



Distributed leadership typologies in destination management organisations

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates processes and practices related to the enactment of Distributed Leadership (DL) within Destination Management Organisations (DMOs) through a cross-disciplinary approach by adapting a framework developed by Hoppe and Reinelt (2010) for evaluating leadership development in networks in situ and the visual strand of Social Network Analysis (SNA). The paper unfolds the case of Milton Keynes – an emerging destination in England and its local destination management structure – Destination Milton Keynes. Six leadership typologies within a network of DMO member organisations are identified, which demonstrate different, yet complementary DL behaviours. The study contributes to an understanding of how traditional DMOs shift their predominant organisational models through the development of different leadership behaviours of their member organisations in line with changes in their operational environment. The identification of different leadership behaviours serves as the basis of the development of DL typologies to support DMO policy and practice.

1. Introduction

Destination Management Organisations (DMOs) face an increasingly networked environment and significant changes in their funding and governance (Coles, Dinan, & Hutchison, 2014; Hristov & Petrova, 2015; Reinhold, Beritelli, & Grünig, 2018). Such disruptions to the operational environment for DMOs are evident in a number of countries, such as Switzerland (Beritelli, Bieger, & Laesser, 2014), Australia (Pforr, Pechlaner, Volgger, & Thompson, 2014), China (Wang & Ap, 2013) and the UK (Hristov & Zehrer, 2017). Financially constrained DMOs face considerable challenges in delivering value to their destinations, visitors and member organisations (Hristov & Zehrer, 2015; Reinhold, Laesser, & Beritelli, 2015). Distributed Leadership (DL) is a recent paradigm used in destination research as a response to these challenges as it provides a mechanism for pooling knowledge and resources, and hence an opportunity to ensure the long-term sustainability of DMOs (Kozak, Volgger, & Pechlaner, 2014; Pechlaner, Kozak, & Volgger, 2014). DL provides a framework for collective responsibility and leadership of dispersed DMO resources advocated by recent government policy (Penrose, 2011; Reinhold et al., 2015). Implementing DL requires champions from the various destination stakeholder groups with developmental resources and strategic vision on the DMO board

(Hristov & Zehrer, 2015). Such network champions can play an important linking function within DMOs (Beritelli, Buffa, & Martini, 2015). Buchanan, Addicott, Fitzgerald, Ferlie, and Baeza (2007) suggest that network champions and the interplay between them is important for the enactment and promotion of DL across networks and organisations.

A number of recent academic contributions in the domains of destinations and destination organisations suggest the importance of considering alternative approaches to DMO and destination governance practices within a new funding and governance landscape (Laesser & Beritelli, 2013; Pikkemaat, Peters, & Chan, 2018; Reinhold et al., 2015) and highlight the opportunities provided by shared forms of leadership, such as DL (Hristov & Zehrer, 2015; Kennedy & Augustyn, 2014; Kozak et al., 2014; Valente, Dredge, & Lohmann, 2015).

Whilst the extant literature on DMOs and destinations has incorporated network theory and SNA (see Baggio and Cooper, 2010; Gajdošík, Gajdošíková, Maráková, & Flagestad, 2017; Scott, Baggio, & Cooper, 2008), evidence from academic contributions on the adoption of DL in the DMO and destination context is thin (Hristov & Zehrer, 2017; Pechlaner et al., 2014). Arguably, the extant literature on DMOs and destinations has not provided investigations into how DL is enacted and practiced by a multitude of leaders on board DMOs and their

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networks of member organisations using a network approach guided by an established framework for leadership development emanating from the organisational leadership literature (Hoppe & Reinelt, 2010).

Reinhold et al. (2015) and more recently Hristov and Zehrer (2015, 2017) called for empirical evidence into how DL is put into practice in the domain of destinations and DMOs. Similar calls for further study are also found in the wider organisational leadership literature (Cullen & Yammarino, 2014). Within this context, the overarching purpose of this study is twofold:

- (i) To investigate how DL is enacted in a DMO through the identification of different leadership behaviours of DMO member organisations; and
- (ii) To develop a DL functional typology of DMO leaders by building on findings related to the identification of different leadership behaviours of DMO member organisations.

This paper thus discusses distributed leadership as an alternative perspective to traditional ‘heroic’ leadership approaches to orchestration of DMOs and their network of public, private and non-profit member organisations within a dynamic organisational context fuelled by shifts on a global to local scale (Milne & Ateljevic, 2001). Although this study is grounded in a specific DMO context, i.e. England, UK characterised with a shifting funding and governance landscape (see Coles et al., 2014; Hristov & Zehrer, 2017), these challenges faced by DMOs are not exclusive to this specific context (Reinhold et al., 2015; Scott & Marzano, 2015). This makes this investigation relevant to other DMOs and destinations operating under similar context to the one in England, UK.

The remainder of this paper firstly provides an overview of prominent leadership contributions in the domain of DL and its interplay with destination and DMO research. It then discusses the DMO and destination that is the focus of this study, the guiding methodological framework based on network analysis, and data collection and sampling considerations. Hoppe and Reinelt (2010) recommend network analysis to study the interaction of network actors and resources and hence to provide insights into the enactment of DL at a DMO level. As a result six types of leadership behaviours are identified and implications for DL within DMOs discussed.

2. Literature review

Strategic cooperation and collaboration on a DMO level has long been perceived as an important catalyst of strategic destination decision-making for DMOs and other key destination stakeholders (Bramwell & Lane, 2000; Scott, 2011; Scott & Marzano, 2015). Indeed, successful DMOs excel in establishing partnerships and collaborative networks (Harrill, 2009; Pikkemaat et al., 2018). Whilst partnerships between DMOs and other key destination stakeholders can be productive and functional, they may also be problematic and highly political (Sheehan, Brent Ritchie, & Hudson, 2007) particularly in times of shifting governance and funding arrangements for DMOs and destinations introducing a degree of uncertainty and complexity. Recent policy developments involving a new funding landscape are set to challenge the traditional paradigms and governance models discussed in the extant literature of DMOs and destinations (Reinhold et al., 2015).

This complexity in the operational environment together with the rapid development of tourism as a multifaceted phenomenon creates new challenges to both destination practitioners and academics attempting to predict global industry shifts (Kozak & Baloglu, 2011; Laesser & Beritelli, 2013; Urry & Larsen, 2011). These trends, coupled with the rapid globalisation processes and increased competition, require destination organisations to become more effective and efficient (Scott, Baggio, & Cooper, 2008). To respond, DMOs need a network of champions to provide the leadership and strategic vision required to support more effective operation (Hristov & Zehrer, 2015). Buchanan

et al. (2007) contended that the empowerment of network champions and nurturing interaction between them, leads to the development of DL across networks of organisations, such as DMOs. Beritelli et al. (2015) provided evidence that such network champions play an important linking function within DMOs.

2.1. From collaboration to distribution of leadership

DL builds on the concepts of cooperation and collaboration (see Scott & Marzano, 2015), which hold a prominent role in the changing funding and governance landscape, where DMOs in England are expected to adopt a strategic leadership role (Hristov & Petrova, 2015). DL builds on stakeholder collaboration in destinations through interdependence as its defining feature and indeed a condition for the enactment and practice of DL (Harris, 2005; Spillane, 2006). Interdependence in the context of DMOs implies limited resources, and response to this is framed in a networked fashion as opposed to on a bilateral basis, which is often the case with traditional stakeholder collaboration (Mason, 2015). DL therefore requires collective decision-making roles and responsibilities in the context of inter-dependency, where the latter is gaining more prominence in light of recent developments in the funding and governance landscape for DMOs. DL requires collaboration in the form of communication and resource exchange across a multitude of leaders to provide access to much needed developmental resources and oversee strategic destination decision-making in destinations. The last two decades have seen major shifts in paradigms of the concept of leadership discussed across the mainstream leadership literature (see Cullen & Yammarino, 2014; Fitzsimons, James, & Denyer, 2011; Harris, 2008; Martin, Currie, & Finn, 2009; Spillane, 2006). Cullen and Yammarino (2014) describe a transition from orthodox and ‘heroic’ leadership towards collective forms of leadership as ‘a paradigm shift’ within the field. These authors suggest that ‘teams, organisations, coalitions, communities, networks, systems, and other collectives carry out leadership functions through a collective social process’ (Cullen & Yammarino, 2014, p.1).

The term ‘distributed leadership’ was first introduced by Gibb (1954) in the mainstream leadership literature in his investigation of dynamics in influence processes taking place in both formal and informal groups and organisations. After Gibb (1954) little attention was placed on the concept until its rediscovery by Brown and Hosking (1986). Harris (2008) contends that DL emerges within organisations as a consequence of major shifts and subsequent complexities in an attempt to respond to them and cannot be prescribed in advance as it is the case of ‘heroic’ leadership. Traditional theories of leadership emanating from the mainstream leadership literature tend to discuss characteristics, values and attitudes held by individuals, i.e. leaders (Bass, 1985; Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999), which is aligned with the notion of ‘heroic’ leadership. DL, in contrast, is enacted by multiple individuals within an organisation or across organisations (Fitzsimons et al., 2011) and therefore occurs in a variety of group and organisation settings (Thorpe, Gold, & Lawler, 2011). A DL perspective then ‘recognises the inclusive and collaborative nature of the leadership process’ (Oborn, Barrett, & Dawson, 2013, p.254).

DL, according to Fitzsimons et al. (2011), is inherently inclusive as the concept captures whole organisations as units of analysis and importantly, takes into account their organisational environments. The focus of DL is on the study of leadership at an organisational level and across organisations. The practice of DL is founded on and thus heavily shaped by interactions within the organisation and its operational environment (Fitzsimons et al., 2011).

DL is thus defined as leadership that is not concentrated in just a few individuals but distributed across a network. DL also goes beyond merely the interdependence of individual actors to capture other defining features such as interactions rather than actions and the sharing of developmental resources and communication (e.g. see Fitzsimons et al., 2011; Harris & Spillane, 2008). It is important to note that

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