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## **Distributed Leadership in the Tourism Industry**

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**Word Count: 1950**

## **Distributed Leadership in the Tourism Industry**

The concept of distributed leadership has been quickly adopted in the 21<sup>st</sup> century by diverse scholars and practitioners (Beirne, 2017). Distributed leadership has been used interchangeably with terms such as shared leadership, team leadership, participative leadership and democratic leadership by some researchers. This approach has been given little attention outside the education sector. The little research done in the tourism sector is inclined to views from western nations and America. None of these studies has examined the views of experienced people from Asia in particular. This research is to investigate distributed leadership in Dubai's tourism industry by applying qualitative research method. The tourism industry has experienced a shift from its trait-based concept to the approach-based concept. Furthermore, improvement in the undertaking of this research are considered and displayed.

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## **Introduction**

In this global era, for sustainability and competitiveness, companies adapt strategies and leadership styles in order to thrive in the competitive business environment. Harris (2009) proposes that the concept of distributed leadership emerged as a new leadership architecture from different authors in the past. Distributed leadership has been extensively researched and applied in the education sector. The most detailed models for distributed leadership are also based on the educational sector as well. It is not to imply that no research on distributed leadership is done in other sectors. However, distributed leadership is not extensively researched in other fields as it is done in educational sector. Also, the little research done in other sectors does tend to converge on the same analysis and conclusions drawn by researchers working in the educational sector. There are varying definitions of distributed leadership. However, there is no consensus on a specific definition since each researcher defines the term differently. The term 'distributed leadership' has been used interchangeably with terms such as shared leadership, team leadership, participative leadership and democratic leadership by some researchers (Duif et al., 2013; Harris et al., 2007; Harrison, 2018; Jones, 2014). The purpose of this paper is to analyse the role of distributed leadership in the tourism industry.

## **What is Distributed Leadership?**

Perhaps distributed leadership may be most aptly defined as:

*“Anarchic misalignment: where leaders pursue their own goals independently of one another and there is ‘active rejection, on the part of some or many organizational leaders, of influence from others about what they should be doing in their own sphere of influence.”* (Leithwood et al., 2006:344).

Bolden (2011) greatly emphasised on process and systems to formulate three kinds of distributed leadership including collaborated distribution, collective distribution and coordinated distribution. Collaborated distribution as denoted by Bolden (2011) includes two or more people working together in the same place and time following the same leadership activity. Collective distribution works individually or separately but depends on each other to enact a particular leadership routine. Bolden (2011) further stated that the coordinated distribution includes two or greater than two individuals that work in a structured and sequenced way to accomplish a particular leadership routine.

In the tourism sector, Benson and Blackman (2011) examined distributed leadership from the islands and found that teamwork and sharing of vital information increase tourism visits. Also, Zach (2016) investigated leadership for collaboration in tourism organisations. The study concluded that delegation of specific duties to the subordinate staff increases efficiency in the management decisions. Another study by Haven-Tang and Jones (2012) also indicated that distributed leadership in the tourism industry improves management decisions thus increasing tourist visits. Moreover, José Valente et al. (2014) examined leadership capacity and concluded that notions about transformational leadership are closely related to those of distributed leadership. Finally, Pechlaner et al. (2014) explored distributed leadership and found that the aspect of distributed leadership entails collaboration between leadership departments overseeing marketing and resource-based strategies. Distributed leadership in different sectors face various challenges

while practising their leadership roles. For instance, Benson and Blackman (2011) report that there are cultural challenges in distributed leadership positions. According to Ocker et al. (2011), leaders face different challenges as a result of cultural differences and varying working environments.

### **Context of Research**

The few studies on distributed leadership in the tourism industry are inclined to views from western nations and America. None of these studies has examined the views of experienced people from Asia in particular. This implies that knowledge on distributed leadership from Asian tourism sector is minimal. Therefore, it is worthy to understand the concept in the Asian tourism sector.

The main aim of this research is to investigate distributed leadership in Dubai's tourism industry in order to identify the attributes, benefits and challenges of distributed leadership.

For articulation of the variety of ways that distributed leadership can occur, various authors have developed taxonomies where each of the frameworks is derived from previous research and thus applied in various contexts. Gronn (2002) and Spillane (2006) focussed on the interpersonal dynamics and the types of collaborations that people can have for achievement of shared outcomes.

The researchers applied the activity theory to understand distributed leadership. Also, Hermann (2016) reports that the distributed leadership concept originated in the early 2000s within the anthropological, sociological, physiological and cognitive theories.

### **Relevance of the Research**

Findings by Harris (2008) established that distributed leadership has a substantial bearing on organisational growth in situations in which structural and cultural barricades are appropriately addressed. This includes reducing bureaucracy by giving individuals the power to engage in leadership roles based on their personal capabilities. This autonomy is important in keeping individuals engaged and committed to their responsibilities. The researcher concluded that the leadership distribution mattered in how schools develop and engage in organisational change. As mentioned earlier, distributed leadership is not researched in as much detail as it has been in education sector. Our research will confirm or refute that distributed leadership has similar effects in tourism sector as it has in educational sector.

### **Methodology**

This study seeks to investigate distributed leadership, which implies a focus on social and cultural aspects through an interpretivist philosophy. The data collected and analysed which are meant to develop meaningful insights for the issue under research are effectively achieved by engaging in a qualitative research methodology.

Qualitative research is an inductive approach that facilitates developing novel insights about a phenomenon whose data is difficult to quantify. This approach entails the use of qualitative data, which can be gathered through various means, including interviews, documentation, and observations with the intent of explaining a social phenomenon (Reichertz, 2004). The qualitative

research methods are effective in studies such as ours, which require the identification of intangible factors (Cassell and Symon, 2004). From this perspective, the qualitative approach expands the bases on which the research can address distributed leadership by incorporating various intangible factors such as social norms, socioeconomic aspects, gender roles, religion, and other relevant aspects that can contribute to addressing the research questions and their impact might not be obvious. The qualitative approach also offers an opportunity to develop better understanding through the interpretation of quantitative studies and complex realities associated with the issue under investigation.

The subjectivity of qualitative research ensures that investigators and participants bring their histories, assumptions, values, points of view, as well as politics into the research. Resultantly, the knowledge developed is likely to reflect some bias. This makes it imperative to engage in reflexivity, which entails reflecting on the insights developed and the role of the researcher in developing the new knowledge (Tang, Coffey, Elby, and Levin, 2010).

This research study will involve participants from the tourism sector in Dubai. Furthermore, the research focuses on leadership, which means that appropriate data based on the interpretivist point of view can only be offered by individuals in leadership positions. The target population for this study is the managers/leaders of tourism organisations and the Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing (DTCM) in Dubai. Semi-structured interviews will be employed for the primary research as they are effective for gathering qualitative data because they are entirely text-based and facilitate a flexible approach in accomplishing research (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016).

Data collected in the research process becomes useful if it is analysed appropriately to inform the research questions and address the objectives. The data collected through qualitative research needs to be organised and interpreted properly for the exact findings of the research to be determined. Notably, Marshall and Rossman (2014) have argued that there is no single approach of qualitative data analysis that is deemed right or effective. In this light, the nature and amount of the data collected shapes how the analysis is conducted (Creswell, 2003). Although there are different approaches proposed by researchers that include narratives, triangulation, and thematic analysis, there are common procedures employed in the qualitative analysis to allow researchers to determine if the data gathered responds to the research questions to meet the research objectives. These approaches are centred on identifying the patterns and themes that emerge from the data. The research incorporates a large body of knowledge and information that emerges from the responses offered by different participants. This requires inductive reasoning, sorting, and categorisation based on key themes. From this perspective, the study employs thematic analysis to establish the insights that emerge in the investigation. According to Vaismoradi et al. (2016), the thematic analysis entails extracting information that is meaningful and characteristics to specific themes emerging in the research. The analysis in this study will be achieved by adopting the data analysis spiral method presented by Creswell (2003). The approach includes the following steps: Organising the data into several forms, Perusing the data several times to identify the complete picture, Identification of general themes and Integrating and summarising the data for the audience.

Quality will be assessed through four aspects including dependability, conformability, transferability and credibility (Pandey and Patnaik, 2014).

After developing the interview guides with insights drawn from the literature review and premised on the research questions and objectives, a pilot study will be undertaken. At least four respondents

will be involved in the pilot study to achieve a broad perspective on the changes and improvements required in conducting the interviews.

The findings of the research will be largely hypothetical by generalizing the phenomenon of distributed leadership in the tourism industry based on the research findings. This will be achieved by analysing the evidence collected, identifying the patterns in data, and formulating a theoretical account that explains the findings (Thomas, 2006).

### **Further Development**

Data collected in the research process becomes useful if it is analysed appropriately to inform the research questions and address the objectives, a systematic review of the existing literature in the domain will be conducted prior to the BAM 2020 conference in September. The researcher is going to use a qualitative approach where the managers/leaders of the tourism industry in Dubai are going to be interviewed. The qualitative research methods are also effective in studies such as this, which require the identification of intangible factors (Cassell and Symon, 2004).

### **Conclusion**

As knowledge on distributed leadership from Asian tourism sector is minimal. Therefore, it is worthwhile to understand the concept in the Asian tourism sector. The main aim of this research is to investigate distributed leadership in Dubai's tourism industry in order to identify the attributes, benefits and challenges of distributed leadership.

The research will follow the interpretivist research philosophy that cumulates to an inductive approach that is fostered by a qualitative research method. The data collection will be accomplished through a semi-structured interview, with respondents selected using purposeful and snowballing sampling methods. This implies that the research will engage participants who can contribute substantially to the research. Thematic analysis coupled with an effective collection of information will ensure that the paper remains credible and reliable. Ethical considerations will be upheld with high levels of respect guaranteeing appropriate engagement of respondents.

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