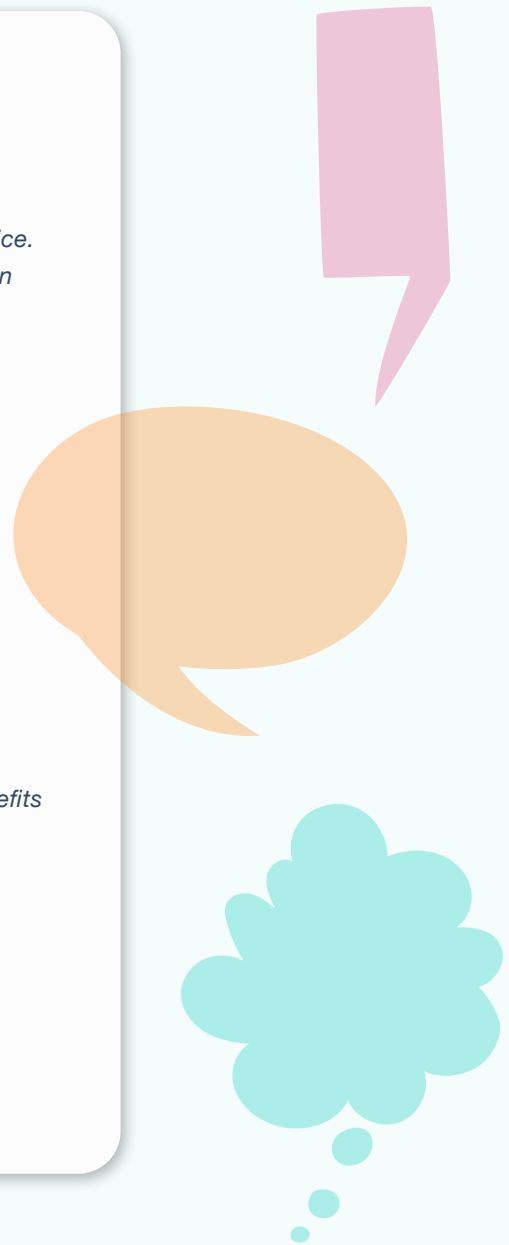
Scene Two: 'The development quandary'

The club committee room
Its committee meeting night, most committee members are there: Geoff with piles of papers; Allan and Dave have both rushed in from work and are trying to get settled; Joyce is passing Ali a biscuit in lieu of dinner. Geoff starts,

"Right then. Next on the agenda is club development. Remi, at the last meeting, I said, you would get your chance, but we ran out of time. Now the floor is yours!"
A bit confounded by the initial statement, she sighs!

"Actually everyone, club development is not what I said I wanted to talk about. It, was helping the coaches. At the moment, there are a number of things that we need to think about. We have some issues! Abbie, the U12 coach is moving away for work, so we need somebody to 'step-up'. We could do with looking at upskilling some of the parents. Getting them involved. Sending some on their level 1. To be honest, we could do with upskilling a lot of the coaches on providing feedback, managing behaviour, dealing with parents, and some technical knowledge too. Perhaps some mentoring or series of workshops".
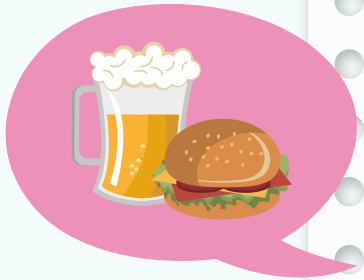
"That's 'all well and good Remi", says Dave (in a slightly condescending tone). "But first things first. The bookings for the new season need sorting, we are behind on player registration forms, and this grant application needs completing by next week".

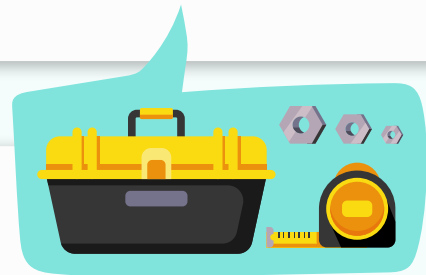"I agree!" interrupts Joyce "There are overheads and other problems we need to prioritise. What about the bar and the food? We need to feed people and for that, I need to get a gas engineer to fix the kitchen!". Sarcastically she says, "Don't forget the players, parents and spectators bring in all the revenue"!

"Yes", supports Allan. "Let's see if we can get that engineer booked in now".

Trying to keep control of her emotions, Remi responds. "Look, I am not saying the club doesn't have other things to think about, but we can't continue to just do the same things! We need more bodies on the ground, people are getting burnt out. We need to be mindful of that!"

The tension in the room is palpable.
After what seems like an age, Ali says quietly,
"Can I make a suggestion? A friend told me that the NGB and Redshire Uni were piloting a course on community coach development. Maybe that would help. You should take part Remi and then pass on anything of interest".

As the meeting continues, Remi's voice is less prominent. She contemplates the myriad of tasks that take priority over coach learning, the voices who determine what the club focuses on, and how addressing the coaching might help the recruitment and retention of the very players and parents that fund the club. On that basis, she decides to attend the coach education workshop that Ali suggested. *'I hope it won't be another lecture from someone who doesn't know the club',* she thought.

Challenges and opportunities for
Community Sport Coach Development
An appreciative inquiry project

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Narrative 5:
Appreciating and supporting volunteers in community sport

The following story involves a facilitator delivering an AI-framed workshop for club coach developers.

The story illustrates:

1. The flexible, yet still guided by AI principles, implementation of the workshop.
2. The value of getting together to discuss coaching and coach development.
3. The challenges of the AI approach for facilitators (e.g., deficit thinking) and the skilful navigation of the workshop to achieve positive participant-driven outcomes.

Scene 1

Monday 6.15pm. It's a sunny summer's evening, in preparation for the online workshop with a group of coach developers, Nic switches the laptop on, logs in, and remembers to plug it in - *'don't want it to die on me mid-session like the first time I delivered online, what a disaster!'* Nic shivers at the thought, then checks everything is ready. *'Notepad - check, pen and a spare pen – check, guidance questions – check, list of people attending – check. Right 10 mins to go. All set'.* Nic recalls the butterflies swirling when, several years ago, delivering these workshops for the first time. And remembers the attempts to calm the butterflies. *'Ok, so I have my list of questions – there's quite a lot! How will I get through them all? Just remember the steps of appreciative inquiry - Define, Discover, Dream, Design, Deliver. Just remember the steps...'* Nic still gets a few butterflies, but there's more calmness now. Nic muses over the differences. *'I'm more prepared, yes, but it's not really that, not just about the notepad, pens, list etc, I'm approaching it differently. How? I'm not trying to get to a specific endpoint, not one I've chosen anyway. I'm more curious about what the group is doing, wanting to do and how they can get there. I still loosely follow the steps but I'm more mindful of the AI principles, it's their journey, their hopes for the future, their plans, that are important. Working with them to draw those things out, help them share and discuss possibilities…and practicalities, of course.'*

6.25pm. The laptop pings – meeting in 5 mins. Nic is brought back to the present. *'Right, who is coming along tonight, I wonder where the conversation will go…'*

Nic takes a quick sip of water from the glass beside the laptop and starts the meeting.

Reminder
Meeting in 5 mins

Scene 2

"Can you introduce yourselves, your role in the club, etc." Each person shares something about themselves, in turn. Nic takes a few notes, little reminders, things they might come back to. *'Wow, they do a lot. How much of that is really development of coaches? It is related, but is it really coach development? I guess if the club is not running and there aren't members then there is no need for coaches and no need for coach development.'*

It's clear some of them know each other. As they chat about work, family, and their clubs. Nic knows it is good for them to have a chance to catch up and lets it go for a few minutes. Sensing a lull in conversation, Nic takes the opportunity to steer the conversation:

"So, what brought you here tonight? Who would like to go first? Thanks Kim."

The conversation is off, lots of sharing, mostly challenges and concerns related to the club and coaching within the club. Then Toni groans:
"...and the club committee, don't get me started on that!"

Toni continues and others add their thoughts too. Fifteen minutes later they are still sharing frustrations with the wider club committee and running of the club. Nic takes a few more notes. *'Judging by the flow of the conversation, they appreciate this chance to share. I don't want to disrupt that. I also don't want to let this go for too long, though. Another minute or two maybe? Appreciative inquiry is meant to be positive, strengths focused and action oriented. How am I going to get this back on track?'* While the conversation continues, Nic glances at the list of questions for a bit of guidance, then puts it to one side: *'How can I help them draw out their strengths? – that's discover. Hmmm...perhaps prompt them to discuss 'what great coach developing looks like' – dream? We haven't really defined a clear topic yet but that can come out of the discussion.'*
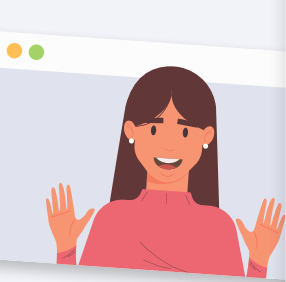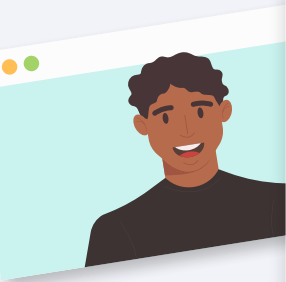
Slightly interrupting, Nic summarises so far:
"Great discussion, I'm learning a lot about you and your clubs, thank you, from what you have been saying it seems that growth in membership means greater demand for coaches. And for the club this means getting people started in coaching, being able to support and develop them are important."

Toni nods and adds:
"Yeah, but it's not just having people qualified, we need to build a coaching culture within the club, people seeing a pathway."

Ah, here's an opening. Nic Replies:
"With that in mind, I wonder if we could explore it in relation to, what does coach development look and feel like when it is going really well?"

Stevie jumps:
"coaches feel like they are getting something as well, not just delivering all the time, they are developing their skills, getting opportunities to be coached themselves."
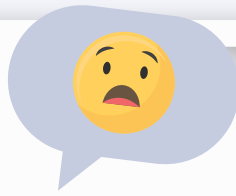
George adds:
"yeah and feel that connection to the club and enjoy being out there with others."

Nic thinks, *'Ok, this is better, we are talking coaching, and it is more positive'.* Before replying: **"And how does that happen? What leads to those opportunities and feelings?"**

Scene 3

Nic checks the clock on the laptop. It's 7.40pm. *'We've been going for over an hour now and I haven't got through even half of the questions. But that's ok, they've been helping each other, Stevie has shared some funding sources and Toni has offered to help George with some paperwork for a course he is running. Remember AI is action oriented. And those are actions. We haven't really talked about future plans, yet. How can I move us to that?'* Nic looks at the list of questions, scanning down the page to the sections on Design and Delivery. There are quite a few questions there. In the past Nic would have felt pressured to try to cover them all. As this memory comes to mind, Nic pushes it back. *'It's not about the question as such…it's prompting their thinking towards the future and their plans. And based on the flow of discussion tonight, there is really only time for one more prompt to the conversation, I reckon. Ok so…'*

"The discussion tonight has been really interesting, for me, I hope it has been useful for you too."

Smiling, George offers: **"Yeah, a bit like therapy really…but good, yeah."** The others chuckle in agreement and nod their heads.

"For the last wee bit, can we change tack a little? Can we think about what you are going to do between now and the next workshop that can advance coach development in your clubs?"

Silence. More silence. It might be a virtual meeting, but the atmosphere has just turned ice cold. Stoney faces stare back at Nic. The look on their faces says it all *'What! Are you asking us to do more?!!!'*

For Nic, the silence seems to be lasting an eternity. Just wait, someone will answer. But nothing comes. *'Oh no, I'm losing them. I wasn't expecting that reaction! It's ok, no need to panic, just back track and soften the task.'*

"What I mean is, is there anything from tonight's discussion that you think, 'Oh I could maybe do something about that' or one thing you are going to think about or do a little differently, not necessarily something more or new, just one thing you want to focus a bit more on?"

The coach developers' faces noticeably relax.

And then Stevie – the most experienced coach developer of the group - also sensing the tension says: **"I am going to think about what we said about recruitment, who and how we are recruiting coaches."**

"Great, thanks Stevie, anyone else have anything?" The virtual room is thawing, the tension largely gone.

Even while eating dinner, Kim has clearly been listening and thinking:
"Our discussion has reminded me of something I experienced some time ago, a coach invited a group of coaches to a session and said bring along something you are working on or want to play with in your coaching and let's share and work on it together. And that was really good, I really enjoyed it. So that experience and then I have also just been asked to do a 1 to 1 development session with a coach, so there's that as well and then our discussion here tonight has got me thinking 'can I bring all those things together?' Cause I don't have time to do lots of 1 to 1s but I could get a group of coaches together to help each other – connecting coaches sort of thing. But it has to be practical. Practicing and discussing coaching. So, it won't happen until the season starts"

Toni is clearly excited about this, **"could some coaches from my club come along too? – we're not that far away?"**

Narrative 6:
Power doesn't flow equally

The following story involves a facilitator delivering an AI-framed coach development workshop for coaches from one club.

The story illustrates:

1. That powerful people shape coach learning in clubs.
2. Tensions around the enactment of equity, diversity and inclusive (EDI) activity.
3. The challenges of the AI approach (e.g., different to expectations, gives individuals' a voice) and potential for productive outcomes.

Scene 1:
Initial expectations

Salma arrives at the clubhouse of Wriggleston Rowing Club, which is nestled on the bank of the river. She is here to facilitate the first appreciative inquiry workshop with the club's coaches and Coach Developer – John. As she walks from her car to the clubhouse, she wonders how tonight's session would go. It would be very different from the usual affair of 'chalk and talk' expert-led delivery, which many club coaches had grown used to over the years. What would they think? How would they engage with this way of doing things? Salma pushes these thoughts to one side as she is greeted by John at the doors to the clubhouse. He guides her into the building, turns on the lights and asks Salma if she would like a coffee.

After some initial formalities about the weather and her journey down to the club, John asks:
"So, where would you like the projector and screen to be set-up for your talk?"

Salma masks an inner anxiety as her thoughts about the participants' expectations and responses race around her mind. Instead, she confidently replies:
"oh, that won't be necessary tonight – I'm here to facilitate conversations around coach development that will principally be led by the coaches and yourself rather than me delivering."

John, standing with the projector in his arms, eyebrows raised, appears simultaneously bemused and intrigued by her response.

Scene 2:
Introductions and development topics

At the commencement of the session, Salma asks the group if they would mind individually introducing themselves and outlining their respective roles at the club. Kitty, Michael, Duncan and Sylvester, all coaches at the club, keep their introductions relatively brief but informative. It comes to John's turn. In contrast to those that preceded him, he lists his extensive (and impressive career) as a school inspector, coach, coach educator, coach developer, chair of the club, and advisor to many organisations. Pressing ahead of the planned agenda, John moves from introducing himself straight into sharing his dissatisfaction with the governing bodies' coach education programme. In particular, he feels the courses do not provide the technical knowledge required to coach the sport well. Kitty sits quietly but in disagreement with John. She feels that she is adequately prepared to facilitate technical development from her previous rowing experience. However, she, instead, feels she could be better supported to manage people, both in terms of the relationships she has with others and the one she seeks to facilitate between people. Next to Kitty, Salma feels unease that the conversation is very quickly moving away from how she initially anticipated it would play out.

John continues to dominate the discussions. Many of the coaches go on to agree with John's stance, nodding along and feeding in their own thoughts about how they are quite satisfied in the day-to-day running of sessions, but hold reservations about observing, analysing, feeding back on, and developing technical performance of the rowers in their charge.

Sensing a gap in the conversation, Kitty goes on to air her concerns that the female talent pathway at the club is not receiving the same attention as the boy's section...

"we are finding it really tough to locate suitable equipment during the winter for our training to go ahead...I mean, the boys already have equipment at their fingertips, yet we don't have anything set up for the girls, including who will coach them".

John replies:
"we had a local sponsor visit the club and who wanted to help. Ian, the youth coach mentioned that the boys didn't have everything they needed so the sponsor took care of that. It all happened really quickly, over a coffee."

Kitty rolls her eyes, as if to indicate that she is no longer surprised by this and seems tired by multiple previous attempts to advocate for equitable treatment of the female section of the club.

Salma is struck and somewhat surprised by how quickly the participants were willing to begin discussing some of the problematic realities of club life, coach development, and connections to the national governing body. She wonders whether these views were to show conformity to the Coach Developer's propositions around the focus for coach development and/or if they indeed felt that these were necessary aspects of coach development for themselves. She mused how external contributors like herself spent very little time in the context, and, as such, had little appreciation of how local relationships, alliances, and conflicts ultimately shaped the extent to which new ideas and ways of doing things could be implemented in the club setting.

Scene 3:
Purposefully seeking to challenge power dynamics in the final workshop

Recognising that John has had a dominating impact in shaping the agenda and discussions of previous workshops, Salma asks Kitty if she would be comfortable leading the facilitation of the next workshop. Kitty's eyes light up as if to indicate her delight at the invitation **"Yes, I'd love to! The only thing I'm asked to lead around here is an under resourced girl's programme!"**

Salma runs through some of the semi-structured questions with Kitty to provide her with an initial frame of reference to manage tonight's discussions with the coaches. However, she stresses that this is just an initial scaffold and encourages Kitty to feel comfortable to take the session in directions that she thinks might productively facilitate discussions around coach development. Salma explains, how this could include recognising the excellent practice already occurring in the club, exploring how such practices could be drawn upon and used by other coaches to navigate some of the key everyday (club and coach development) issues that the club faced, and, of course, recognising the ongoing challenges and issues that the group could continue to navigate together.

After the final workshop, Jill, Salma's collaborator on the project, contacts her to check on progress...

13:52

Jill (work)

So, how did the session go tonight, Salma?

"It was a good one! 😄 Kitty was brilliant – she facilitated the session really well! I even had a chance to sit back and take it all in. ☕ Made a nice change!

What?! John let her lead!?

Yes! He even took notes and did much more listening than talking. I was so pleased to see him like this with the coaches.

Wow! This could be the start of something really good!

I know. I hope it lasts though... 🤞

Findings Part 3:
Narrative Themes and Theoretical Analysis

The narrative and theoretical analysis of the 27 workshop focus groups, 27 researcher workshop fieldnotes, and 3 review meetings generated 9 themes. Is presented below. The themes and their relationships are summarised in Figure 1. They captured the coaches' and coach developers' lived experiences working in community sport clubs. They also capture the participants' and researchers' experiences of the AI-framed workshops. Each theme is described and discussed through relevant theoretical perspectives and research along with illustrative quotes from the data.

Figure 1. Community coach development themes and their relationships

Outcomes of the AI Process	Understanding Challenges	Feelings of connection, repair and rekindling	Steps to improve knowledge (e.g. workshops)
Practical Interactions	Practice Shaped by Power	Unclear conception of Coach Development	Complexity of Inclusion	Principles of Appreciative Inquiry
Existential Influences on Learning in Community Sport Clubs	Time	Environment	Relationality	Sport Context

Theme 1:
What is coach development in community sports clubs?

As there is limited exploration of coach development within community club settings it was useful to explore:

- Who are coach developers (CDs)?
- What they do?
- How coach development is characterised in these setting?

Who are community coach developers?

In recent years those working to develop coaches have been labelled 'coach developers' (CIMSPA, 2021; ICCE, 2014; North, 2010). However, other terms have also been used such as coach educator, mentor, tutor, personal learning coach (McQuade & Nash, 2015; Milistetd et al., 2018; Trudel et al., 2013). The use of multiple labels and accompanying multiple functional roles fulfilled perpetuates confusion and disagreement with regards to who CDs are and what they do (Culver et al., 2019; Jones, et al., 2024). In our study, many of those individuals who might be deemed 'coach developers' didn't recognise the title 'coach developer'.

> **You know, we talked about how these coach developers don't call themselves coach developers, you know, they're just Joe or Jane who've been around the club for 30 years.** *(Review meeting)*

Consistent with previous research (for a review see Jones et al., 2024), the coach developers were often more experienced coaches who have been 'bestowed' or assumed the role, sometimes formally, but often informally. Often the CDs' own development (as CDs) was largely informal, based on experience (trial and error), and seldom prioritised. They were more comfortable talking about coaching than the process of coach development. For some their view of coach development amounted to what they had learnt about coaching from higher level coaching courses rather than specific to coach development:

> **...emphasis was placed on relational skills that connect, develop a sense of trust and community, and enable people to explore their practice. Yet, these were things they had developed through trial and error, not through formal engagement with the "system" of coach development or coach developer training/education.** *(Fieldnotes - CD workshop)*

> **There are also people who don't have any qualifications other than perhaps their own coaching background...there is the complexity in terms of the people who are within these roles.** *(Review meeting)*

What do coach developers do?

Coach care, support, and development in community sport takes a wide variety of forms and serves a range of functions (Jones, et al., 2024). In this sense, coach development is perhaps more similar to the 'umbrella' term used by ICCE (2014). In some cases, it is a club-level remit (often adopted informally or part of a sub-committee) ostensibly to oversee and organise coaching to meet the demands/needs of the club members. In this instance it can also have crossover into club development. In other cases, it is closer to the more recognised in situ 1 to 1 (or small group) development work directly related to coaches' practices when coaching athletes (e.g., CIMSPA, 2021). In yet other cases, it is help with logistics related to coaching (e.g., organisation and management tasks related coaching). Table 3. provides further examples of the forms and functions of coach development within clubs. Suffice to say CDs were busy people who provided a wide array of critical functions for clubs, with many individuals fulfilling multiple functions (Jones, et al., 2024).

Table 3. Coach development forms and functions within community clubs.

Form	Function
Logistics/admin supporter	Assists coaches with coaching administration/management-related tasks
Club co-ordinator/organiser	Club level organisation and 'allocation' of coaches to activity, oversees coaching within the club, may be involved in scheduling of facilities
Well-being supporter	'Checks in' with coaches, pastoral care, listens, provides emotional support
Confidant	Trusted colleague, psychologically safe space to share issues/concerns
Club coach developer	Takes responsibility for club level activity for the development of coaches. Could include strategic overview, consideration of pathways, courses etc.
Advocate/ally	Identifies, encourages, promotes individuals to get into coaching and signpost individuals to development opportunities
Development provider	Delivers nonformal coach development opportunities
Coach education provider	Delivers formal coach education courses
More experienced 'other'	Assists coaches with coaching practice, providing tips and practice content
Critical friend	Provides opportunities for coaches to 'check and challenge' their coaching
Mentor	Proactively engaged in 1 to 1 development of coaches' practice
All things to all people	Has multiple club roles, some related to coach development
'Coaching Guru'	Respected and trusted 'go to' individual within the club. Generally due to experience and expertise in the sport as a participant but more likely as a coach, possibly as a coach developer

What is the essence of coach development? Despite differing perspectives and disagreement with regards to the skills, knowledge and roles of coach developers (e.g., ICCE, 2014 cf. CIMSPA, 2021), at a broad level coach developers seek to support the performance of coaches to enhance the sport experiences of participants. Our findings suggest that what this support means in community club contexts maybe different to other sport contexts (e.g., performance sport). Coach development in community clubs often focuses on assisting relatively inexperienced coaches to navigate the complexities of coaching within the club (e.g., logistics, practicalities, managing others, emotions, interactions with stakeholders, sport knowledge etc.).

> …it's passing on the lived realities of being a coach and understanding the mechanics of everyday coaching and offering in the club's view, some like shortcuts and hints and tips… it's genuine embedded support. *(Review meeting)*

Coach development was often prompted by gaps left by formal coach education or coaches' biographies that affected coaches' confidence and competent to coach:

> it *[formal coach education]*, didn't prepare you for what you actually experienced on the grass. *(Coach)*

> …we were largely on our own with a bit of support from [X] *(Coach)*

As such coach development was typically ad hoc, informal, occurring in situ within the club and reactive to coaches' immediate concerns and needs. There was little evidence of structured approaches to coach development. The exception being where coaches were supported towards coaching qualification attainment. In this instance, a strategy employed was to create cohorts of trainee coaches from the same club to work through the coaching qualification together. Although viewed as effective, it could also marginalise some trainee coaches (e.g., those unable to attend with the cohort) and leave them uncertain about a pathway to get involved or develop their coaching.

Importantly for many CDs in this study, while CDs offered hints, tips and immediate problem solving, coach development was about connecting, it was a relational caring practice. CDs suggested they brought coaches together, created relationships with and between coaches so coaches have someone to turn to for help, guidance or advice, they sought to empower coaches, help and support but not dictate, be open and inquisitive, develop coaches' sense of belonging and value within the club, and build their competence (and confidence). Examples of activities included 'in house' coaching forums, coach learning communities, opportunities for observation and peer coaching. One coach developer commented:

> You can have all the skills to be a great *[coach/coach developer]* but actually it means nothing if there is no care and compassion and being able to relate to people and being able to work with people and nurture them and create a *[sense of]* belonging. *(Coach, coach supporter and coaching committee member)*

The recognition of a wider function was also captured in the workshop fieldnotes:

> …the inhouse 'coach-developer' is keen to help, listen and facilitate opportunities. He understands *[sport]* but definitely sees his role as broader than tech tact support. *(Fieldnotes - coach workshop)*

Through this approach and associated actions, CDs were often supporting coaches' psychological needs for competence, relatedness and autonomy (Ryan & Deci, 2000; 2017). These actions are likely to foster coaches' motivation for coaching and sense of well-being. In turn, however, where these were absent or limited, for example, when coaches felt underprepared for the realities of coaching (i.e., low sense of competence) and disconnected from other coaches or others who might support them in the club, this could negatively affect their desire to stay involved in coaching as well as how they work with athletes. In addition, some CDs were aware of their status (as a more experienced other) and sought to reduce potential power imbalances this might create and thereby support coaches' sense of autonomy. One strategy was to downplay and be humble about their contributions.

An aspect from the research, that needs to be acknowledged is the time, space and energy required to undertake relational caring practice roles in community sport. Irrespective, of the terminology used, or the nature of the support given. It requires additional labour. Consequently, from an organisational perspective there may be a need to reflect and consider how processes of supporting, nurturing and developing others can be managed effectively. Thus, ensuring that people feel they are able to 'give their time'. It was highlighted that:

> **Equally it comes back at that same point** *[that]* **lots of these people are volunteers and already doing lots of stuff. It's like adding an extra layer onto them!** *(Review meeting)*

> **We do what we can do, and we do it to the best of our ability...and a lot of the time it is jolly good** *(Coach developer)*

> **I guess the key thing for me is: What are people looking for from a coach that is realistic** *[for a coach that is]* **volunteering?...what do we really know [about] what people...understand about the expectations** *[of what]* **a club can offer?** *(Coach supporter)*

This point was also reiterated by others, who suggested 'does that contribute to people resenting coaching, seeing it as a job? An extra task that I'm always given! What am I getting back from this club?' As such, could the AI process be an effective way of supporting the spread of labour? In contrast to the coaches' need support, the CDs' psychological needs may be less well catered for.

> **The CD did open up about their struggles...and it was evident that the CD had little sounding board opportunities with others and had a fear of letting the children and coaches down...** *[I]* **do feel that the CD would benefit form more individual coach developer support and this was something that the CD has since raised with me too.** *(Fieldnotes - CD workshop)*

Whilst many were comfortable with their functions, albeit often humble about their contributions, some questioned their competence to be a mentor and others felt disempowered by actions of club committees. These circumstances could affect CDs' sense of competence, relatedness, and enjoyment of the sport and lead CDs to question their involvement. One CD commented:

> **…Just getting to know one another and supporting one another, cos I've seen too much now, whether it's a committee, or a board, or something else I do, it's the lack of that, and respect and compassion and care for people and it starts to drive people away, people feel despondent, people feel let down, people feel lost."** *(Coach, coach supporter, and coaching committee member)*

Another CD highlighted the importance of feeling connected within the club:

> **…within clubs I would have thought that belonging was most important because we are here as unpaid people, we can disappear if we want. We are only here because we want to be here and having that feeling of relatedness and enjoyment being out there with other people is absolutely key…without that enjoyment of being part of a bigger 'team', it's pointless doing it…that belonging bit, if anything, is the biggest bit in the club and building that club culture that friendly club culture.** *(Coach developer and coaching committee member)*

Despite suggestions of a lack of support for CDs' psychological needs, their desire to help others suggests they may be fulfilling another psychological need, i.e., beneficence, which may help to explain why they remain motivated to support coaches and advance coach development in their clubs. Beneficence refers to the feeling of having a positive impact on others, making a positive contribution (Martela & Ryan, 2016; Martela & Riekki, 2018). Satisfaction of beneficence has been associated with well-being (Martela & Ryan, 2016) and perceptions that work is meaningful (Martela & Riekki, 2018). One CD commented:

> **Coaching** *[the coaches]* **is alive and well in the club…and I can only speak in any detail from my own experiences…the biggest motivation to coach** *[trainee coaches]* **is provided…by those we coach… the human element is critical.** *(Coach and coach developer)*

It is important to note, and perhaps not surprising, that coach development also took place in the absence of a coach developer. For example, relationships with other coaches offered support, opportunities to take more responsibility provided a chance to try new ways of coaching, and individuals' desire to improve motivated them to seek out learning opportunities.

> **…I feel like the more I watch, the better I'm getting, so…what I'll do is even, even if it's just daft stuff like watching another coach after my session finishes just for half an hour to an hour,** *[I]* **feel like I'm doing that a lot at the minute just to get different types of angles of the way that people get their types of messages across.** *(Coach)*

> **Sharing ideas is great, and sharing experience is even better. So just because you've went out and experienced one thing doesn't mean that people that weren't there can't** [benefit as well].
> *(Coach)*

Coaches frequently report a preference for these informal and self-directed approaches to development (Stoszkowski & Collins, 2016), however, these approaches leave 'what is learnt' somewhat to chance. Social structures, norms, and coaches' biographies provide powerful influence over which types of knowledge and behaviours are valued and accepted and what coaches will pay attention to and chose to learn (Stoszkowski & Collins, 2016). As a result, "the potential exists for coaches to simply acquire and reproduce outcome-neutral or even potentially harmful ideological interpretations of knowledge and outdated or ineffective practices" (Stoszkowski & Collins, 2016, p. 795). Enrolling the coach developer in the AI workshops provides an alternative form of informal learning activity. It provides an opportunity to share experiences, however, the workshops could also provide an opportunity for what is being learnt to be shaped, guided or challenged. It is, of course, important to be mindful that the workshops themselves do not become a means of indoctrinating coaches into a 'right way' to coach.

Theme 2:
Learning emerging from interaction in environments.

Across the workshops, coach and coach developer learning was situated in spatial contexts. For example, 'bodies of water' were present at cricket, canoe, and football clubs and these influenced learning. In the first case, at the canoe club, the river or sea context shapes how individuals work in peers. Typically, this is through a day spent on a river or sea suitable to the needs of the learner. Here both parties engage in experiential practices at specific parts of the river/sea and hold reflective conversations as they return their kayaks to the 'top of the river' or 'calmer waters'. Moreover, the learning content is also shaped by the weather, river and sea, such that learning is dynamic. From an ecological perspective, this is reminiscent of a mentor "leading another out in the world" (Lascu, Wood, Moulds, & Davids, 2024, p.7).

> What is interesting is that much of the coaching occurs in small groups or 1-2-1. There is little formal or group sharing of expertise. No real model or methods informing how the club coaches can learn from each other. They have a sort of informal system/ calendar of athlete learning. This occurs through:
> 1) **Introductory course**
> 2) **Time on river with more experienced person**
> 3) **Occasional practices at specific parts of the river**
> 4) **Ability-specific trips (intermediated). For instance, the advanced go away for a week.**
> *(Fieldnotes - coach workshop)*

> Coach development is associated with sport specific, environmental, and seasonal challenges i.e., there are winter challenges, river safety, and sport culture challenges i.e. the type of coaches/ participants that canoe attracts. *(Fieldnotes - coach workshop)*

At the football club, coaching occurs on busy match and training days, on multiple pitches, with lots of teams, spectators, players, and coaches in situ. In contrast, the appreciative inquiry workshops occurred on training nights when training had been cancelled due to rain. Here, waterlogged pitches meant the pitches were quiet, and the clubhouse calm. Overlooking this unusual scene, coaches who had been scheduled to be on those pitches, were able to meet inside and positively discuss how they can behave more calmly amidst the chaos of match days.

> The coaches spent a lot of time reflecting and talking about the environment that they create, and that the club encourage. This focus on the environment is clearly something discussed regularly outside of this workshop as the coaches regularly referred to the work that the Coach Developer did/encouraged. *(Fieldnotes - coach workshop)*

Finally, the cricket club learning was also framed by the environment, and in particular the nearby river that recently flooded the club. In response to the flood, the club admirably reorganised committees, and through determined and businesslike leadership secured funding and rebuilt their facility. This approach continued in the appreciative workshops which often had a serious action focused approach and was led by senior leaders in the group.

> **The coach supporter in this context is incredibly passionate and, at times, dominated some of the discussions. This took some careful facilitation at times, although this was a struggle in some moments, and I feel that this likely swayed the views and perspectives of the coaches present. Rather than being an inherent disadvantage, this data is interesting and useful in and of itself, understanding what naturally occurs in these contexts and is therefore likely to occur in other environments should this format be rolled out on a bigger scale.** *(Fieldnotes - coach workshop)*

Conversely, coach developers from disparate organisations and sports, often met online. This meant that they lacked a shared physical environment. This presented challenges (see theme 9). Nonetheless over a longer time and facilitated by the skill of the researcher, some coach developers were able to recognise a shared relational context. For them coach development

> **Emphasised the need for situated mentoring/support early in the coach's journey. Reading people, relating to them, building bridges and a sense of trust/safety to "be themselves" as practitioners.** *(Fieldnotes - CD workshop)*

And the workshops were about:

> **...care, being vulnerable, being humble, learning from each other, sharing practice. A big focus on creating a network where coach developers can share their practice and work to support each others' mentees/coaches.** *(Fieldnotes - CD workshop)*

Across these examples, the format of learning and to an extent the content emerged from interaction between the environment and individuals (Wood, Mellalieu, Araújo, Wood, & Davids, 2023). Thus, for those interested in supporting coaches and coach developers, there is much value in understanding coach learning contexts (Cushion, Griffiths, & Armour, 2019). Critically, this is not to say coach developers should impose top down 'ecologically informed' practices on community clubs. Rather it is to recognise the value of coach developers dwelling in the environment of coaches and coach developers and noticing how context shapes what people learn and how (Cassidy & Rossi, 2006). This dwelling will allow coach developers to understand what is important to coaches in this context. Doing so will mean that coach learning can be contextually relevant, dynamic, and never ending (Armour, Quennerstedt, Chambers, & Makopoulou, 2017).

Theme 3:
Powerful people in clubs shape coach learning.

Power – that is, the potentially productive or repressive influence negotiated between people as they (inter) act – has long been acknowledged as a central dynamic of relations between coaches and athletes, coaches and coach developers, and researchers and the researched in ways that shape both knowledge production and learning (Avner et al., 2021; Nichol et al., 2019; Zehntner & McMahon, 2019; Cushion et al., 2022; Hall et al., 2021). For the coaches in the current research, managing the micropolitical tensions of working with, and generating buy-in from, diverse groups of athletes and other stakeholders was something they a) felt poorly prepared for (Potrac & Jones, 2009), and b) was, therefore, a productive focus for ongoing discussion and development. As one coach explained:

> **I've got nine staff, I've got 112 kids, 112 sets of parents. So, if you look... 50% of the people I look after are parents, coaches - adults! The things we experience in the normal football** *[coach education]* **structure never prepares us for that...The better you get as a kids coach, it actually gives you an increased amount of adults and politics that you have to deal with to get on the grass... In coach ed. you're not taught how to get that. How do we get parents, players, our staff all singing from the same sheet?** *(Coach)*

In particular, navigating collaborative and conflicting relations with other coaches, coach developers, and club officials in their everyday practice, and the resultant intra-club tensions that divergent beliefs and agendas could create, was a source of frustration:

> **...within the** *[X]* **committee we're trying to address capacity but we've had our difficulties with that and one is you have to be able to articulate what your pathway is, so it's clear, and the other is you need to be empowered to facilitate...to get coaches together...to get the learning shared without having to constantly seek permission from the organisers at the top.**
> *(Coach developer and coaching committee member)*

And also something coaches and coach developers felt generally ill-equipped to manage (Hall et al., 2024). Therefore, this was a topic that coaches felt could be a productive area of focus for AI workshops:

> **Other people with different styles, sometimes I find hard. So, obviously, everyone has their own way of doing it. I sometimes struggle with people who's just maybe chalk-and-cheese to mine. That's something from this programme I want to get to...how to work with coaches who are working for me or working around me...that's something where I need to get better to support them.** *(Coach)*

Interestingly, even where the AI workshops focused on navigating the (above) micropolitical features of club life, it was essential for the research team to attend to the power relations between coach supporters and their coaches. For instance, within the clubs themselves, while coach developers often felt overworked or stretched by their roles, some were also reluctant to share their workload, and the control they maintained, among other even willing volunteers. Likewise, dominant voices among the workshop groups needed to be managed (typically the coach developer in coach workshops or 'more experienced' coach developer in CD workshops), to ensure all those who had given time to be part of the AI process were empowered to speak and be heard. In some cases (not all), despite attempting to shift the focus to coaches in the AI workshops, coach developers, especially the very experienced, continued to dominate discussions and power (im)balances meant that the focus for coach development was heavily shaped by one individual's perspectives or judgements. For example:

> **The coach supporter in this context is incredibly passionate and, at times, dominated some of the discussions. This took some careful facilitation at times, although this was a struggle in some moments, and I feel that this likely swayed the views and perspectives of the coaches present.**
> *(Fieldnotes - coach workshop)*

Finally, participants in the workshops often held predefined expectations that the researcher would provide definitive answers about coaching and coach development. Here, and above, certain individuals (i.e., the coach supporter and the researcher) were positioned as more "knowledgeable" or "experienced others" (Lascu et al., 2024), but this could be to the detriment of less-experienced coaches sharing their own perspectives. In these instances - and to overcome expectations typically associated with hierarchical power relations in other forms of coach education/development - researchers were proactive in explaining that the AI process was designed to be participant-led. For coaches, it was clearly unfamiliar territory to have "knowledgeable others" act as a 'facilitator' (rather than a "director") of discussion about current areas of strength and how these could be used to achieve wider club aims and/or navigate particular issues that coaches were experiencing.

When implementing the process of AI, it is important to be aware of intra-club micropolitics, existing power relations between participants, and normative expectations about the roles of the coach supporter and researcher. Skilful facilitation is needed to reflexively manage issues of power in-situ, in order to provide an appropriate balance of autonomy and more direct forms of feedback/support. For some sites in this study, for example, researchers explicitly asked certain coaches to take a lead on facilitating the AI process in order to purposefully change the power dynamics that existed in these settings, and to show that it was possible to generate more integrated, equitable forms of coach development.

Theme 4:
Technical knowledge and club development are gaps in coach learning.

Across the community sport clubs, a less frequent but nonetheless insightful theme concerned coaches' knowledge. Reflecting the wider roles and challenges that coaches undertake (see Table 1.), there is a range of knowledge and skills relevant to the community coach. These include the 'micropolitical literacy' to navigate the relationships within their club, and administration skills to co-ordinate parents, co-coaches, facilities and competitions. Beyond this, sport specific technical and tactical knowledge was an interesting area that coaches sought to develop.

> **We are not technical coaches. I think that's where I feel I'll let the girls down. The batting is no issue, but when I'm doing the bowling (that's different). I've never particularly been a good bowler myself, and that's where you need, you know, help and guidance because on the modern qualifications, you don't actually learn that.** *(Coach)*

In particular, there was a sense that this knowledge was not always provided by formal coach education. A lot of the cricketers felt that the national governing body course didn't prepare them very well for the technical aspects of other roles. They felt really well prepared in terms of the how to coach, how to use different tools or behaviours, but not necessarily the technical aspects of cricket. (Review meeting)

> **Some of the parents who were coaching, wanted more technical knowledge of the sport.** *(Review meeting)*

In this scenario, coaches perceived that "social media offered as a solution to getting tech/tac info." This source of technical and tactical knowledge is often accessible via phone applications and short multimedia. It does not however ensure quality content and may reinforce inequalities and poor practices (Richards, Killian, Kinder, Badshah, & Cushing, 2020). This might explain why for, at least, two clubs (canoe and cricket), the developed actions focused on technical knowledge through the appreciate inquiry process. For example, the canoe club recognised the need amongst intermediate members to improve skills and knowledge. This resulted in the development of a monthly CPD workshop, the first of which focused on technical aspects of rescuing. Here technical knowledge was not only seen as desirable but essential to the safety of members, and a form of knowledge that could be developed 'in-situ' within the AI process.

In critical considering this theme, it is worth noting that previous iterations of formal coach education and conceptions of coaching have been criticised for overly focusing on technical knowledge and not always recognising the social and psychological aspects of coaching (Chapman, Richardson, Cope, & Cronin, 2020). It is interesting that now, with the passage of time, coaches, at this community level, felt there was not enough technical knowledge in formal coach education. They also considered it as potentially a powerful form of knowledge that can help coaches support athletes to thrive in their sport.

That said, there needs to be a recognition that although this knowledge was desired by coaches and was considered powerful, these discourses are not necessarily neutral. Rather as Theme 5 demonstrates learning within the AI process is shaped by powerful relationships within the clubs. For example, the nominal coach developers in the group were influential in shaping what actions were taken.

> **My cricket coach developers are very keen on them having an understanding of the skill, so a batting coach, a fielding coach, a bowling coach show they can work with young children. But around an isolated skill.** *(Review meeting)*

Thus, while technical knowledge was deemed to be powerful as a means of helping coaches in situ, we also need to be mindful not to merely reproduce the interests, knowledge and expectations of the powerful stakeholders (Dempsey, Richardson, Cope, & Cronin, 2021).

Theme 5:
Tensions in the community context

In keeping with the findings of recent research (e.g., Gale et al., 2019; Ives et al., 2021; O'Gorman et al., 2021), the participants highlighted how their efforts to navigate the constraints and opportunities of organisational life were far from straightforward (Cassidy et al., 2023). Indeed, rather than being characterised by a shared and unproblematic commitment to organisational goals, they instead described how their respective contexts were riven with ideological diversity, often poor coordination between individuals and groups, and the potential for, if not actual, conflict between stakeholders (coaches, parents, club administrators, and coach developers). For example, as one participant noted:

> **…there were individuals within that club that when there isn't someone external supporting it, they basically just, you know, bulldoze everyone else and it becomes like power games.** *(Coach)*

Importantly, the participants highlighted several areas of tension or conflicts that existed within the club setting. In this sense, they especially emphasised what might be understood as differences in the cultural-ideological interests or priorities of stakeholders (Cassidy et al., 2023). In essence, cultural-ideological interests refer to the norms, values, practices, policies, and ideas that are considered 'good', 'right', and 'just' within an organisation, as well as those that are labelled 'bad', 'wrong' or 'unjust' (Cassidy et al., 2023). Crucially, these issues were not limited to a single group but, instead, circulated among the networks of interaction (i.e., between coaches, coach developers, club administrators, and parents) that comprised the respective club environments in which the participants were embedded. For example, the participants acknowledged that there were frequently tensions between individuals committed to promoting and pursuing an inclusive participation base agenda and those who subscribed to a performance ethos. For example:

> **So yeah, that that seems as if there's a bit of a debate as well, and I wouldn't say divide, but they're conscious about wanting to do well as a club and how they're seen in in relation to other clubs in the area. Versus wanting to have that element of community in that element of ensuring that people have a lifelong love of the game, what would just, you know, come to really enjoy what they're doing as opposed to a more professionalised or performance driven?** *(Review meeting)*

Equally, such cultural-ideological disagreements were also sometimes found in the pursuit of 'new' or 'traditional' approaches and strategies within club settings. Here, one participant noted that:

> **We've got, both sides and it is creating some potential conflict and that there's one coach developer who's very much about, well, I've done this in the past. It's worked. It's seeming to have impact. So, I'm going to continue to do it. And there's another coach developer who is looking for some principles, a framework, a model, a wider strategy for the club and, at the last meeting they were they were at loggerheads as to an approach.** *(Review meeting)*

A further disagreement between organisational stakeholders reported by the participants related to ideological differences between those individuals wishing to increasingly 'professionalise' the practices and accountability of coaches and those who, in contrast, supported the pursuit of a less formalised, volunteer approach to club life. For example, one participant noted:

> **One of the interesting conversations in my group is they simultaneously want a little bit of accountability, but they don't want it to become their job. And so, they don't want key performance indicators. Others do.** *(Review meeting)*

Interestingly, the participants highlighted how this disagreement not only manifested itself within the club setting but also in the relationship that existed between a club and its respective National Governing Body (NGB). For some participants, NGBs, in their respective quests to 'raise standards' and 'grow memberships', were considered to expect too much time and investment from the almost exclusively volunteer work forces that are a feature of community sport. For example, one participant provided the following response:

> **I'm a volunteer. I spend numerous hours attending to my coaching and all the other stuff…I'm quite happy to go through coaching awards, but like other people, we've got work, businesses, family, dog walking too. I mean to, and like I don't know how many opportunities there are and how many slots in the year they provide…Maybe if it was like 4 hours in a weekend, fine. But if someone to ask me for my whole Sunday on several occasions. Well, that's going to be difficult. They** *[the NGB]* **need to think seriously about when and how they make these courses available to us.** *(Coach)*

Finally, some of the participants described how the disjuncture between community clubs and their respective NGBs was further emphasised by a perception in the community clubs that the NGBs interests and priorities were almost exclusively focused on the high-performance agenda. For example, one participant shared the following view:

> **I mean, this is more of a bit of a more controversial point…but there needs to be more support for clubs and coaches from the** *[NGB]*. **I think that that stems from not just not just aiding with CPD and coach development, but more around the acknowledgement of what we do, how we promote ourselves as clubs, how they promote ourselves, how we're seeing it on the ground…you sign up to be a club and there is nothing back from the** *[NGB]* **to support you as coaches…It is a performance driven sport, so there's a lot of the funding will go on the performance program…we recognize we've got the majority of our 3000 Members are our kids…they are not developing grassroots and seem to be unaware of that.** *(Coach)*

Reinforcing the insight and discussion provided in the subsection addressing power, the findings in this section suggest that those entailed with leading AI interventions are: a) sensitive to the interests and coalitions that may have formed around various ideas, policies, and ways of practicing within a club setting; and b) able to astutely facilitate discussion and action around these topics. Explicit attention to, and the development of, such 'political astuteness' remains an important aspect of coach educator development (Potrac et al., 2022). Equally, the findings suggest that NGBs may benefit from similarly considering how they seek to develop positive and productive relationships with their constituent member clubs and volunteer work forces. This would appear crucial if NGBs are to gain the support for, and sustained engagement in, desired programmes - such as the AI approach that is at the heart of this project.
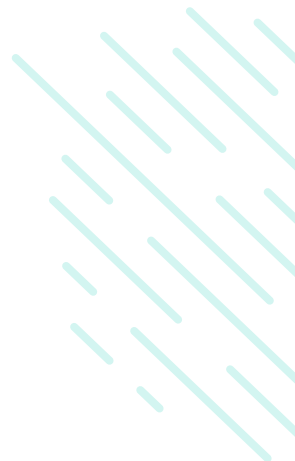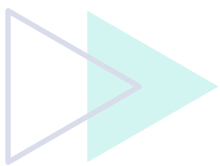
Theme 6:
Tensions enacting equity, diversity and inclusive (EDI) activity

Where EDI-related awareness and activity was evident, it was influenced by but also continued to reproduce structural norms. Structural norms are shared 'rules' and expectations about which social behaviours are acceptable, appropriate or desirable, and which are not, in a given social context. As a result, norms guide individuals' action and decisions (Elder-Vass, 2007, 2010). They may privilege some while marginalising others (Hylton, 2021). Further social norms influence awareness and activity but can also lead to their own reproduction (Elder-Vass, 2010). With regards to this project social norms appeared to influence and, in some cases, reproduce how people felt about the profile of the sport, the club, who members are, whether they 'come forward' to coach/ coach develop or not. As well as perceptions of who felt comfortable becoming a member, a coach, a coach developer and who didn't.

Conditions that promote and hinder engagement often perpetuate typically white and male dominated priorities. But there were also, 'sites of resistance', where existing power structures and norms were being challenged to 'promote equitable distribution of resources and opportunities' (Elder-Vass, 2007; Hylton, 2021) with variable success. Examples included consideration of EDI in activity, role modelling, and opportunities:

> **I guess like in the last few months or so, I suppose I have been pushing with working together. With organisations, whether that's universities...Just opening up more opportunities for people who want to play** *[X sport]*...**Like, we only** *[have]* **training once a week, so it's how can we open up more opportunities? Cos that could be a limiting** *[if]* **they can't make it,...then they're not playing.** *(Coach)*

> **I think my girls' stuff is me being a role model to them.** *(Coach)*

Actions, however, were highly dependent on individuals who had a particular interest linked to EDI and therefore, were influenced by individuals' biographies (Hylton, 2021). These pockets of work often lacked a joined-up approach and at a club level, the activity appeared to be more serendipitous than part of a deliberate or strategic plan:

> **I kind of mainly developed the girls'** *[sport]*, **which obviously was something that when I first started the club there was not a lot of...Took upon myself to develop the girls'** *[sport]* **clubs. That's what my kind of interest is.** *(Coach)*

The lack of an EDI-related vision, plan, or purpose for the club, along with individuals following their own agendas contributed to tensions, frustrations and even conflict. And suggested that perhaps inclusion was taken for granted and more rhetoric, viewed as straightforward, simple, and easy. With little consideration expressed about the building of inclusive culture/spaces and relationships. What this might look like in practice for them; how inconsistencies and contradictions might be addressed. Albeit in a performance context, Kamperman and Rankin-Wright (2023) suggest three overarching impediments to achieving equality implementation in practice: performance and inclusion as seemingly incompatible objectives; an emphasis on outcomes over processes; and rhetoric versus real action. In this project, tensions were noted between a more inclusive, participation-oriented focus and a performance focus which also encompassed emphasis on overcomes (i.e., winning):

> **I mean as a club we are inclusive. So, you come along, you join** *[X]* **club, and we are inclusive and … we're quite happy for you to be there and everyone will talk to you, and everyone will be your friend. But you pull the jersey on, be one of the…***[competitive]* **team…well, wining. That's it. Full stop. All we want to do…The problem is we're not big enough yet to have…a social team and… the** *[competitive team]*. *(Coach)*

> **But you know, we're a village club, we don't want to exclude people from being** *[part of]* **a village club. Being a village club doesn't** *[mean]* **people don't aspire to be very good** *[sport performers]* **as well.** *(Coach)*

> **I mean to me, it's still [about] winning, but that's my mentality and you know what I'm like, I think as a team you're judged by your win or lose.** *(Coach)*

Other EDI-related issues raised indicate awareness such as who is given priority for resources, opportunities, and pathways but less real action. Examples included: a) opportunities for girls as an afterthought after the boys were catered for; b) opportunities for those from more disadvantaged backgrounds due to financial implications or education provision (e.g., c.f. private school sport opportunities); c) whether the connections and next steps (pathways) especially for talent identified participants, were clear for all groups. Participants commented:

> **I believe passionately in giving kids from, you know, fairly limited financial backgrounds, an opportunity to play a sport, and this is undoubtedly a very unfair sport in terms of the finance, all the research shows that at our county squads are predominantly private, educated kids. The fact we start so young means that those private educated kids get lots more opportunities and just get better and better…It's a real struggle for kids to catch up, so from my perspective, anything that we can do to try and get kids on in that structure.** *(Coach)*

> **As much as it sort of might stick in my throat in terms of, it will be the posh kids who can afford to have that coaching and they're going to have that extra. That's the reality.** *(Coach)*

Furthermore, certain knowledge and skills may be valued more (e.g., playing experience, particularly men) which unknowingly devalues others and affects confidence (particularly women) (LaVoi & Dutove 2012; Karlik & Wolden, 2023). This can affect perceptions of who is deemed competent as a coach and why. Who deems themselves competent to coach and why? Who does not? Who responds to 'open' calls to get involved in coaching? Who does not? Who is actively recruited/encouraged and based on what characteristics? Who is not? Who has credibility to be a coach developer? What is this based on? Participants commented:

> **It's what you're comfortable with…like so if you've played** *[x sport]*, **you'd be more comfortable delivering a session whereas everything else that comes with it after, would be uncomfortable."** *(Coach)*

> **…***[I]* **started a course, I couldn't complete a course and just being left…not out of maliciousness or nastiness but things had to move on so you're lost in this system where do I go next and I'm not the only one that has experienced that…it can be a very isolating process…I've had to really stand-up cos of what I want to do, really put myself out there 'I want to do this, I want to do that'. I'm not sure other people have the confidence to do that.** *(Coach and coach supporter)*

A possible explanation for limited or piecemeal actions is the volunteer foundation of community sport clubs and that there may be distinctions between what Harris, et al. (2009) characterised as survival-oriented clubs (not necessarily looking for change, just managing to do what they can) and developmentally-oriented clubs (proactively seeking change and enhancement). What does this mean for coach development in these clubs? Are some coaches' and coach developers' also survival-oriented and others' development-oriented? Whether coaches and CDs are 'surviving' or 'seeking to develop', it is critical to remember they are volunteers and consider whether they have the 'space' to be more development oriented. The comments from participants suggest both orientations may be present:

> **We're volunteers…volunteers can only do what they can do…the pressures put on us as volunteers…***(Coach developer)*

> **I'm constantly trying to look at what I can do to improve how I can change different things that are set up and always trying to push myself coaching.** *(Coach)*

The AI-informed workshops provide a 'space' to explore what might be possible (discover and dream phases) and what is realistic (design and delivery phases) with regards to coaching and coach development in general and EDI-related activity more specifically. Considerations could include:

How does the wider culture and 'profile' (social structures/norms) of the sport play out in local clubs in relation to EDI-related thinking and activity to benefit participants, coaches and coach developers? Who is benefiting? Who is disadvantaged or marginalised?

Policy enactment 'on the ground' – what does this look like? Is it explicit? Is it aligned with what the NGB striving for?

What training and/or support is available? Does it serve to construct cultural boundaries rather than do away with them? How well does it support development of settings which nurture social relatedness and mutual understanding as the basis for inclusive practice and environments?

What does EDI look like for a club?
- How to bring a desire for inclusivity together with practical realities of running a club and coaching activities? (e.g., capacity, readiness)
- How to influence others to (re)consider, challenge, change views and practices to become more inclusive in their thinking and practices? Both club and individual coach levels? Is problem status being attached to the 'underrepresented' group and reinforcing rather than challenging engrained issues?
- How to differentiate and be inclusive within sessions? Is ability always the most important characteristics guiding differentiation practices?
- How to recruit and support a more diverse coaching workforce? What are the benefits to the sport, the club, and the members?

Theme 7:
Time for reconnecting, 'repair', rekindling and learning

Time was a mediating influence that underpinned the AI Process. Many of the coaches were 'time poor' as they had coaching, family, and work commitments.

> One thing that that no one can change is time. Some people might have loads of it, some people might have little of it. What you do with it, is a big thing. And what we want more of is time. Whether that be you're working 40-50 hours a week and you've got an hour. I want more time to learn, but I might not have it because I'm working. So, I spend as much time as humanly possible. And it's work. It's tying it into a day-to-day job. You need a work life balance. But then also unfortunately if you're a parent coach or just a grassroots coach, sometimes even an academy coach. You may have to sacrifice that hour of your down time if you want to progress. And there is just not enough hours in the day, but you wish it was more. *(Coach)*

Interestingly, coaches also expressed tension in terms of accessing their own sport. Here volunteer responsibilities to others conflicted with their own hobby and recreation. An example of this occurred in the canoe club, where on weekend trips coaches would often paddle rivers that are more suitable to others in the club than their own interests or skills.

The demands of the 'coach developers' in the groups were often substantial too. Many of these individuals had multiple roles in clubs and across their sports (e.g., coach, parent, committee member, coach developer, competition organiser). In the face of such challenges, the AI workshops provided a space for participants to reconnect with colleagues, 'repair' (Corsby, Jones, Thomas & Edwards, 2023), and to rekindle their enthusiasm for coaching:

> I think the workshop made it flip almost away from this really negative diagnosing problems environment. Although there were very open, we flipped very quickly to this idea of, 'Wow, we're all in this together'. We're helping each other out. We can recognize strengths in the room. The final sort of 30 minutes up then that actually the group decided together that one coach was particularly patient with these children. This opportunity to share and talk as opposed to be told and but actually, and I suppose just to finish with in terms of the workshop itself, I think it was a success and I think the one of the coaches actually said halfway through that 'this has been a real experience'. *(Review meeting)*

This is not to say that all workshops had immediate benefits. On the contrary, many workshops took between 90 and 120 minutes rather than the anticipated 60 minutes to arrive at actions.

> **Initial conversations were fairly damning of coach education more broadly and how it doesn't necessarily prepare them for their environment. Moved towards more strengths based as the session progressed.** *(Fieldnotes – coach workshop)*

> **Session started tentatively, the coaches looked a little nervous and this meant that the coach developer spoke first and led the conversation in the early stages. Each coach then described their journey into coaching. The first 30 mins then were perhaps less conversational and more people taking it in turns to share their thoughts/experiences.** *(Fieldnotes – coach workshop)*

Here time was spent learning about challenges, and discovering peoples' strengths that may have been developed in the lives prior to becoming a coach. In this context learning was not confined to time bound courses but rather the AI process helped generate a recognition of individual knowledge and skills developed over lifetimes. In this way the past was not behind the coaches (Sokolowski, 2000), and nor were the immediate challenges. Through the AI process, the biographies of the coaches came to be shared and began to influence how others might move forward. Thus, the past and future were key aspects of the present-day workshops.

As the workshops progressed, time mediated the learning between workshops. Coaches often needed 4-8 weeks to implement actions, and both these and workshops worked best as part of schedule that complemented particular sporting schedules (pre-seasons, half terms). Coach developers often took longer to plan and implement actions, perhaps being cautious about what they might be committing themselves too but also aware that the timing of activity was important to be successful (e.g., in-season, fitting with multiple coaches' schedules). At the end of the process several groups expressed the value of the researchers scheduling the AI workshops as it provided a stimulus and light form of 'accountability' for actions. It also ensured they took the time to reconnect, 'repair', rekindle their enthusiasm and learn.

Theme 8:
Appreciative Inquiry-framed workshops were generally productive

Appreciative inquiry principles and stages provided the initial framework for the workshops including the questions to work through. Early in the delivery of the workshops, however, it became apparent that although there was a list of questions for each stage of the AI process, it was more helpful to work with the AI principles and adapt our questions as the conversations progressed:

> maybe the value in the AI is probably in the principles. And possibly the stages and the questions then are just example templates…the AI process it, it's I suppose it's a direction of travel, isn't it? And the emphasis on pulling on the positives and trying, so you're trying to come away from a session with what we're going to do next. *(Review meeting)*

The process and principles of AI meant that participants were 'given' a voice and were the central focus in the meetings. As Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2003, p. 78) described, the "principles of appreciative inquiry point to one simple message – appreciative inquiry is about conversations that matter." Consistent with this view, the workshops were focused on what mattered to the coaches and coach developers. A coach developer commented:

> I think it's been quite useful…I think it's really nice that we can get together and have a chat about the things that are not defined by the course or the orientation, or you know, whatever it is we're doing, because that's usually when we see each other, when we're doing you know, an update for a training course…or something like that. So, it's nice to be away from that quite strict…kind of, you know,…to do a bit of free-wheeling. *(Coach developer)*

Within the AI process, the researcher was a facilitator of discussions. Offering a direction of travel (in this case, supporting and developing coaching and coach development in the club) but not a road map of how to get there. Instead, the topics for discussion and the outcomes generated were decided and constructed by the participants. For example, one coach commented:

> We've got, I don't know, 30 odd teams and the first time anybody's ever sat down in this club and actually had this sort of conversation shows where the gap is, if you like. So, I'm interested to understand from that perspective how we do support. With whoever's help, because we're not where we want to be. *(Coach)*

The principles of AI largely mirror autonomy supportive literature and wider concepts of the Self Determination theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000; 2017; Allen & Hodge, 2006). SDT (Deci & Ryan, 2000) focuses on the concept of basic needs, proposing that satisfaction of the basic psychological needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness represent core conditions for psychological well-being and motivation, independent of context. Within the context of AI, the groups had meaningful choices (a central component of autonomy support) in terms of the topic of discussion, development of a vision and plans for the future, and agreed actions. The facilitator and AI principles provided structure (a central component of competence development support) to the conversations without controlling its direction. The combination of structure and autonomy support has been shown to be more effective than autonomy support alone when supporting learning (Vansteenkiste, et al., 2012). A coach developer acknowledged the value of the workshop structure:

> I think it's been good to have a structure and it's been good for you to prompt us and remind us of where we got to before…so yeah, it's been. It's been useful to have that underlying structure… And reminder rather than just getting together and having a chat, for sure. *(Coach developer)*

The interplay between structure and autonomy within the workshops was also evident in the participants' desire for 'soft' accountability. A researcher commented:

> We also discussed the experience of the workshops – they like the accountability. They were intrigued by having to take control. We also discussed what next – they would keep AI on, tie it into the workshops they are delivering and then want me to check it for accountability. *(Fieldnotes – CD workshop)*

The workshops, AI principles and emphasis on uncovering strengths supported participants' connections with others involved in coaching or coach development (i.e., relatedness support). For example, participants acknowledged the importance of being able to sit together and discuss the mechanisms of development.

> I think having this and sort of reminding myself, you know, that there are those who work in the same fields and who have the same or some of the same problems, even if some of them are different problems, you know, and it's really good to know and to sort of be able to think, OK, how do we how do we all make coaching better and how do we help people who are who are moving into coaching or who are at the stage where they do need to progress their coaching? It's been good. *(Coach developer)*

Through the needs-supportive approach of the researcher delivering the workshop, participants were also able to be action focussed. Within the cricket workshop, it was observed that although the initial outset of the workshop appeared exploratory in nature, clear actions were able to be agreed by the end of the session.

> **The participants seemed to enjoy the discussion and were even surprised that they had ended up with a clear action to pursue. I think we all went into the discussion a little unsure of where it might head, but left feeling pretty satisfied that it had been a productive use of our time.**
> *(Fieldnotes - CD workshop)*

These findings highlight the importance of co-constructing actions and the poetic principles of AI where the participants are given autonomy to decide what it is they want to focus on (Enright, et al., 2014). Participants leading the decision-making process also promotes a sense competence within, as they are choosing their own actions, which are more likely to be perceived to be within their own capabilities (Deci & Ryan, 2000). The AI approach proved particularly useful for the current project because the workshops sought to be positive and action oriented. They were largely productive, generating an array of outcomes to enhance the connection of and support for coaches and coach developers (see Table 4).

Table 4. Outcomes from the AI-framed workshops

Workshop Outcomes
Feeling connected (relatedness) - Appreciate opportunity to share, be listened to, cathartic, valued
Sense of achievement (competence) - Pride in actions and success
Open opportunity for learning driven by the topics they want to discuss (autonomy)
Motivating • Keen to work on actions developed in the workshop (intrinsic motivation) • Success breeds continuation and building (competence motivation) • Element of accountability to someone else (identified regulation)
Space for thinking and planning • Space for reflection (e.g., spark to bring experiences and ideas together and prompt action; stimulating thinking, consider different views) • Vehicle for change – what might be possible and how, planning for action
Internal informal learning opportunities organised and delivered **A: Knowledge development** • Technical detail • Innovative ideas • Work through problems • Coaching forum • Better understanding of needs (able to help/support) **B: Practical development** (e.g., coaching practice) • Conscious attempts to change behaviours: •   - Patience (awareness, monitor, control) •   - Timing of feedback •   - Improvements in players behaviours, learning, engagement • Ad hoc development sessions • Planned programme of CPD throughout the season • Coaching coaches' group **C: Logistical support** (e.g., funding sources, regulations, paperwork)

Theme 9:
Challenges when using an Appreciative Inquiry approach

As with literature from areas such as health care (Merriel, et al., 2022), and PE (Enright, Hill, Sandford, & Gard, 2014; Sargent & Casey, 2021), and consistent with recent studies in coaching (e.g., Clements, Morgan, & Harris, 2022), AI generally provided a positive experience for participants (coaches and coach developers) including supporting learning, repair and rekindling of their enthusiasm (see theme 8). This does not mean the process was wholly unproblematic. Rather a range of challenges were encountered, and facilitators required skill and an understanding of the AI principles to navigate these challenges. For instance, the size of the groups initially provided challenges to coaches:

> **Large numbers and competing interests (were challenging). (Fieldnotes – coach workshop).**

> **Given the smaller numbers at this workshop compared to the first workshop, this session was easier to facilitate and, as a result, coaches were afforded more space to discuss and contribute as individuals.** *(Field notes – coach workshop)*

Facilitators also used skill to redirect conversations to less vocal members of the group, to focus on local more than national issues, and to reframe deficit thinking.

> **He (a coach developer in a coaching group) is quite dominant in that environment anyway, and I think if I didn't facilitate those conversations, those questions, then perhaps it would just be a monologue of him talking for an hour and a half. So I'm just mindful of including other people.** *(Fieldnotes – coach workshop)*

> **And like most of the coaches, as you would do with children or participants, they jumped into diagnosing problems, and they diagnosed problems with national coach education. So, I'm not an expert, but it's got to be strengths based, so as soon as they go to this idea of negatives and problems and diagnosing problems, I'm pulling that back towards a strength-based approach. That was difficult to be honest to start with.** *(Review meeting)*

This empathetic and somewhat democratic redirection work has echoes of Rogerian principles (see Rowley & Lester, 2016), albeit while participants maybe have felt 'unloading their frustrations as therapeutic', to be clear AI is not therapy. When coupled with time spent managing larger groups, this often meant that workshops took longer than 60 minutes.

> **In terms of the how the session went, it was the best part of an hour and 40 minutes. So there's a long time and considering that, the last 10-15 minutes I had to rush a little bit because I was very conscious of this being free time that people give up.** *(Review meeting)*

In other areas, AI has been used over longer workshops, away days and four-day summits (Whitney & Cooperrider, 1998). These provide better opportunities to involve all members of an organisation and perhaps outside stakeholders (e.g., facility providers, national governing bodies etc.). That said, such time commitments may not be feasible in community sport contexts.

> **Community coaches want to support the development of children and players but are juggling time, expertise, resource constantly.** *(Fieldnotes – coach workshop)*

The complexity of coaching in community contexts also influenced on the length of workshops and provided challenges. In keeping with theme 5, tensions in areas such as a focus on performance versus participation had to be negotiated by participants and the facilitators.

> **They were mindful and cautious about imposing a managerialist structure on the club. People don't want it in their leisure time.** *(Fieldnotes – coach workshop)*

In these scenarios the AI workshops provided both a mechanism for tensions to reveal themselves and in some cases to be addressed. This reflects the different priorities, values, and interests between coaches, even within single clubs. Whilst challenging at the club context, the differences were even starker in the coach developer groups with members from distinct organisations. Without a shared context or joint enterprise where individuals work together (Wegner, 1998; Li, et al., 2009) these groups were harder to schedule, facilitate a consensus and to maintain a momentum of actions. The process was also more effective for coaches than coach developers which reflects the shared interests of coaches jointly working within specific organisations.

> **My coach developer group was very geographically spread. So, we have people from all around the UK, very different sports, very different experiences (of coach developers) … but they didn't necessarily have the confidence or recognition of I'm doing this work or this is valuable or this is the one at the many hats that I'm wearing. They don't know each other (coach developers), so the processes have been much slower. They haven't worked together.** *(Review meeting)*

> **My coach developer group is so diverse, sometimes we talk across each other because of the sport specific knowledge.** *(Review meeting)*

In sum, whilst generally productive, those wishing to undertake AI informed work in coaching settings should be aware of the challenges including timing, power, and tensions within the contexts. To support them, AI facilitators may benefit from training which foretells these challenges and uses AI principles to overcome them.

Summary of Key Findings

Lived experiences of community coaches

The community coaches we encountered in the project are committed individuals who provide participation in a range of activities. These clubs are valuable community assets providing positive physical, social and emotional opportunities for individuals and the coaches themselves. During this valuable community work, coaches face a wide range of challenges both 'on and off the field' which contribute to feeling under prepared for the realities of coaching. These challenges include tensions in the community sport context (e.g., participation v performance, complexity of inclusion), the dynamic environment (e.g., weather or seasonality of the sport season), and can also include navigating the micro-politics of community clubs (e.g., agenda of powerful stakeholders). Coaches' biographies affect knowledge and skills (e.g., technical knowledge developed as a former player; organisational skills developed as willing parent or teacher) and their knowledge requirements. Here coach learning should be considered over time and across coaches' lives. This includes the time before coaches began their role, learning on formal coach education courses, but also the ongoing ad-hoc informal coach development that may occur during coach development workshops, between coaching sessions, and across seasons.

Lived experiences of community coach developers

Coach developers in our project were often club members who sought to enjoy their own sport, who also invested volunteer time in helping others to also have positive experience. Many of those individuals who support and assist coaches in community sport settings did not necessarily recognise the title 'coach developer'. In part, this is because coach developers themselves fulfil a wide array of critical functions for clubs (e.g., club member, committee members, coaches). Whilst linked to coaching, many functions are not directly aimed at improving coaches' performance instead may focus on general support and care for coaches or club development and administration (e.g., booking facilities). Here the forms and functions of coach development involve additional labour for already busy individuals. Thus, coach development typically occurs ad-hoc when other roles and tasks are fulfilled or when there is an explicit need/incident. When coach development does occur, its essence is rooted in a caring relational practice. It can manifest in varied ways (e.g., supporting coaches to access courses, mentoring, emotional support), and we received reports of coaches benefitting from the care provided by coach developers. Critically, much of the coach developers' action was not strategic nor informed by an explicit coach development framework but was rooted in their own coaching knowledge or experience. Tensions within clubs (e.g., agendas of powerful stakeholder including committees and coaches), often the result of a lack of understanding, appreciation, or clear guidance about coach development, can negatively affect the work and well-being of coach developers. These may be areas for further support to help these benevolent volunteers who support others in clubs.

Appreciative Inquiry is a promising process for in situ support of coaches and coach developers

The AI-framed workshops provided an impetus for coaches and coach developers to connect, to share and discuss coaching. This time was valued as a form of coach repair and as a means of rekindling coaches' 'spark'. Such benefits may be achieved by simply bringing coaches together. However, through skilful facilitation and guided by the principles of appreciative inquiry, coaches and coach developers were supported to recognise strengths in each other and their clubs, envision and clarify the future, and formulate concrete realistic actions they could implement to develop coaches in their clubs (e.g., establishing a coaching forum, undertaking conscious attempts to change coach behaviour such as timing of feedback, planning a season long programme of CPD). These interactions led to some positive feelings amongst coaches and coach developers (e.g., feeling connected, rejuvenated motivation, sense of achievement when actions were complete). The impact was not uniform across all groups (e.g., smaller groups engaged better than larger groups, coaches and single sport groups engaged better than mixed groups and coach developer groups). AI also required facilitators to have an understanding of the principles, be flexible with time, and skilfully navigate deficit thinking (e.g., less relevant focus on national issue and powerful voices in the workshops). Thus, the AI approach and workshop format provides a promising mechanism through which community sport coaches and coach developers can be supported, and future work should consider the potential of AI to provide situated democratic and positive change on a wider basis, beyond this pilot.

Recommendations

Based on the findings we recognise that coach learning and coach development can happen well in situ.
We recommend it is likely to be best supported with scaffolds, such as:

1	Formally scheduled opportunities (time and space) for people to come together in their clubs, within their seasons, to reconnect, repair, rekindle and learn. This would recognise coaches as participants in clubs too and formally allocate time to their development. Organisations such as national governing bodies, leagues, tournament providers and clubs could consider how to implement this in 'naturally' occurring moments.
2	An evidence-based learning package(s) relevant to community sport clubs, coach developers, and coaches, that provides: a) Examples of club-wide coach development strategies or frameworks to support the place and practice of coach development within wider club strategies. b) Summaries of coach development methods, (e.g., AI, mentoring, think aloud), that may aid coach developers to support coaches in community contexts. c) Illustrative case studies of how these methods can be deployed by coach developers in community clubs to aid their everyday processes (e.g., recruiting parent/performer-coaches, inducting new coaches, supporting coaches with changing challenges across seasons). d) An awareness of power and micro-political contexts in community sport clubs. e) A recognition of individuals' capacity to act as agents of change (e.g., inclusion, diversity) f) The development of knowledge and skills to positively influence others (e.g., negotiation) in these contexts (e.g., supporting others to learn).

These learning packages may be provided through formal, non-formal or informal opportunities.

To further understand coach development and coach learning in the community context we recommend research:

3	Reviews and synthesises the evidence base on coach development in UK community sport clubs.
4	Provides empirical case study research that explores coach development within the context of community club development and in relation to sport management frameworks frameworks (e.g., club development).
5	Explores the effectiveness of AI when delivered in different contexts (e.g., new clubs) with local club coach developers as facilitators.

For clubs considering AI as a means of supporting coaches, at this stage we recommend:

6	Principle based training (i.e., AI is in situ, strengths based, involves facilitation with people) is provided for those who intend to deliver appreciative inquiry-framed workshops. Organisations such as UK Coaching, national governing bodies of sport, leagues, tournament providers and clubs could consider how to implement this.
7	Carefully deployed external support for coach developers intending to utilise AI (e.g., advice on AI workshops, co-delivering the first three AI workshops, mentoring coach developers across an AI season).

Acknowledgements

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Appendix 1: Methodology

Research design

A multidisciplinary multi-cycle action research approach (Figure 1) was adopted for this project. This approach was ideal to understand the lived experiences of coaches and coach developers in community sport as well as pilot a programme of appreciative inquiry (AI) informed workshops. AI reflects a strengths-based approach that counter to deficit, 'problem to fix', perspectives, encourages people to value (appreciate) what works well and envision this occurring more frequently (Sargent & Casey, 2021). AI emphasises positive collaboration between researchers and practitioners as a means of appreciating existing strengths, previous successes, and opportunities for innovative practice.

AI is grounded in five principles:
1) Constructionist – world is socially constructed through language and conversation
2) Simultaneity – asking a question begins change
3) Anticipatory – human move in the direction their imagined futures
4) Positive – momentum for change requires positive affect and social boding;
5) Humanised (poetic) – people have agency in what they explore
(Cooperrider, & Whitney, 2001; Cooperrider, et al., 2008; Enright, et al., 2014)

When applied in action research, AI typically takes the form of 5 stages:
1) Define – the topic
2) Discover – what is already working
3) Dream – overall vision
4) Design – options to make the vision happen
5) Deliver – plan for action
(Cooperrider, & Whitney, 2001; Enright, et al., 2014)

Through AI, we supported participants (coaches and coach developers) to shape their activities during the pilot programme whilst also gathering in-depth and situated insights into their experiences.

There were 3 AI cycles:
1) Soon after project initiation
2) Mid-programme
3) Late-programme

Figure 1. Multi-cycle action-research overview

Pilot Programme	Action Research	Cycle Activity	Appreciative Inquiry Cycle
Project Initiation Early Coach Development (CD) activity	Cycle 1	**Workshops with existing groups of coaches and local developers in person** *(if possible)* (90mins/group)	**Clarifying & Appreciating:** Discovering where we are as coaches and coach developers **Envisioning:** Dreaming what could be (in the pilot and more broadly) **Co-Constructing:** Designing a shared vision for the next few weeks within the pilot and more **Broadly Innovating:** Delivering and acting upon the workshop
Mid-programme CD activity	Cycle 2	**Workshops with participants online** (60mins/group)	
Late-programme CD activity	Cycle 3	**Workshops with participants online** (60mins/group)	

Participants

A total of 58 participants (coaches = 32; coach developers = 26) engaged in the project.
Participants coached or supported coaches in:

cricket (16)	disability sport (4)	rock climbing (2)
football (15)	sea kayaking (3)	whitewater kayaking (1)
kayaking (7)	pentathlon (3)	flat water kayak racing (1)
paddlesports (4)	hockey (2)	

We recruited 6 community coaching groups:
football (2); disability sport (rugby and basketball), pentathlon, cricket, paddlesports)

Each group involved 3 to 7 coaches and 1 coach developer from the same context. In addition, we recruited and formed 6 coach developer groups representing different clubs and sports (cricket, sea kayaking, football, paddlesports, hockey, rock climbing, flatwater kayaking).

Participant sampling

Participants were recruited through the research team's networks in community sport and UK Coaching networks. We sought diversity across the participants with regards to demographic characteristics including gender, age of coached participants (e.g., child/adult), rural/urban, socio-economic background, ethnicity, disability, and UK geography. Despite our efforts, women, disability and ethnic groups other than White British were underrepresented in our participant sample. Table 5 provides an overview of participants. Figures 2-4 provide age and gender breakdown for all participants, coaches and coach developers.

Table 5. Participants' demographic information

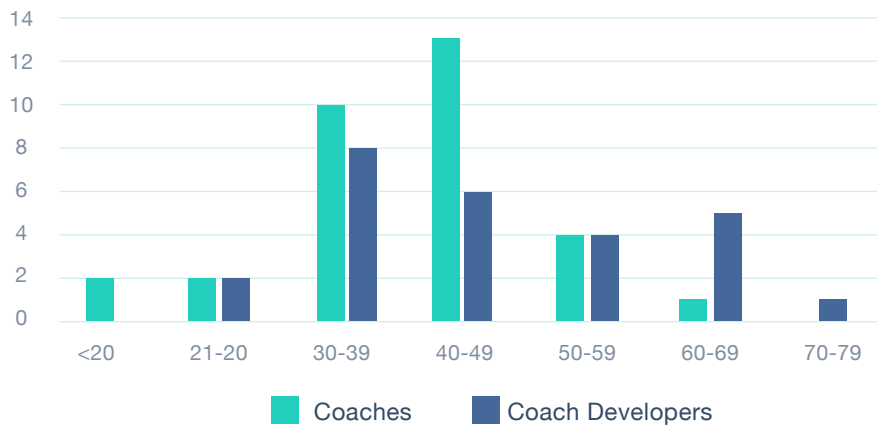|	Coaches	Coach Developers
Total	32	26
Gender	6 women; 26 men	9 women; 17 men
Ethnicity	22 White British; 7 British; 3 White;	17 White British; 4 Black Caribbean; 3 White; 2 British
Sport participation	0 – 55 years (M=20.48)	0 – 54 years (M=25.77)
Coaching	1 – 30 years (M=8.04)	2 – 51 years (M=15.17)
Coach supporting	-	0 – 40 years (M=8.66)

Figure 2. Participants by role and age group

Figure 3. Coaches by age group and gender

Challenges and opportunities for
Community Sport Coach Development
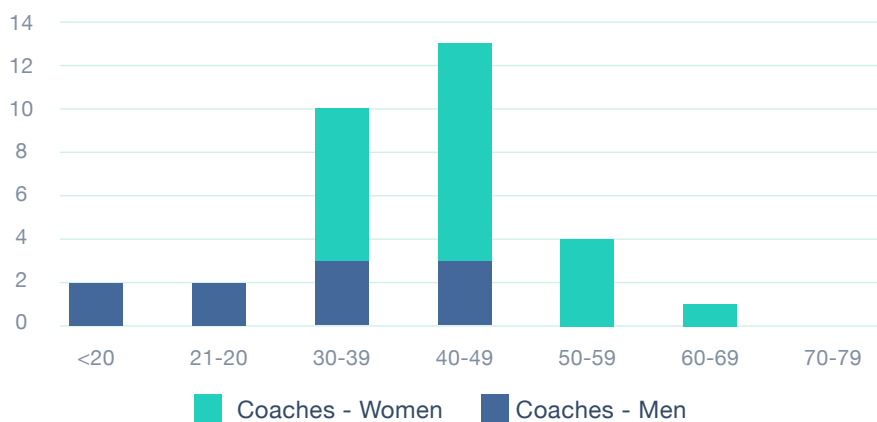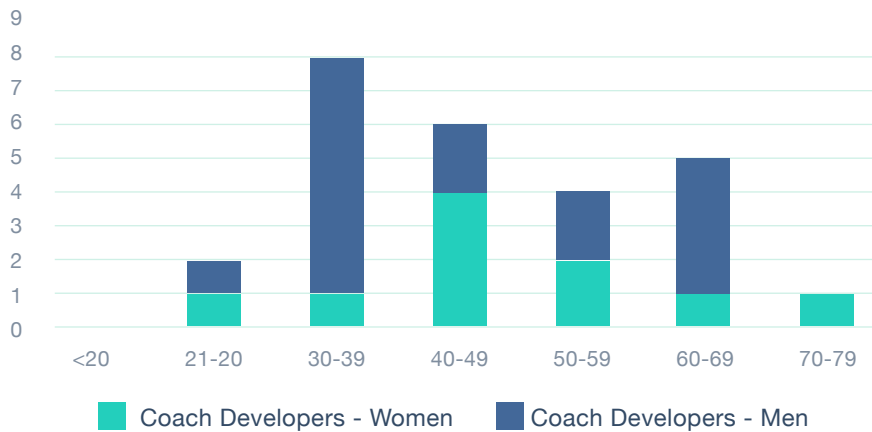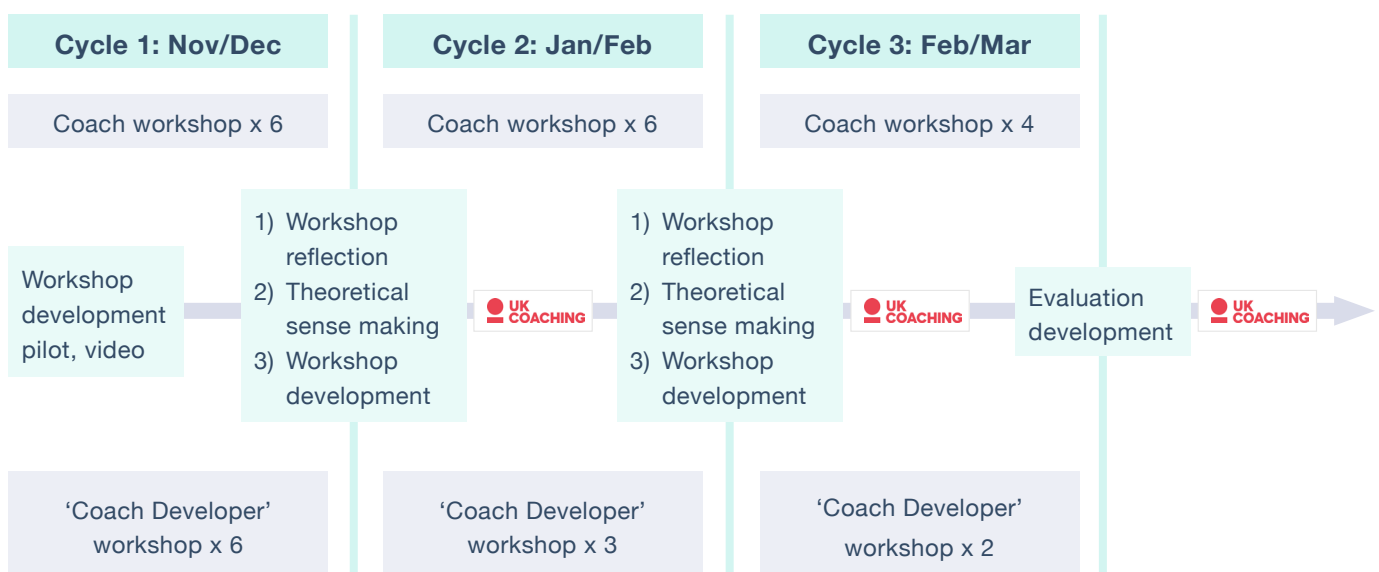An appreciative inquiry project

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Figure 4. Coach developers by age group and gender

Procedure

Drawing on established networks and conducting in person workshops in the first cycle (where practical) enabled us to build on existing relationships. This was critical for our in-depth exploration of participants' lived experiences in community sport coaching and increased the likelihood of participants full engagement in the programme and research. Each group was invited to engage in 3 workshops. Where practical, the first workshop for the coaches were conducted in person at a location convenient for the group. Subsequent sessions were either conducted in person or online via MS Teams platform dependent on participants' preference and feasibility. As the coach developers came from diverse parts of the UK their workshops were all conducted online via MS Teams platform. A total of 27 workshops were delivered (16 coach workshops and 11 coach developer workshops). Each workshop lasted 60-120 minutes. Workshops were recorded, written fieldnotes were documented, and review meetings were held and also recorded (see Figure 5 for an overview of the research procedures).

Figure 5. Overview of research procedures

Challenges and opportunities for
Community Sport Coach Development
An appreciative inquiry project

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Data collection methods

Workshop focus groups

The AI approach to participants' workshops meant that the workshops also served as focus groups for data gathering. The workshops were facilitated by members of the research team who have experience facilitating coach development activities. The AI process involved participants as collaborators to improve their practice through cycles of clarifying, appreciating, envisioning, co-constructing, and innovating. This provided insights into participants' experiences in community sport, established the focus for cycles of coach support/development activity, and explored the experiences and outcomes during each cycle. Consistent with action research, the exact questions were adapted to the stage of the programme, shaped by the participants, as well as insights gained from earlier cycles (see Figure 6 for an example).

Researcher fieldnotes

In addition to the workshop focus groups, researcher fieldnotes were kept. These provided an overview of the researchers' experiences during the workshop and reflection afterwards. The fieldnotes sought to capture a brief descriptive account about who, what, where, and when in relation to notable 'moments' during the workshop. They also captured the researchers' sensory notes, i.e., what they saw and felt as well as interpretations about coach learning and coach development and tentative theoretical insights.

Research team review discussions

The research team also engaged in review discussions after each round of workshops. The purpose of these was to enable those who had delivered workshops to share and discuss their experiences and reflections on:

1) Process of AI-grounded workshop delivery, workshop engagement by participants and the impact on participants.
2) Interpretations of coaches' challenges and actions.
3) Interpretations of coach developers' challenges and actions.

Figure 6. Appreciative inquiry framework for coach-focused and coach developer-focused activity

AI Action Research	AI Initiation / Early Stage	AI Mid / Later Stages	AI Initiation / Early Stage	AI Mid / Later Stages
Clarifying: Define the focus	What is it like to be a community coach?	What is it like working with a CD?	What has it been like to be a coach developer in community sport?	What is it like working with the coach?
Appreciating: Discover what is occurring	What is going well? Not so well?	What is different in your practice?	What is going well? Not so well?	What is different in your practice?
Envisioning: Dream about possibilities	What else might be possible?	What is going well? Not so well?	What else might be possible?	What is going well? Not so well?
Co-constructing: Design a plan	How would a CD be useful?	What else might be possible?	What would working like that look and feel like?	What else might be possible?
	What would working with a CD look and feel like?	What would that look and feel like?		What would that look and feel like?
Innovating: Deliver the plan	What would have to happen to get there?	What has to happen to get there?	What has to happen to get there?	What has to happen to get there?

Analysis approach

To make sense of the data, the research team completed a narrative analysis and produced six pedagogical case studies. The narrative analysis enabled the research team to explore the stories participants told and integrate data collected from the multiple sources. From this the team generated nine themes that captured the experiences of community sport coaches and coach developers as well as the AI-workshop process. To provide in-depth insights the data were analysed from a range of theoretical perspectives. Due to the complexity of coaching and coach development it is necessary, but rare to have these multiple perspectives combined in a single study. The pedagogical case studies share creative non-fiction narratives of participants' experiences and potential to support coaches and coach developers. They are excellent ways of learning about and from coaches and coach developers. This is because they present narrative stories that can ethically and evocatively share the lived experiences of participants. Secondly, informed by the solution-focused approach inherent in appreciative inquiries, each case prompts exploration of the positive techniques and operational steps that can support coaches and coach developers. The cases studies are complemented by analytical themes and theoretical analysis to further enhance our understanding and consideration of the lived experiences of community sport coaches and local coach developers.

Appendix 2: Appreciative Inquiry Workshop Guide

Appreciating Inquiry in Sport Coaching (workshop 1)

Define	Discover	Dream	Design	Deliver
Topic to work on	What is already working?	Overall vision	Options to make it happen	Action planning

Introductory Principles

Constructivist	Simultaneity	Anticipatory	Positivity	Poetic
valuing dialogue through organisations	inquiring and changing at the same time	valuing positive images of the future	capturing being good and using that as momentum and joy	valuing humans, their lives, emotions, perspectives

Workshop guidance

Structure	Example statements	Notes
Introduction	Today we will discuss our coaching experiences including past, present and future. It is a great opportunity to share what is going well and what we can do in the future.	
Defining the topic	1. What has brought you here today?[1] 2. What is it that you want more of in your coaching / coach development? 3. What coaching/coach development topic[2] will we discuss?	[1]make sure to ask the coaches first and not defer to the coach developer. [2]Turn focus into a neutral topic to explore.
Discovering our strengths	1. Why do you care about X? 2. Can you tell me about a time (past or present when you were at your best in X? • **Probe:** What was that like, how did that feel? • **Prompt:** In terms of X can you tell me about a time when you did X really well? • **Probes:** When was that? What was going on? Who was there? What were you doing? What were you saying, or not saying? How were you feeling? What did you see? 3. What contributed most to the success of the effort in 1+2? • **Probe:** What did you do well during 1+2? 4. What was your intention during 1? • **Prompt:** What's your deeper purpose in coaching (the big "why" that is really worthy of our best effort).	X=coaching/coach development topic identified. Be mindful of people emphasising negatives and dominating conversations. Try to capture strengths.
Dreaming	1. What are the opportunities to do X coaching better? 2. If the X/coaching/coach development opportunities are taken what impact would that have (on whom)? 3. If X/coaching/coach development was done very well, how would it look (team)	Positive aspirational
Designing small steps	1. What small changes could we make right now that would really improve x/coaching/coach development? 2. How/which coach developer support this (coaches and coach developer perspective)? 3. How would know success has occurred?	Make this achievable (1 small thing), supported by coach developer, but also the idea of them bringing 'evidence' of the change to the next workshop.
Destiny	1. So which of your strengths are you going to deploy to make this work? 2. How can the coach developer support this? • **Probes:** • Whose support do we need to make this work? • What support can we access outside of the group to help us with our action? • How will we communicate with them? • What technological/equipment/financial resources to we need? • What rewards and recognition will we provide and receive? 3. Clarifying (in appropriate terms) – what have we agreed as our action and where has that come from? 4. What do you think success in the project will mean for you and for others? 5. What future is being created by addressing these changes?	Actionable, clarifying in different language and finishing on a positive aspiration.
Closure	So, just as we finish, I can't wait to hear how you get on at the next session on…If you want to bring anything to show how it has worked or hasn't feel free.	

Appendix 3:
AI Workshop Action Planner

Documenting Action (workshop 1)

Project Name/Description

Purpose/vision

Overview in bullets (what, when, where how)

Action	Help Needed	Due date

What might success look like?

Northumbria University NEWCASTLE

LIVERPOOL JOHN MOORES UNIVERSITY

UK COACHING

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