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Distributed Leadership in the Tourism Industry: A Study of Dubai

Distributed Leadership in the Tourism Industry: A Study of Dubai

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Distributed Leadership in the Tourism Industry: A Study of Dubai

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Abstract

This paper's main objective is to examine distributed leadership's current conceptualisation in existing research through a critical literature review and identify distributed leadership challenges, attributes, and benefits through qualitative interviews. The methodology adopts the primary research design approach to answer the four main research questions systematically. The research design is based on virtual interviews involving 41 general managers working in Dubai's tourism sector. These respondents were asked about their distributed leadership perceptions, challenges, benefits, and attributes in their sector.

The research study concludes that adopting organisational attributes is likely to create several benefits for the hotels that operate in the hospitality sector. The study recommends implementing a detailed plan which allows involvement in the formulation of critical decisions.

Keywords: Systematic Literature Review, Distributed Leadership, Tourism Sector, Dubai.

Track: Leadership and Leadership Development.

Word Counts: 6742 words

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1. Introduction

Distributed leadership approach has emerged in the business and tourism literature from the educational sector, where it is extensively applied (Bolden, 2011). Still, distributed leadership is considered relatively unfamiliar as an organisational management architecture. This architecture's premise is sharing leadership responsibilities and accountability among individuals with a shared profile of competencies and attributes to avoid the individuality idea (Harrison, 2018). Following Badaracco (2001), distributed leadership approach responded to the drawback of traditional and transformational leadership models, mainly focusing on the leader's behavioural attributes as an "individual". However, distributed leadership focus on a systemic perspective of leadership (Badaracco, 2001), which, in turn, creates a social process that entails delegation, democracy and group interaction rather than the decisions' centralisation (Lumby, 2013).

Across the literature, distributed leadership is also known as "shared leadership", "participatory leadership", "democratic leadership", "delegated leadership", and "team leadership approach" (Duif et al., 2013). The common theme across all these terms concentrates on sharing the leadership responsibilities and accountability as a decentralised leadership methodology (Harris et al., 2007). Accordingly, distributed leadership is seen as a social and situational determinant of organisational effectiveness and stakeholder's engagement (Hristov & Zehrer, 2017).

The efficacy of distributed leadership is determined by three main bases (Bolden, 2011). First, the group's empowerment to enhance leadership effectiveness (Edwards, 2011). Second, the involvement in complicated organisational settings instead of centralised governance (Spillane, 2005). Last, the sharing and the delegation for learning and developing future implementers of distributed leadership (Bolden, 2011).

According to Harris (2008), distributed leadership has been deeply compared to classical individual-centred leadership approaches. However, the distributed approach emphasises empowerment, cooperation, and participation (Brownell, 2010). Besides, the synergistic efficacy, trust, team effectiveness, and organisational learning process of the decentralised decision-making are other organisational variables compared against the traditional leadership approaches (Carter & Dechurch, 2012; Cleveland-Innes, 2014).

In the tourism sector and Destination Management Organisations (DMOs), distributed leadership is a contemporary paradigm that has gained due consideration (Hristov & Zehrer, 2017). This growing interest is led by the role of this style in addressing sector challenges. In detail, decentralised decision-making and team-oriented leadership reduce the uncertainty in managing the networked hospitality environment (Fu, Ye & Xu, 2020). Moreover, the improvements in the tourism sector's internal organisational environment improved reconfiguring with external changes (Wu & Chen, 2018). Last, distributed leadership's adoption has reduced the financial challenges commonly faced by DMOs (Hristov & Zehrer, 2017).

This study's main motive is guided by the need to address the literature gap in the effectiveness of distributed leadership and the implication of this empirical investigation in the tourism sector in Dubai City, the economic capital of the United Arab Emirates.

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Distributed leadership has resulted in many research publications. However, prior research shed light on the empirical investigation in the education sector (Gronn, 2000; Hairon & Goh, 2015). Few other studies focus on the delegated/shared leadership architecture in the business management settings (e.g., Harris, 2013). Therefore, this study addresses this gap and extends the empirical and theoretical contribution of Hristov and Zehrer (2017), who recommends studying the impact of distributed leadership and the challenges empirically on the tourism sector in emerging and developing markets.

This paper examines the challenges associated with the distributed leadership approach in Dubai's tourism sector regarding the challenges, benefits, and attributes. Thus, this research aims to investigate distributed leadership in Dubai's tourism sector and identify the challenges, attributes, and benefits of distributed leadership.

2. Theoretical Background

The Leadership Concept

According to Harrison (2018), leadership is influence. Leaders should influence their followers to achieve set goals. Opata et al. (2017) suggest that leadership can challenge the organisation's existing culture; therefore, it can be opined to stand out of the existing culture and start an evolutionary process. Therefore, leadership can be regarded as a mechanism that can help employees achieve higher performance and provide services to lead the team towards common ground.

Team Leadership

According to Ojokuku et al. (2012), this leadership style is mainly concerned with team effort regarding how and where the team can accomplish specific goals and objectives. Eisenbeiß and Brodbeck (2014) also professed that the leader's vision provides and inspires a strong sense of direction and purpose in the team leadership style. Therefore, this leadership style has been more associated with a leader's participation in the given task to ensure credible delivery results.

Hobson et al. (2010) opined that team leadership is regarded as prudence and commitment with all team members. However, Ziek and Smulowitz (2014) stated that the major limitation in team leadership style is the notion of whether it would succeed or not; the main reason has been the leadership qualities required, for instance, trust, integrity and a will to work hand-in-hand with fellow employees. Therefore, it might also imply that team leadership has been based on the leader's participation, where the good qualities are required to lead the team and achieve task goals.

Systematic Literature Review (SLR)

The current study applied the SLR according to the argument of Harrison et al. (2016), who consider it an acknowledged approach to developing a reliable knowledge baseline and evidence-based strategy. Tranfield et al. (2003) support this as the SLR content is a strategic approach of identifying keywords to frame the study's scope. Further, it draws insights from both published

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and unpublished sources to develop a comprehensive understanding of the variables. The first stage of an SLR is engaging in extensive discussions and consultations with Subject Matter Experts in leadership to baseline the review appropriately. The significance of this stage is to frame out the knowledge and concepts of distributed leadership. Subsequently, the first stage's outcomes are identifying the included studies' entry criteria in the SLR. Conducting the review focuses on the definitions, challenges, attributes and benefits of the distributed leadership.

After concluding the second stage of the SLR process by 15th December 2018, a review of how the key sources contributed to the literature review in the context of distributed leadership was conducted. In total, 560 articles were retrieved, 43 of the duplicate articles were excluded. Also, the other 100 articles were excluded as they are generalised the ideologies of distributed leadership. Out of the remaining 385 relevant articles, 104 papers were excluded for not informing any review question. The remaining 281 articles were assessed for eligibility based on their abstracts. More than 100 were also excluded for lack of unclear abstracts. Thus, the rest of the 181 articles were more examined for eligibility by references and citations. Twenty papers were excluded for missing proper citations and a further 30 for missing the reference page, thereby obtaining 131 articles. The 131 articles were assessed for eligibility by full-text information, in which 26 articles were excluded for lacking full-text information obtaining 105 articles. On 20th January 2021, the researcher conducted a more recent SLR, an additional 23 articles were retrieved, and only 6 of them added to the SLR.

In terms of the publication time frame, the reviewed studies were categorised into five groups. Namely, the publications between 1995 and 1999 were three papers, the publications between 2000 and 2004 were nine papers, the publications between 2005 and 2009 were 23 papers, the publications between 2010 and 2014 were 44 papers. The publications between 2015 and 2019 are 26 papers. The publications of 2020 and 2021 were six papers. Regardless of the rich publications on this topic, it was only at the turn of the millennium that distributed leadership concept was widely researched

Results

Across the reviewed literature, 29 discussed distributed leadership definition, which answers the first question (what is distributed leadership?). The term “distributed leadership” has appeared interchangeably with terms such as “shared leadership”, “team leadership”, “participative leadership”, and “democratic leadership” by some researchers (e.g., Duif et al., 2013; Harris et al., 2007; Jones, 2014; Harrison, 2018). This stage helps to consider distributed leadership from a normative perspective that significantly promotes the leadership processes' usefulness and involvement (Lumby, 2013; Budgen and Brereton, 2006; Cope et al., 2011). Gunter et al. (2015) formulates an explicitly descriptive approach of distributed leadership and considers it an analytical framework that articulates the way leaders have been distributed in the firms. According to Spillane (2005), distributed leadership appears in social and situational contexts, language, physical environment, and organisational systems. This situated nature of leadership is seen as constitutive of leadership practice and hence demands identification of leadership acts in improved ways (Edwards, 2011; Göksoy, 2015; Supovitz and Tognatta, 2013).

Brownell (2010) suggested three main factors must be considered: organisational boundaries and context, power and influence, and ethics and diversity despite variation in distributed leadership

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definition. It includes an assumption that leadership is a prominent aspect of a group or network of individuals interacting, requiring openness in leadership boundaries and the various leaders. Thus, distributed leadership is a constructive process that is collective and collaborated in such a way to share beliefs, knowledge, new understanding, and ideas (Angelle, 2010; Beirne, 2017; Harris, 2013; Jain, 2016; Hairon and Goh, 2015; Fitzsimons et al., 2011; Mascall et al., 2008).

Challenges of Distributed Leadership identified across the literature

After completing the SLR process, only 29 papers highlighted the challenges of implementing distributed leadership. Another focused review was conducted to dig deep into the challenges of distributed leadership to identify gaps. The challenges identified are discussed in this section. For the cultural challenges, the implementation of distributed leadership passed through many challenges. According to Grenda (2011), an example of these challenges includes the limited safe environment practice, the lack of experts in the field, and the lack of accurate communication when addressing people's groups. Benson and Blackman (2011) focused on cultural challenges, cultural differences, and varying working environments (Ocker et al., 2011). In their turn, Van Meter et al. (2016) investigated distributed leadership. They identified leadership administrative challenges associated with the absence of clarity and lack of specification in domain and construction of knowledge. The decision-making challenges were discussed by Supovitz and Tognatta (2015). One of the significant challenges in distributed leadership is inclusive decision making. Tahir et al. (2016) propose that teachers lack confidence in decision-making. Leaders must apply critical knowledge to understand the importance of decision-making to solve different organisation issues. Other organisational parameters require leaders to work in collaboration with different people to promote decision-making for firm growth. However, it has been proved that most leaders ignore their subjects when it comes to making vital decisions and, in the process, attract employee resistance (Wood, 2005; Pechlaner et al., 2014; Nezakati et al., 2015; Oborn et al., 2013).

As Kilicoglu (2018) states, the hierarchical structure was a challenge where there is distributed leadership. The authoritarian leader clarifies what will be done when it will be done and how it will be done. Supovitz and Tognatta (2015) added that different organisational structure and hierarchy factors affect the organisation's decision-making. It is argued that hierarchical structures often trigger differences in a competency working environment. Mehra et al. (2014) state that distributed leadership needs to have a strong network of leaders to address particular challenges to enhance organisational growth, but the hierarchical structure of management hinders the overall outcome.

Distributed leadership capitalises on interactions between the organisation's employees in ensuring the realisation of the institution's aspirations. Under distributed leadership, the interactions between leaders and followers are crucial in facilitating the needed change by helping their superiors identify and implement the necessary strategies for realising the goal. Spillane (2005) recognises the interdependent relationship existing between distributed leadership and interactions within the organisation. This interaction can be between top leaders within the workplace or between leaders and the institution's employees.

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Delegated leadership drives the leader into identifying the most suitable candidate for the job to ensure the task is effectively completed beyond the expectation of the superior. However, delegating tasks does not necessarily reduce the involvement of the leader. Leithwood et al. (2007) conclude that leadership distribution to other employees is less likely to mitigate formal leaders' participation.

3. Methodology

Research Design

Data collected in the research process becomes useful if analysed appropriately to inform the research questions and address the objectives. The data collected through qualitative research needs to be organised and adequately interpreted to determine its exact findings. Notably, Marshall and Rossman (2014) have argued that no single qualitative data analysis approach is deemed suitable or practical. In this light, the nature and amount of the data collected shape how the analysis is conducted (Creswell, 2003). Although researchers propose different approaches, standard procedures are employed in the qualitative analysis to determine the objectives and answer the research questions.

Research Approach

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 different participants' responses. This requires inductive reasoning, sorting, and categorisation based on key themes. From this perspective, the study employs a thematic analysis to establish the insights that emerge in the investigation. According to Vaismoradi et al. (2016), the thematic analysis entails extracting meaningful information to specific themes emerging in the research. The analysis in this study will be achieved by adopting Creswell's data analysis spiral method (2003).

Sample

This research involved 41 general managers from the tourism sector in Dubai. Furthermore, the study focuses on leadership, which means that appropriate data is based on the interpretive point of view. However, the topic can be covered at all organisational levels, but this study focuses on general managers. The target population for this study is the general managers who work in the tourism sector. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the managers, and the transcripts were analysed thematically based on the research objectives.

4. Results

4.1. Distributed Leadership Challenges

From the interview transcripts, the general managers indicated that they faced many challenges in implementing distributed leadership to their heads of departments and employees. During the interviews, 38 general managers identified that it is hard to choose managers as leaders since many reject the opportunity to take up leadership positions and mentioned that not everyone could lead.

For instance, respondent GM3 said:

“It is hard to choose one of the managers to be in a leadership position as some of them resist and reject to accept their turn to be a leader” (GM3)

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Hotel general managers admitted that some heads of departments and staff are enthusiastic about being part of the hotel leadership circle. Still, they mentioned that some general managers rejected such leadership roles.

GM30 notes that:

“All heads of departments and staff are well trained to have a good knowledge of distributed leadership and have a chance to be a leader. however, still, some of them refuse to be a leader.”
(GM30)

Regardless of the general manager’s efforts to increase staff obligations, there remains doubt from the managers regarding the staff acceptance of a leadership role. The Head of the department and the team know the duties and responsibilities required to accomplish leadership tasks. That is why the participants notice the rejection of leadership roles. GM26 mentioned how he used his authority to ensure the staff accepted a leadership position when they rejected that position.

Respondent GM26 particularly said:

“Some of the staff prefers to be followers, and they do not accept to take any responsibilities and are afraid to make decisions and solve problems. In this case, I instruct them to accept and follow their leadership roles” (GM26)

More workload leads to resistance from the staff members to accept leadership roles. They prefer to stay in their current positions without holding new responsibilities. They also like to stay as followers. Many department heads and staff members try their best to avoid accepting leadership roles as they are scared of the conflicts among their friends and their abilities to lead.

The resistance to change is one of the critical challenges as it leads the employees to reject their leaders, which is an early blocker to attain distributed leadership implementation. Managing the relationship between the staff and the appointed leaders are challenging, as highlighted by one of the respondents. Interviewee GM8 alleged to be facing many challenges in the hotel linked to staff-newly appointed leaders’ relations and recommended superior personal attributes for success since newly appointed leaders require staff acceptance. This is due to a lack of personal attributes and emotional intelligence. Hence, lack of collaboration and poor performance from the staff side are the major issues that further deteriorate distributed leadership practice. These include staff leader’s relations and employee productivity.

Respondent GM6 reported:

“...The followers should follow the instructions and respect the appointed staff leaders; I know most of the staff they are friends, so that is why most of the followers do not listen to the appointed leaders.” (GM6)

GMs noticed that there are conflicts between the appointed leaders and the staff in the hotels.

It also hampers the hotels’ leadership roles, where the issue of internal conflicts of interest arises. Respondent GM14 reported that they face many challenges in implementing distributed leadership in the hotel, like team members in the hotels fail to collaborate with their appointed staff leaders and follow their instructions.

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Many staff members complained that they do not trust themselves to instruct, lead their colleagues, and make decisions. As a result, the participants noticed that many of the staff prefer to stay as followers, and they are satisfied to be in their positions and not in leadership roles.

GM8 mentioned that he is facing many challenges in implementing distributed leadership in the hotel linked to staff. He recommended superior training for success as many department heads and staff fail to deal with situations based on personal attributes.

GM38 mentioned that he struggles with the appointed leaders as they always get back to him and ask for advice and solutions.

GM38 stated:

“I am struggling with some of the staff which were appointed as leaders; they are looking for advice for every task.” (GM38).

Also, GM20 mentioned how he expects to receive many emails from his/her appointed leaders on every occasion or almost every day and usually takes a long time to reply.:

“... on any occasion or almost every day, I have received many emails from the leaders asking me for formal approval for their own decisions and reply to them, so that's wasting my time.” (GM20).

4.2. Attributes of distributed leadership

The section presents results linked to the attributes of distributed leadership in the tourism sector. The attributes are grouped into categories: Collaboration/ Planful alignment, Spontaneous collaboration/Spontaneous alignment, Institutionalised practice, Intuitive working relations, Cycles of activity, Autonomy, Spontaneous misalignment/ Anarchic misalignment, Coordinated distribution, and Acceptance of change.

Planful alignment

One of the attributes of distributed leadership is collaboration. This entails combining two or more individuals for a common purpose, allowing ideas to flow across the organisation, creating a consensus (Latta, 2019). Respondents alluded to their satisfaction with the working environment, where there were collaboration and teamwork. Respondent GM1 stated that:

“The collaboration in distributed leadership roles is powerful because it naturally creates transparency in my hotel.”GM1

It is evident that collaboration and working together create a suitable work environment highly regarded in the tourism sector. This is probably due to the business's nature, where the whole team comes together to achieve distributed leadership roles.

Respondent GM35 simply expressed it thus:

“I like the collaboration between all departments with the nominated leaders, which leads to creating the best plans to accomplish tasks.”GM35.

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Spontaneous alignment

The tourism sector has unpredictable situations, given that the staff are different and multinational. This attribute of combining efforts unexpectedly but leads to positive results is vital for distributed leadership. Though this finding was not explicit, several respondents alluded to it, indicating a helpful pillar in the tourism sector. There were several references to “quick decisions” by several respondents suggesting spontaneity.

GM18 notes that:

“When I distribute the leadership to appointed leaders in the hotel, that allows them to fix most of the problems which we are facing in a quick time without getting back for my approval.”GM18.

Fifteen respondents claimed that the appointed leaders’ spontaneous collaboration solved their stress from unforeseen issues in the tourism sector. Respondent GM2 stressed that most unforeseen problems are resolved by the chosen leaders and increase cooperation in the tourism sector.

Intuitive working relations

This attribute posits that distributed leadership encourages close associations where two or more individuals who develop close working relations with appointed leaders display a shared role, allowing them to depend on one another through mutual trust. Shared responsibility came to the fore in several instances among the respondents, and the findings ranged from shared responsibilities, shared visions and shared values, all resulting in working closely for a stated goal, mainly appointed leaders and staff satisfaction.

Respondent GM27 notes that:

“what I love about my work is the collaborative environment. This creates a family environment, and there is a genuine spirit of cooperation and shared goals among nominated leaders and employees all revolving around accomplishing leadership roles” GM27.

This sentiment was shared by 36 respondents and seemed very critical in the tourism sector. The need for this attribute provides answers to the peculiarities of this sector.

Institutionalised practice

This attribute relates to the impact the organisational hierarchies have on facilitating collaboration between individuals. This attribute is evident in the tourism sector as the structures’ nature creates groupings that explicitly deal with specific leadership roles. Thus, distributed leadership in tourism has institutionalised practices that naturally gravitate towards collaboration.

GM24 mentioned that:

“implementing distributed leadership means being able to work cohesively as part of a team; and deal with a diverse group of people in potentially adversarial situations using a calm, polite, diplomatic, discreet and effective approach. Having time management personal attributes to meet expectations across multiple departments and roles. being highly responsible, reliable and resilient and being organised, detail-oriented and structured.”GM24.

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27 participants stressed the importance of facilitating collaboration between the staff and appointed leaders due to organisational structures like committees and teams.

Coordinated distribution

Coordinated distribution involves teamwork. Distributed leadership ensures the equitable distribution of working responsibilities, making subordinates reasonable and enhancing internal collaboration. The jobs are distributed where teamwork is encouraged by the leader. The assistants are also motivated to perform as a team and improve cooperation for working efficiently in the tourism sector. Nine of the respondents pointed out the issue of teamwork.

Respondent GM25 notes that
“promoting teamwork to ensure coordinated among distributed leaders and team members.”GM25

4.3 Benefits of distributed leadership in the tourism sector

Distributed leadership approach is suitable for the organisation where the leaders can distribute the responsibility and allocate the job roles among the employees strategically. It has crucial impacts on the tourism sector, where the leaders can lead the team towards achieving future success.

Findings evidenced the benefits of distributed leadership: enhanced decision-making, creativity and innovation, mutual learning environment, equal chances to serve, empowering organisational structure, and combined expertise in the organisations.

Enhanced decision making

One of the significant benefits of distributed leadership is enhanced decision making. The leaders who delegate is more eligible to make decisions. When there is a sole leader, it will be complicated to accomplish the tasks if they are not available.

Ten of the respondents noted enhanced decision making as a benefit of distributed leadership.

Respondent GM16 points out that:
“It is important to delegate and distribute the authority in the hotel that leads to enhanced and improved decision making, as there is no need for every task getting back to me for approval. That makes the appointed leaders’ decision-makers”.GM16.

The efforts towards enhancing the decision making are beneficial to enhance the overall service excellence since they improve from micro-level (i.e., tasks) to macro-level (i.e., achieve the hotel’s goals). This further helps to distribute the working pressure and fulfil the job objective successfully.

Creativity and Innovation

Distributed leadership encourages the staff members’ creativity and innovation, which further boosts the subordinates’ interest to improve their performance and work effectively. Proper

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empowerment of the management team, good collaboration, and enhanced internal communication also help identify creative solutions to work successfully in the tourism sector.

Respondent GM17 notes that:

“I notice after our weekly meeting and sharing the information with the leaders and the staff the creativity and innovation at the same time. Creative thinking and constant innovation are what makes it beneficial for distributed leadership.”GM7.

Respondent GM13 believed that the hotels’ improvement came from collaboration, internal communication, teamwork and sharing information. He illustrated that distributed leadership encourage appointed leaders and staff to become creative.

Mutual learning environment

Developing mutual learning activities where the appointed leaders successfully arrange training and development programmes encourages group collaboration and communication. The staff members can share their knowledge and personal attributes to work better in the future. Hence, communication and cooperation are benefits of distributed leadership approach and help develop a mutual learning environment where the members can work together and share their capabilities to improve efficiency. Most respondents pointed out one of their pursuits as training. The benefit was noted by GM6 as

“In my opinion regularly training and meeting with staff and employees to discuss all the problems and try to solve it is a good solution which is suitable for all and increases the job satisfaction” GM6.

Mutual learning enhanced the trust among the staff and appointed leaders to share their thoughts, opinions, tasks, and strategies. 38 GMs stressed the importance of mutual learning and encouraged all staff and leaders to share ideas and ask questions they don’t know.

GM41 stated:

“Every meeting, I encourage the staff and leaders to share new information and ideas among them and allow them to question their ideas and strategies that increase the mutual learning in the hotel”. GM41.

Equal chance to serve

Distributed leadership encourages transparency and accountability in the organisation. It further boosts the staff’s performance in the long run, where the employees become experienced to work in the tourism sector and perform efficiently. Distributed leadership approach calls for equal opportunity for each employee in the tourism company to feel valued and get the proper scope to share their feedback and perspectives. As postulated by respondent GM3:

“It allows all staff to be a leader from down to the top to create new ideas and implement them.”GM3.

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GM19 also mentioned that implementing distributed leadership leads to all staff working in an equal environment.

GM19 clearly said:

“My policy in the hotel allows every employee to be a leader, as I used to appoint my leaders every year, so that leads to the staff to serve equally in the hotel.” GM19.

Empowering organisational structure

The empowerment of the organisational structure is there in the tourism sector, where distributed leadership develops a vertical structure as per the companies' functions and working activities. The appointed leaders are also valuable for handling the staff members and their subordinates and empowering them for successful cooperative decision-making practice. Both resources and responsibilities are distributed among the subordinates appointed leaders. GM7 noted:

“We have to offer all the resources for the appointed leaders to handle all the responsibilities, that leads to an improvement in the structure of the hotel” GM7.

When delegating the appointed leaders, this leads to a reduction in the general managers' burden and improves cooperation for working. Every member in the tourism sector can participate and work collaboratively. As noted by GM4

“When I distribute the authority and the leadership to the appointed leaders that create the team spirit among the hotel's staff, and that will lead to increase in responsibility and decrease the issues and problems” GM4.

Combined expertise in the organisations

Under a distributed leadership approach, the leader prefers to engage with the subordinates in managerial tasks, ensuring accountability, instructional monitoring, budget oversights, and addressing issues associated with the subordinates. The nominated leaders in the tourism sector result from this playing a crucial role in developing combined expertise in the workplace. It further maximises the productivity and performance of the staff in the organisations. Twenty respondents noted this as a benefit. This is evidenced by respondent GM22, who states that:

“Shared experience among the appointed leaders and team members improved our decision making, increase job satisfaction, and generates improved levels of motivation and enthusiasm.” GM22

The appointed leaders in the tourism sector can handle the team members efficiently, where the leaders try to lead the subordinates with proper support and direction. Distributed leadership also encourages the subordinates through sharing their experience and helps them to work efficiently in the workplace to meet the organisational objectives as noted by respondent GM1:

“sharing experiences among the staff and chosen leaders increase the effectiveness and efficiency and the job satisfaction of my staff, and I am sure it is one of the benefits of the distributed leadership.” GM1.

5. Discussion

This study's primary purpose is to understand distributed leadership approach better and identify the challenges, attributes, and benefits of this approach in Dubai's tourism sector.

The task assignment and delegation aspect of distributed leadership framework are consistent with the definition by Harrison (2018), who acknowledges that distributed leadership also encompasses a shared leadership approach, which is mainly influenced by the perception of trust among general managers. Secondly, the interview's insight also indicates that 27% of the interviewed general managers supported the view that distributed leadership entails a collaborative process between the employees and managers in sharing leadership roles.

The collaborative leadership definition also concurs with the insight based on Bolden (2011), who defines collaborative leadership as an approach to management in which two or more individuals engage in the same leadership activity. Finally, four (4) general managers who were interviewed also acknowledged that distributed leadership encompasses employee empowerment in the form of participative leadership.

The participative leadership approach, which was conceptualised to occur in the Dubai tourism sector, is also consistent with the insight by Jones (2014), who states that distributed leadership can also be construed as a component of participative and shared leadership involves employee empowerment.

The insight from the thematic analysis of the interviews indicates that 80% of the general managers who participated in the interview acknowledged delegation as one factor that captures the implementation of a distributed leadership approach. According to most general managers, organisations that operate in the Dubai tourism sector mostly assign leadership responsibilities to competent employees to perform such tasks. This view of distributed leadership also closely matches Gronn (2000) insight, who acknowledges that delegation encompasses the assignment of additional leadership and decision-making roles to employees. However, as Hristov and Zehrer (2017) noted, effective delegation of leadership roles requires employees to be confident of their leadership abilities. Besides, delegation's practice is also appropriate in the contextual scenario where managers trust employees to execute additional leadership responsibilities without supervision (McKee et al., 2013).

This view of collaborative leadership distribution is consistent with the empirical insight from the study by Bennet et al. (2003), who also contends that distributed leadership can be construed as an inclusive and collaborative approach to organisational management. The implication is that instead of the unidirectional decision-making and problem-solving aspects associated with traditional leadership approaches such as autocratic leadership, the collaborative distribution requires managers to be willing to embrace lower-level employees' views (Carter & Dechurch, 2012).

The findings also depict that the distributed leadership approach entails the employees' empowerment to participate in critical operational and strategic decisions actively. A considerable number of general managers from the Dubai tourism sector interviewed (6 out of 41 managers) identified the importance of collaborative distribution in promoting employee creativity and initiative.

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Based on the interviews' analysis, the participative leadership approach also facilitates staff empowerment, which is considered necessary in raising employee motivation. Brownell (2010) supports the notion that employees are not only likely to be motivated but equally willing to embrace change through a participative leadership approach. This means that using the participatory leadership style, employees would actively participate in the formulation of new operational and strategic decisions (Bolden, 2011). As a result, such a group of employees are more likely to accept change, which they had participated in its initiation. According to Kotter (2013), resistance to change is associated chiefly with employees who are less involved in formulating critical operational and strategic decisions.

Regarding the challenges, achieving well-coordinated communication between the leaders and employees depends on healthy interactions through interpersonal skills. The communication challenge is a problem mainly among less experienced leaders as identified by the respondents. It implies that organisational leaders adopting distributed leadership must undergo interpersonal skills training to eliminate communication barriers (Grenda & Hackmann, 2014). Furthermore, the staff can be more productive if they are trained to cope with the pace and pressure that occasionally comes with working in the hotel industry.

A significant aspect that was considered to influence resistance to change among employees working across the Dubai tourism sector pertains to the fact that there is a poor collaboration among lower-level employees and new managers. For instance, GM14 observed that a lack of cooperation and support from employees creates a barrier that restricts the effective implementation of a distributed leadership approach. Klar et al. (2016) observe that due to insufficient collaboration, it becomes difficult for the new or existing managers to sell their innovative change ideas to employees who, in turn, resist the effective implementation of the latest transformative initiatives.

The attributes are aligned with Kempster, Higgs and Wuez (2014), distributed leadership has a considerable influence on organisational success than the efforts of a single leader. When management is combined through teamwork, the benefits include significant innovation, clear roles, robust organisational structures, effective communication, and employee leadership development opportunities.

The insight from the synthesis of the interviews with the 41 general managers suggests that distributed leadership approach has a considerable positive effect in improving employee morale. Essentially, Burke et al. (2003) observe that employees are likely to be satisfied when they operate in an organisational setting where the team leadership platforms allow them to ascertain their contribution towards attaining the broad organisational goals.

6. Limitations

Regardless of the numerous benefits, all research methods have limitations (Saunders and Lewis, 2012). The application of SLR in business and management research is faced with different limitations. First, the review's efficacy was limited to the search strings and keywords utilised in searching the databases and the review questions. Also, the effectiveness of the evaluation was limited to the inclusion and exclusion of the literature. Another limitation was related to the absence of interaction and the ability to understand body language.

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COVID 19 was another limitation that restricted the ability of the researchers to conduct physical interviews. However, the virtual interviews conducted provided rich findings and were easily accessible

7. Recommendations and Future Research

Distributed leadership has been found to entail three kinds of leadership approaches, namely, collaborated distribution, collective distribution and coordinated distribution. Future research can provide a more in-depth understanding of distributed leadership based on those approaches. Such research may also be appropriate as a longitudinal study

Future researchers are advised to extend the research to include more empirical studies into other sectors outside the educational context.

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