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To distribute leadership or not? A lesson from the islands.

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Abstract

There is a dearth of literature in the area of tourism leadership. This article identifies the theoretical aspects of distributed leadership which features collective responsibility and collective flexibility, and argues how it might be advantageous for tourism firms in general. A longitudinal qualitative case study is used to consider different forms of distributed leadership and their impact upon organisational outcomes. The analysis is presented in terms of the presence or absence of distributed leadership within the case organisation. Evidence is provided of where this style of leadership would support success, but also identifies why it has been so hard to recognise this and then maintain and support it over time. It is argued that it may prove advantageous for tourism firms to actively consider whether distributed leadership would potentially offer increased organisational performance.

Key words: Distributed leadership, leadership, volunteer tourism

1. Introduction

There is a great deal of organisational and management literature which reports studies identifying leadership as a crucial element of organisational effectiveness (Carson, Tesluk & Marrone, 2007; Conger, 2004; Kark & Van Dijk, 2007; Kets de Vries, 1994; Rickards, Ming-Huei & Moger, 2001). The literature discusses (amongst other themes) what leadership is (Vroom & Jago, 2007), what makes a good leader (Trottier, Van Wart & Wang, 2008) and different forms of leadership (Trottier, Van Wart & Wang, 2008; Vroom & Jago, 2007), as well as where leadership should be located for maximum performance. Although the context is recognised as affecting the way leadership emerges (Vroom & Jago, 2007) and how leaders behave (Detert & Burris, 2007; Trottier, Van Wart & Wang, 2008), there is universal agreement that all organisations will benefit from capable leadership which enables mission and goal achievement (Vroom & Jago, 2007). This makes the lack of discussion pertaining to leadership within the tourism literature somewhat of a curiosity. While there is some conversation about tourism and management (Murphy & Murphy, 2004; Page, & Connell, 2009; Tribe, 1997), there is almost no literature that enters into debates concerning tourism leadership. This study examines tourism leadership, particularly the theme of leadership location and why considering distributed leadership theory is of interest within a tourism context.

The tourism industry is a growing sector despite the recession: in 2008, international tourist arrivals grew by 2% to reach 922 million, up 18 million over 2007, generating US\$ 944 billion (€642 billion) in 2008, or 30% of the world's exports of services. The forecast is 1.6 billion international tourist arrivals worldwide by 2020 (UNWTO, 2009). More than half the total turnover of the tourism sector is generated by a small number of international and multinational companies, however, the majority of businesses within the tourism sector (99% or almost 18

million companies in the EU) are still small or medium sized enterprises (SME's) (Cavlek, 2002); with fewer than 250 employees. Moreover, of those organisations, many work across country boundaries where the parent organisations develop products experienced elsewhere with the support of employees within the host country (for example eco-tourism or adventure tourism companies are usually based in a location separate from the product delivery, e.g. trekking is sold in the UK and delivered by local guides, in the tourist destination). Clearly, such models of tourism separate the general management and leadership from the more specific delivery, which may lead to feelings of separation and possibly a loss of organisational clarity. With such levels of complexity, it is surprising that little is written in the general tourism management texts (see for example: Cooper & Hall, 2008; Murphy & Murphy, 2004; Page & Connell, 2009; Tribe, 1997); in particular, there is relatively little written in the related area of leadership. There is a nascent literature focused on entrepreneurship (Murphy & Murphy, 2004), hospitality management (Rosen, 2009) and knowledge management (Yang, 2007), but compared with the growth in leadership literature in mainstream management and organisational studies, or within the entrepreneurship field itself, there is almost no theoretical development (Zschiegner, 2009). Tourism management texts predominantly adopt a managerialist perspective which reflects mechanistic processes and plans more suited to larger organisations, with more talk of control and human resources than of leadership. It is this latter conversation that we wish to develop as, despite the specifics of the tourism industry, there is no reason why firms within the sector would behave differently from other similar organisations. Moreover, there is a strong literature linking small businesses and leadership, arguing that it may even be more important than in larger firms because the lack of institutional processes strengthens the leadership impact (Grinnell, 2003). In addition, the OECD (2008) believe that SME's will need to take a more managerial approach in order to remain competitive and independent as growth in the sector is leading to hierarchical,

structurally centralised organisations, looking to control subsidiaries and acquire SME's (Harris and Holden, 2001; Calvlek, 2002). This paper questions the extent to which this is an appropriate model for tourism development arguing that alternative leadership strategies or forms may enable improved performance. The case for distributed leadership is considered, since it is designed to enable a range of leaders within an organisation to work together at a distance (both physically and organisationally if necessary) using community goals and differing skills.

Firstly, this article identifies the theoretical aspects of distributed leadership and how it might be advantageous for tourism firms in general. Theoretical choices of applying distributed leadership to tourism contexts are presented. Secondly, we outline the longitudinal case and how data was collected and analysed. Thirdly, an analysis of the qualitative data is presented in terms of the presence or absence of distributed leadership within the case organisation. Evidence is provided of where this style of leadership would support success, but also identify why it has been so hard to recognise this and then maintain and support it over time. Finally conclusions and possible implications for general tourism practice are proposed.

2. Distributed leadership

There has been much written about the differences between leadership as opposed to management (Grint, 1997, 2008), the need for leadership, (Grint, 1997; Gronn, 2000; Timperley, 2005) and also how the understanding of leadership and leaders has changed (Grint, 1997, 2005a; Gronn, 2000; Timperley, 2005), exploring why this matters to successful organisations. The crux of the discussion is that leadership is no longer considered to be about one, heroic individual who single-handedly develops a vision which is then aspired to by others (Inglis, 2004; Meindl, 1995; Timperley, 2005; Yukl, 2002), but instead is about a set of skills and attributes which can be

shared among a group of individuals in a way that enables the greatest benefit for the organisation in question (Salaman, 2004; Story, 2004).

Distributed leadership has been described as “the leadership idea of the moment” (Harris, Leithwood, Day, Sammons & Hopkins, 2007), although its history can be traced back through a range of organisational and leadership ideas including: self-directed teams (Barry, 1991); empowerment (Edmonstone & Western (2002); transformational leadership (Bass & Avolio, 1994); shared leadership (Judge & Ryman, 2001) and participative or democratic leadership (Gastill in Grint, 1997). Indeed, Harris & Spillane (2008) contend that current limitations with distributed leadership as a concept include: the proliferation of terms and definitions which are used interchangeably, leading to some theoretical confusion and considerable overlap with other forms of collaborative leadership. They argue that recognising the core differences between distributed and other forms of leadership will be crucial for either successful analysis or application of distributed leadership.

The reason for the interest in clarifying the elements of distributed leadership is that it is claimed that such forms of leadership will lead to, among other possibilities, greater buy in from those involved in change (Harris et al., 2007; Platow et al., 1998), greater organisational flexibility (Grint, 2005a; Harris, 2004), faster and more effective change (Harris et al., 2007), increased capacity building (Harris et al., 2007; Timperley, 2005), increased innovation (Spillane, Halverson & Diamond, 2004) and better decision-making (Whitby, 2006). There has been an increase in the use of the term ‘distributed leadership’, especially since it has been identified in schools as a key form of educational leadership (Harris, 2004; Harris et al., 2007; Harris & Chapman, 2002; Spillane, Camburn & Pareja, 2007; Spillane et al., 2004; Timperley, 2005; Whitby, 2006). While it is often used as a short hand for a variety of forms of leadership which

are based on collaborative or shared leadership practice (Grint, 2005a; Harris et al., 2007; Inglis, 2004), what is important is that it should not be seen merely as a form of delegated or rotated titular headship (Gronn, 2000; Harris & Chapman, 2002; Whitby, 2006), but as a real way to develop shared contexts that focus upon developing leadership capacity. Spillane, Halverson & Diamond (2001) argue that distributed leadership is where practice is:

“distributed over leaders, followers and their situation and incorporates the activities of multiple groups of individuals” (in Harris et al., 2007, p. 338).

The functions of the leader are shared across a range of individuals and the task is achieved via the interactions of the individuals leading to leadership across a group (Harris et al., 2007; Timperley, 2005; Yukl, 2002). Gronn (2000) argues that distributed leadership is the emergent result of the interactions between individuals and networks; the skills in place and forms of relationship will affect the leadership and outcomes that emerge. Grint (2005a, p.143) contends that while it is hard to make a firm claim as to what distributed leadership ‘must’ look like, it is probable that most examples would include:

- **Collective responsibility:** where organisations have many leaders apparently ordinary people carrying out modest leadership tasks, which together enable the leadership of the organisations as a whole. It is the collection of the unique and disparate skills that enables the community to develop and flourish.
- **Collective flexibility:** for there to be effective collective responsibility, there must be a change from traditional, hierarchical organisational structures. There must be a shift towards a heterarchy where boundaries are undefined and can shift, so that distributed leaders can undertake their roles as and where necessary.

It is unlikely that any two forms of distributed leadership would look the same, but according to Gronn (2002 in Zepke, 2007), there are three broad patterns of distributed leadership which can be plotted on a continuum with a fourth element 'no distribution added', as this is still a possibility and matters in terms of considering where organisations fit (Figure 1). This continuum could also be represented as strong and weak forms of distributed leadership as identified by Currie, Lockett & Suhomlinova (2009). The weak form retains a distinction between the formal leaders and their followers where ultimate responsibility remains with the leader but followers are encouraged to actively identify and solve organisational issues. This form is task focused and seen as Institutionalised Practice in Figure 1. A medium form is represented as a 'constellation' (Currie et al., 2009, p.1739) where there is a structure within which each member plays a distinct role. The distributed leaders work together toward the organisational goals and there is less focus upon the formal leader. In Figure 1 this is Intuitive Working Relationships. The strongest form, where there is Spontaneous Collaboration, is achieved when no single person is in charge. Leadership occurs throughout an organisation, emerging as required in ways that will enable the collective vision to be achieved.

Figure 1 about here

The importance of this continuum is that it is unrealistic to expect every organisation to achieve a strong form of distributed leadership. By plotting the current state of an organisation, and then considering the potential advantages (or not) of trying to develop increased leadership distribution by managing collective flexibility and collective responsibility, firms could actively manage the leadership form they aspire to.

3. Why distributed leadership for tourism?

The question then becomes why this type of leadership might be advantageous for tourism businesses. As identified earlier, tourism firms are predominantly small and often dispersed, yet the literature implies that growth leads to hierarchical configurations and the governance structures advocated all involve formalisation and control. Conversely, there has been a move in many organisations towards new forms of working, such as flatter structures encouraging problem solving (Juhl, Kristensen, Dahlgaard, Kanji, 1997); self-organising (Letiche, 2007), networked organisations (Lea, O'Shea & Fung, 1995) and virtual teams (Malhotra, Majchrzak & Benson, 2007). The argument is made that such changes will enable an improved understanding of shared goals and creates increased problem solving, empowerment and creativity.

Distributed leadership is an extension of such developments. It can be applied to any form of organisation. Predominantly, it has been applied in schools (see for example: Bolden, Petrov, & Gosling, 2009; Spillane, Halverson & Diamond, 1999, 2001), but there is now evidence of research in other types of organisation including the government agencies (Currie et al., 2009). In each case the reason for consideration of distributed leadership is a wish to be able to make decisions faster and more effectively by taking them at the location of the issue rather than referring the issue to the organisational centre. This is a logical solution where it is not just the problems that are distributed but also the people themselves. To maintain control sufficiently to manage at a distance often slows decision-making down; this is seen both in terms of physical distance and that of decision making such as in hierarchies within larger organisations (Child, 2005). In the terms of any tourism or hospitality product, this is likely to be to the detriment of the customer. What would be preferable is to have employees at a distance who share a clear enough 'community goal' (Grint, 2005a) so that any decision will fit with the vision and lead to effective, holistic performance. Such a leadership form would appear to offer opportunities for

both tourism research and practice. In this paper a case study is used to first identify the type of leadership style being practiced by a volunteer tourism business based in the UK and identify whether there were components of distributed leadership in place. Second, the implications of these leadership practices are considered in terms of the success of the company.

4. Background to study

The organisation studied is a UK based volunteer tourism venture that brings together scientists to lead research projects and volunteers, who willingly contribute, both financially and practically, to engage in worldwide, scientifically based research projects. At the time of data collection, the organisation had two main sites (one terrestrial, one marine) on two islands in Indonesia. The terrestrial site had one satellite site based in the forest and the marine site had two satellite sites situated in two different community groups (Figure 2). The organisation at the centre of this research was expanding and has continued to do so. It is unusual in both its product and its location – the need to manage across large distances with small teams and little infrastructure leads to very specific issues.

Take in Figure 2 about here

Initially, it was noticed that there was a steady turnover of managers at the remote locations. They would be employed for a period of up to two years and then ‘moved on’ after enough complaints about their leadership and/or management style and behaviour were received. What was not clear was whether the organisation reflected upon why they were proving to be unsuccessful, whether there were any patterns that could be established and whether the repetition of the problem could be avoided by a better understanding of what was occurring. After initial discussions with managers and observations of meetings, it was posited that the

problems were to do with assumptions being made about the leadership and management abilities of those being employed at the remote location. It was being assumed that having a clear task focus and enough authority would enable the satellite site managers to lead effectively. However, it became clear that it was senior management and control that emerged as the dominant model leading to compliance with what was thought to be required. It was thought that if an understanding of distributed leadership and its requisites was applied to the case, not only would the organisational problems be explicable but also, hopefully, preventable. This then became the focus of this research.

5. Methodology

It is argued that a case study approach is particularly appropriate where the observer has access to a novel, previously unexplained phenomenon (Yin, 2003; Tellis, 1997); in this case the opportunity to look at leadership, more specifically distributed leadership, within a tourism context. The purpose of the case study was to provide insight into an issue, thereby enabling deeper understandings of the management, leadership and stakeholder behaviours within an organisation which drove a qualitative research design (Creswell, 2003; Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). In this case, it is not the comparison of data with other organisations that gives it meaning, but comparison with current theory and the ability to develop novel ideas from the data itself (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2003; Stake, 1995). This fits with the current research purpose, which is not to generalise from this single case but to develop theoretical insights which might contribute to broader understandings. The case study was longitudinal over a five year period, which enables the events to be ascribed to the organisational dictates rather than merely the whim of one year's environmental or contextual factors.

The methods consisted of participant observation, semi-structured interviews and documentary analysis of organisational materials such as year end accounts, volunteer briefing documents, publicity articles and company websites. The three forms of data collection were designed to enable a more holistic picture of the case study. The data sets could be compared to establish whether the patterns recognized were consistent and also to enable any anomalies to be detected. Participant observation was undertaken with the researcher's identity being revealed to all respondents (Gill & Johnson, 2002). Descriptive observation notes (Robson, 2002) were kept which consisted of recorded observations of participants, project activities, team, staff and organisational meetings, team briefings and lectures. For example, diary observations were made of all interactions between any combination of the CEO, site staff, scientists and volunteers in terms of how decision making and change were lead or managed. In this study, primary and secondary observation techniques were used (Delbridge & Kirkpatrick, 1994); consequently, recording consisted of keeping a diary (primary) and recording statements of what happened or was said (secondary).

Individual, semi-structured, face-to-face interviews allowed flexibility during the actual interview process. In total, fifty four interviews were conducted; two with the owner of the organisation, two with location management, 1 with a principal scientist and forty nine with the service recipients (volunteer tourists). There were 21 x 20 minute initial interviews which were exploratory in nature and a further 28 x 50 minute interviews that developed key themes taken from the initial interviews. The demographic profile of the 28 volunteer tourists who were interviewed twice reveals 19 females and 9 males, 81% English (23), 19% Scottish, (4%), Irish (11%) and the remaining (4%) from the Channel Islands. The majority (26) of the volunteer tourists were between 19 and 29 years of age, 23 were single and 22 were studying at a BA/BSc

level, predominately in their final year. Observation indicated that the profile was a representative pattern of the business. The only change that developed towards the end of the study was that volunteer tourists from other parts of the world were beginning to get attracted to the programme of activities. The number of interviews with volunteer tourists was dictated by the premise that volunteers would be interviewed until there was no new information forthcoming. The questions directly addressed what participants thought of the organisational structure, the managerial relationships, interactions between key stakeholders and the impact of all of these upon their experiences.

All of the interviews were recorded and transcribed. NVivo was used as the vehicle for working through the transcripts, thus allowing unstructured data to be analysed thematically (Pandit, 1996) and interrogated for: the nature of the business, how it worked and the relationships between different stakeholders that affected, or were affected by, leadership. All three data sets were compared and demonstrated similar themes and patterns.

6. Analysis

When analysed as a form of distributed leadership it was clear that the CEO espoused a weak form in that he recognised the need for a collective vision and planned for consensus. However, he also made it clear that when, for example, all the scientists were disagreeing and going off working on their own ideas, rather than developing community goals, he determined outcomes related to the business plan which is “*all in my head*” and then expected these to guide the decision making of others:

“What it’s done [winning an external grant] is clarify what we’re doing all this for.

Scientists were saying we need to find out where we are going. [I said] Ok let’s get you all

together to decide where we were going. It was unbelievable they were all going in different directions ... In the end it was far better if I decided where we were going and the rest could follow it. Leadership by consent and what I was interested in doing was having a strong conversation about what we were doing” (CEO).

There was no doubt that managers on the islands were expected to make autonomous decisions, but also that these should be within the overall organisational framework. In terms of a comparison with Figure 1, the CEO talked as though the plan was to support and develop Intuitive Working Relationships but, in fact, owing to the rather task focused form of the consensus building, the results were more analogous with Institutionalised Practice.

The question then became, would the organisation benefit from a stronger form of distributed leadership and, if so, how could this be supported. The data was analysed for evidence of how the networks were operating between the different organizational stakeholders: the CEO and the management (both UK and on location); the CEO and the scientists, the management (both UK and on location) and the scientists and all the previous parties with the volunteers themselves. Analysis of the themes that emerged within this data set identified the following themes for consideration: (6.1) a shared vision or purpose in terms of developing what Grint (2005 a and b) refers to as community goals , (6.2) appropriate contexts and structures as most distributed forms of leadership are based upon less hierarchical or centralised management forms, (6.3) managed, effective relationships as the new forms of working need active support, (6.4) the appropriate blend of skills as the way that recruitment and development were undertaken would affect the possibilities of distributed leadership and (6.5) trust as without this there was unlikely to be any power devolution and, therefore, no effective decision making. Each of these will now be discussed in more detail.

6.1 Shared vision or purpose

As the organisation grew there was a move away from the single heroic leader, a change advocated by distributed leadership theorists (Carson et al., 2007; Grint, 2005a and b), for the practical reasons of organisational size and location. This is likely to occur for many tourism organisations where there is separation between the various forms of operation, especially when several tourism products are developed and delivered in a variety of locations. There was still a central CEO, but it was argued that for effective performance there needed to be decision making at the remote locations. Consequently, more power, autonomy and authority was delegated to the island managers. This theoretically followed Grint's (2005a, p. 36) proposal of moving away from an 'Emperor' style of leadership, with a high dependence upon a leader who is responsible for solving all the organisational problems, towards the 'Wheelwright' (Grint, 2005a, p. 36) where there is a heterarchy with responsible followers and constructive dissent. However, such a change can only be effective where a strong commitment to community visions and goals by all stakeholders emerges; without this, different organisational parts will move in different directions and revert to individualism (Duignan & Bezzina, 2006; Senge, 1990; Timperley, 2005; Whitby, 2006).

In this case study the CEO envisaged a shared, community vision framing all the decisions and ensuring that more everyday independence from the leader did not lead to fragmentation. He was very clear that because of the form of the organisation, it encouraged stakeholder commitment which should lead to the potential for community goals:

“ in many ways the people who are working with us are stakeholders, it's not a strict commercial relationshippeople like [Island Managers] are a good example, they retired early, they are well off in their own right, they love diving , they love working –

they love all that, we do pay them a reasonable sum but certainly not a commercial rate for what I would have to pay if I was going to get people like that to come and work its because it's a very attractive project That's virtually the case of everyone working here - They believe in what we are doing here" (CEO).

However, the majority of power remained with the leader who thought that the community vision would reflect his own; consequently, there was potential that this could be seen either as a weak form of distributed leadership (Currie et al., 2009) or more of a management system where there was delegated legitimate power within certain parameters.

The CEO knew that there needed to be clarity about organisational direction and he did have a very clear picture about what the organisation stood for and where he wanted it to go. He spoke of the need for aims and objectives (including social and environmental objectives) and the need for clear, shared institutional goals. However, he did not formally articulate these ideas, they were passed on through stories in the form of conversations with staff members and presentations to potential customers.

So is there a clear sense of purpose shared throughout those leading and managing in the field? This varied for different sites functionaries; although all seemed to have bought into some part of the vision, often a narrower version or their own interpretation prevailed. For example, interviews with the scientists and observations of team briefings demonstrated that the scientists who led the actual trips were committed to the vision of improving science. Nevertheless, they were very parochial about their own areas and were not very interested in the organisation. This

sometimes led to problems where there would be tensions between the scientists, the managers and the customers.

The site managers reflected their own backgrounds and self-interests: some managers were scientists and so bought into that part of the vision but did not see their business role in the same way as a more traditional manager. On one of the Islands where there was a manager who lived all year round, his vision was about helping the local community. Where the visions synchronised, this led to effective management, but often there were tensions between the satellite site and the organisation. For some of the Island Managers, their directives were specifically about managing the budget. Where this was in conflict with supporting the bigger picture, the budget always won out, not community goals.

Generally there was a shared vision about some form of contribution to science but not about the business itself. As a result of this, differences soon emerged in each of the sites which led to different contexts and structures.

6.2 Appropriate context and structure

The need for the shared institutional vision demonstrates the need for buy in (Grint, 2005a) from all decision makers and this leads to arguments for alternative structures moving towards the heterarchies of the wheelwright. Flatter structures enabling a wider basis for decision-making are vital if organisational inertia, insecurity and cautiousness are not to lead to a maintaining of the status quo even if there is a rhetoric of change (Whitby, 2006), or becoming focused on operational tasks to the detriment of implementing the vision. It is argued that distributed leadership cannot be something 'done to others' (Bennett et al. 2003 in Harris, 2004), it must be

emergent, demonstrating collective agency. Timperley (2005) argues that opportunities that demonstrate leadership intent can be made for the necessary emergence and that, whereas without actively managed space, authentic distributed leadership is unlikely to prosper, with it more top-down approaches to distributed leadership are possible.

Certain tensions emerged consequent to the organisational structure shown in Figure 2. Firstly, if the scientists were not happy with local management decisions they would liaise directly with the CEO thereby upsetting the site managers who thought that the scientists should report to them. Secondly, unless there was clear consensus on the processes, policies and decisions across the organisation, volunteers were liable to get mixed messages. The CEO desired volunteer transfer between the satellite sites in order that they gained a range of perspectives pertaining to the host communities and the conservation efforts; many staff, especially ex-volunteers, knew this.

However:

“I’ve heard of kind of people on [Marine Site] who maybe wanted to come over to [Satellite Site] and have a visit or something and they’ve been prevented for some reason. I think sometimes that’s been a bit unnecessary” (Female Volunteer 1).

“[Male Volunteer] wants to go to [Marine Site] on Friday to the beach. Not generally encouraged but as the organisation has not provided him with a project this week he thinks it’s not an unreasonable request” Diary Notes.

“I’m not sure how strict they are at [Marine Site] because they seem a lot more strict than they are here (Female Volunteer 2).

Initially, when this structure was adopted, island managers could do what they wanted, provided that the customers were cared for and the science happened within the CEOs' vision; a weak form of distributed leadership. However, this led to differences which were accentuated by the fact that satellite managers were only in post a short time during the year and were often volunteer staff members who had research work of their own to do. They felt that they had no flexibility, control or power except to ignore the decisions made elsewhere which they often did. In order to eradicate the differences, centralised policies and procedures were developed but, as each successive set of rules, and the people implementing them, failed to achieve the desired performance, the CEO and the management team questioned what form of leadership or management would be effective.

Observations in the diary indicated that, as a result of the continual problems that whenever the CEO visited sites there were always complaints from everyone, a series of staff meetings were instituted; however, the content was largely operational. Weekly meetings indicated an attempt to achieve consistency, but the sites ran very differently with different local rules and regulations, often reflections of their different contexts, stakeholders in the community and local management style. Controlling the volunteers and scientists was seen as the most important factor by management in some locations. Whilst staff were mostly accepting of this, volunteers found the differences and restrictions unsatisfactory, leading to surprises, shocks and problems when visiting more than one satellite site and they could see no logic for the differences especially when explanations were not forthcoming.

Communication was an ongoing problem, as it was always very hard to contact the islands since, at that time, some only had satellite phones which were very expensive and not always

functioning. Where decisions were taken they were often communicated slowly and the outcomes were unpredictable. Moreover, the communications between the UK and Indonesia were complex with the parent company issuing instructions that field workers considered difficult or unworkable:

“Numbers are generated in UK but planning is in [Marine Site]” [Island Manager 3] Briefly spoke to [Scientist 2]. He signed a contract for 80 volunteers [for all marine projects]. There are 170 on [Marine Site]. Satellite site has about 40. He’s not very happy.” Diary Entry.

Overall, it can be seen that the interactions between the leaders and the followers, consequent to both the structure and the context were leading to different leadership practices on each island. It can be argued that a stronger, supported form of distributed leadership might lead to a more consistent approach as, even if details of rules and policies changed, there would be a greater likelihood of the local leaders being able to communicate and explain rather than control. The history has been to remain input and task focused and therefore, institutionalised in terms of the distributed leadership in places. If relationships and outcomes were managed through institutional goals and value sets leading to a more fluid, responsive and potentially more effective organisation, then a move towards intuitive working relationships could emerge. As indicated earlier, this is what the CEO wanted but has not managed to achieve.

6.3 Managed, effective relationships

The previous section raises issues of how the relationships between leaders and followers were being managed. The problem is the development of different outcomes and inappropriate solutions to varied organisational issues. If distributed leadership is to provide a solution to such

issues then, whilst a shared vision will enable a clearer framework, there will also need to be a clear commitment to the forms of organisational leadership desired. Gibb identified two forms of distribution: increased numerical frequency of the acts performed by members of the leadership group and 'the multiplicity or pattern of group functions performed' (1954 in Gronn, 2000, p. 324). In the case study there is evidence of more decision being taken at the satellite site but in fact this is creating more problems and not solving them. The second, stronger and more holistic perspective, seems to be that which is being adopted by those who are advocating distributed leadership as an alternative to more traditional forms of organisational leadership (Currie et al., 2009; Gronn, 2000; Harris, 2004; Timperley, 2005; Whitby, 2006), stressing that it is about collaboration on tasks in ways which are appropriate for the context, in order to develop more effective outcomes based upon collective visions. The fluidity implied by these new forms of working is about fundamental changes in the way that the relationships are undertaken, rather than merely increasing the numbers of interactions.

To promote a more coherent and relationship driven organisation the CEO undertook all the orientation of new recruits outlining the vision, company expectations and so on. This was a part of his trying to move towards intuitive working relationships. However, observation showed that there was no real training or development and most people were left to sink or swim. Although there were operational meetings it was expected that the staff, who had mostly been volunteers, knew the systems; this led to the continual reinforcement of processes. Over time it became clear that a part of the problem with the communication was a lack of understanding by those in the UK of the work being undertaken in the field; therefore, there was a concerted effort to employ people in the field who understood the business; where this was not possible, UK based staff went on a field visit.

The CEO tries to treat the operation as a ‘family’, with head office being a part of his home:

“Living and working in the big house to create that Dunkirk spirit. The Volunteer parties – still happen 1st Saturday in December .. trying to create family spirit” (CEO).

However, such an analogy, although supposed to mean an open, inclusive, caring and nurturing environment, may actually mean an organisation which is managed by a patriarch or Emperor. Overall, there was little evidence of active management of relationships between managers of different islands, or of considering the implications of such connections. The managers and scientists did not see the development of relationships, other than with the CEO, as a priority. For there to be effective distributed leadership there must be some form of process which recognises, firstly, the importance of the relationships to be developed and nurtured, so that those within the distributed network can lead where it is appropriate for them to do so. Secondly, the difficulty of communication means that the leaders need to act as boundary spanners, enabling understanding across the different stakeholders (Levina & Vaast, 2005; Timperley, 2005), thereby enabling the distributed team to be effective.

6.4 Appropriate blend of skills

There are two issues pertaining to skills that were of interest in this data. The first was whether the implementation of any distribution would enable a better harnessing of the skills needed to lead and organise a situation at a certain time. The second was whether the managers and leaders in place had the requisite skills to be able to undertake distributed leadership.

As identified earlier, there was a recognition that those in the UK needed to understand the work in the field. Moreover, as the company grew the CEO had started to look for specific skills sets;

however, these were operational skills not necessarily leadership or management skills. For those working in the field, recruitment tended to be ad hoc as it attracted a certain type which could limit the range of skills. A strategy emerged whereby the CEO tried to identify volunteers who showed initiative and then recruit them:

“[We are an] unusual company we have a very close relationship with them [customers/volunteers]. A lot of people who come out with us and really enjoy it, end up working with us. We have a policy now of only trying to recruit ex [Name of Company] volunteers as staff members here, we can’t always do that but for the most part that is the case and we get better people doing that” (CEO).

This had the advantage of employees who would understand the mission and vision and be more comfortable with discussing the purpose. The CEO did terminate people if there was evidence that their behaviour or skills were not appropriate but this is very much a reactive, rather than proactive practice. Overall, there was an awareness that some skills matter for organisational success, but the need for management and leadership skills to be an active part of organisational and human resource development was not a current managerial driver. This links to the second skills issue. Whilst there was some evidence of considering the need to examine leadership skills during recruitment, in order to develop the shared vision and support the structural form in place, for the CEO this was in terms of trying to recruit in his own image

“The thing now is I need now another [Name of CEO] which is why I am looking” (CEO).

Instead of moving towards a Wheelwright, an Emperor form will be supported with followers who leave the problem solving to the leader (Grint, 2005b, p. 2). It might even lead to a White

Elephant (Grint, 2005b, p. 2) approach where there is a great deal of community spirit and probably community goals, but the followers do not constructively dissent and they do not take ownership of their part of the organisation. Bennett et al. (2003 in Harris, 2004) argue that distributed leadership should not be thought of as a technique, tool or practice, but rather as a way of thinking about leadership. This should encourage a consideration of the impact of forms, styles, types and traditions of leadership and how they will react with or against the concept of distributing leadership in order to enhance performance. There was no evidence of these forms of consideration anywhere within the organisation.

6.5 Trust

In the case data there were clearly areas where different members of the organisation failed to trust others. Observation diary entries included:

“Chatted to [CEO’s Aide de camp], marine site restructured, the forest still to be restructured. CEO only popping in this year as a new site being opened. Previous Island logistic manager was going with the CEO as current [Island Managers 1 and 2] won’t work with him because of budget issues. Communication liaison officer/administrator supporting all sites has been demoted. [Island Managers 1 and 2] want him out as they don’t think he’s competent to run the office. Already discussion who to replace him”.

“Lots of arguing ‘politely’ over the radio”.

[Name of Scientist] and [Island Manager 3] talking on another radio channel so they can talk privately”.

Several writers on distributed leadership identify trust as essential because it should enable power to be redistributed and members of a team to be heard and respected (Spillane et al., 1999, 2001); MacBeath went so far as to say:

“Distributing leadership is premised on trust. Trust presents the most acute of dilemmas because, while headteachers believe in the importance of trust they also feel the pressure of accountability from external sources and trusting others to deliver implies a risk for which they personally pay the price. Without mutual trust, relationships and respect are compromised and mistrust exerts a corrosive influence” (2005, p.353).

The CEO had reason to mistrust those he had been in business with previously and he brought this mindset of mistrust into the company with him:

“My only concern is - you know what [Name of an Island Manager 3] is like great guy, very talented, but very independent terribly tricky to control. So, having someone like [CEO’s Aide de Camp] just keeping an eye on what is actually going on, and that we are really doing the things I don’t really mind what he comes up with as long as we write it down, sell it to people and then we do what we say we are going to do” (CEO).

He had problems sharing power and responsibility as he felt he knew what he wanted to do and that he would be the best person to do all aspects of the work and had concerns that changes were sometimes made without enough stakeholder involvement which alienated others. This led to the other managers leaving the minutiae of work to the CEO and having a general culture of mistrust between each other (especially the managers and the scientists as indicated earlier). This encouraged inefficiency within the company and reduced the possibilities of distributed leadership.

Effective leadership distribution implies mutual acceptance by staff of each other's leadership potential and is an important precondition of distributed leadership; trust will not ensure effective distributed leadership, but lack of trust can ensure the failure of it (MacBeath, 2005; Storey, 2004). The problem is that once differences emerge (between stakeholders, sites and values), mistrust begins and rebuilding trust and developing distribution will be very difficult within any organisation.

7. Discussion and implications

So what can be learnt from this case study? Firstly, it is important to recognise that this is not a case of effective or ineffective leadership. Rather, it illustrates a set of issues where there is a need for effective leadership over distance because simply delegating managerial authority is not enough to achieve the organisational goals whilst embodying the values. Consequently we are suggesting that the development of distributed leadership would support these aspirations.

It is widely accepted that effective distributed leadership is very hard to achieve (Duignan & Bezzina, 2006; Gronn, 2000) but there is increasing discussion of the utilisation of distributed leadership as a possible organisational tool. In this case, although there were elements of distributed leadership, it was a weak form. In terms of Grint's (2005a) analysis of collective responsibility and collective flexibility it can be said that there was an assemblage of disparate skills, but that this needed to be more carefully considered if there was to be greater devolution of control from the leader. There needed to be less 'cloning' in order to develop a particular form of leader and a greater consideration of leadership as a set of skills that can be shared (Burgoyne, Hirsh & Williams, 2004). Moreover, there was a move to remove some of the role boundaries but the focus on task, as defined by the CEO, meant there was still a substantial way to move on this. From the data it seemed, however, that in terms of satisfying volunteer needs, greater effective

distributed leadership would be of value as it would enable more coherent, and more customer orientated solutions to develop without losing the overall coherence of the parent organisation. The question is - Would the active discussion and implementation of distributed leadership as an aspirational strategy have been organisationally advantageous? To answer this, other forms of distributed leadership need to be considered. In terms of spontaneous collaboration on areas of interest this might have been useful, but the current structure, systems and trust levels made it unlikely. There would need to be a range of skills in differing locations held by individuals who see the advantages of working together. The implications of this are that those within the organisations need to actively consider what skills are present, what must be developed and who needs to interact with who (Timperley, 2005). This need for active capability recognition and development underpins the call for more active learning systems within organisations (Lacomski, 2005) and demonstrates that there is a need to consider distributed leadership as an element of organisational strategy. The dispersed nature of the organisation means that there would need to be high levels of interaction which would have had to be actively managed and encouraged in some way. Nevertheless, should this prove to be possible it would clearly be advantageous.

The second point for discussion is that of role sharing within frameworks of implicit understanding where tasks are shared according to skill sets. The dispersed nature of the organisation makes this harder as there are not enough people at any one site (except the UK) to enable easy sharing; however, with active management of the relationships between the scientists and the managers this might be an area of potential strength and competitive advantage. One extremely able member of staff was lost because he had un-utilised skills which were needed, but not recognised as they were not a part of his actual job description.

What is of interest is to consider whether distributed leadership could, or should, be developed within this firm in particular or other tourism firms in general. There is evidence that it can be done (Harris et al., 2007) but the context becomes vital. Zepke (2007) argues that in a situation where there is a great deal of accountability and audit it is harder to develop distributed leadership, as the leaders are less comfortable with sharing control. This encourages 'Emperor' style leadership (Grint, 2005a, b), which might be effective but could become difficult to sustain over time, especially as an organisation grows. In the case example, there had been a great deal of centralised control but this had to be changed as the organisation wished to grow; either there had to be such tight policies that one person could effectively lead a highly dispersed organisation or there had to be a shift in the way that power and leadership was distributed. Although the theory-in-practice was still a centrally administered, institutionalised practice model which was 'Emperor' leadership, the rhetoric from the CEO became about becoming a 'Wheelwright' (Grint 2005a, b) using relationships to support organisational initiatives. In particular there was a wish for constructive dissent to develop new ideas where appropriate and a wish for responsible leaders. The organisation is not yet ready for a heterarchy but it needs to move some way down the continuum if the new relationships are to become functional. A managed approach to distributed leadership, addressing each of the criteria and actively considering the possibility of supported distribution, might be enough to enable a change, probably not to fully distributed leadership but to somewhere on the path. It is important to remember that it does not have to be all or nothing in managed organisational examples of distributed leadership; rather it can be considered as a continuum and the question is, if an organisation wishes to undertake distributed leadership, where on the continuum does it wish to be and can it get there.

An important message from this paper is that distributed leadership needs to be considered in conjunction with, not only other leadership literature, but also related organisational effectiveness literature. This will enable organisations to consider distributed leadership less as an emergent, uncontrollable phenomenon, but more as a possible strategy that can be both supported and enabled. What can be inferred is that the more complex and disparate the elements of the organisation, the more difficult it will be to maintain an effective distributed leadership network. Reflecting upon Spillane et al.'s (2004) view of leadership as practice that is distributed between leaders, followers and their situation, it can be seen that the more complex the situation the harder the practice will be. It is well known that communication becomes harder when there is more opportunity for missed messages, noise within the communication systems or reasons for misinterpretation of information; all of these were issues with the distance (both physical and intentional) between the various organisational sites. Distance and complex infrastructure problems (such as little or no telephonic contact), too much pressure upon one person to initiate and lead communication (as might occur with the one heroic leader model), or different value sets leading to different constructions of meanings upon communication (Berger & Luckmann, 1966), could all lead to breakdowns in the system which prevent a distributed team from working effectively. An holistic approach to distributed leadership will only work if the requisite skills are present within the network as a whole. In an organisation where distance adds to the complexity of the situation the need to manage the distributed network effectively will become paramount. What is clear is that the recognition of distributed leadership as a potential strategy might be of real value to many smaller or dispersed organisations where collective goals could be used to frame decisions rather than formalised control.

8. Limitations

The case study discussed here is a single case that is used as an illustration as to how distributed leadership might be of use in this form of dispersed organisation and whether it might be an effective tool. The research needs to be extended to consider and test the potential use of distributed leadership across a range of tourism contexts and organisations. This research emerged from a secondary analysis of data collected for a different purpose and, consequently, research needs to be designed to specifically address leadership within tourism.

9. Conclusion

This paper aimed to open a conversation about tourism leadership in general and distributed leadership in particular. The potential of distributed leadership to enable faster and more effective change through collective responsibility and flexibility is outlined, as are a range of distributed leadership forms. It is argued that it may prove advantageous for tourism firms to actively consider whether distributed leadership would potentially offer increased organisational performance and, if so, what form would be most likely to be appropriate. We propose that for many tourism firms, who will be managing employees at a distance who need to make rapid decisions pertaining to customer (in this case volunteer) satisfaction, if collective goals can be developed that will enable distributed leadership to be adopted, increased performance is likely. The longitudinal case is used to demonstrate the differences between the aspirational forms of leadership and that which is actually in place. It highlights some of the problems to be found in implementing distributed leadership.

We argue that by actively debating the role and forms of leadership which will prove to be beneficial for tourism firms, changes may emerge in the structures, locations and processes of leadership and, consequently, decision-making. This is very much an introduction to this under-

researched area and we call for more research into tourism leadership in general and applied forms in particular. By moving the discussion from management to leadership, tourism research will begin to consider different skill sets, new ways of working and alternative strategies for organisational development.

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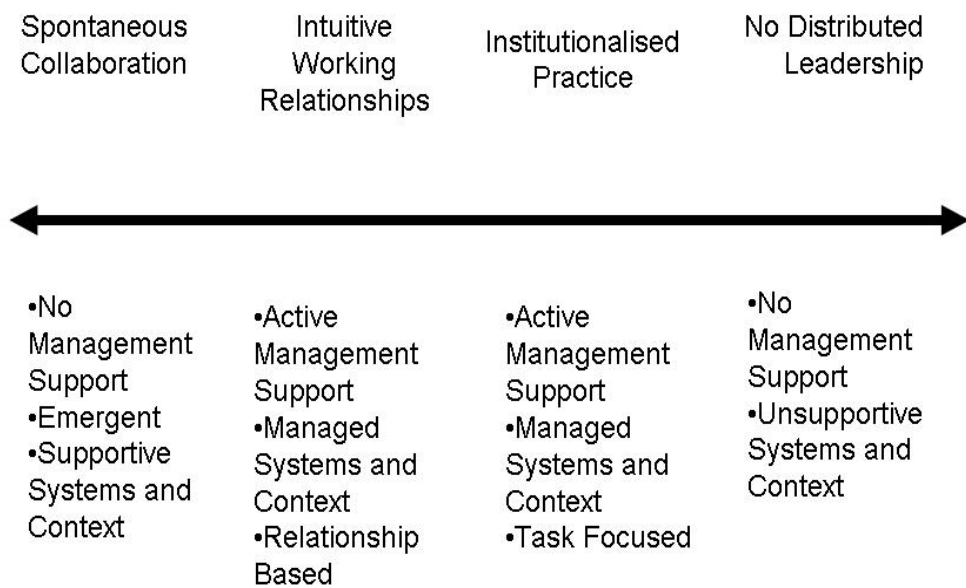
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Figure 1: a continuum of distributed leadership

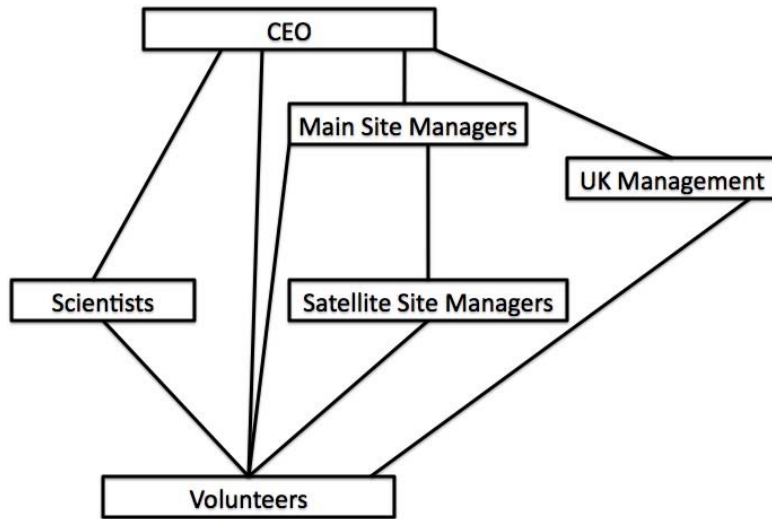


Figure 2: Organisational Structure of the Case Organisation