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Organising Tourism Providers on Remote Touring Tracks as Geographically Dispersed Teams

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Abstract

The Australian outback is a popular tourism destination. Iconic four wheel drive touring tracks are particularly attractive. This study considers how tourism providers are organised in remote touring tracks (RTTs) through a case study of the Oodnadatta Track. A framework developed from the geographically dispersed teams' (GDTs) literature provided the analytical lens for the study. This framework produced a useful description and explanation of the contemporary context and also a tentative improvement agenda. Particularly noteworthy was the question of leadership, which emerged as an influential and pervasive factor.

Introduction

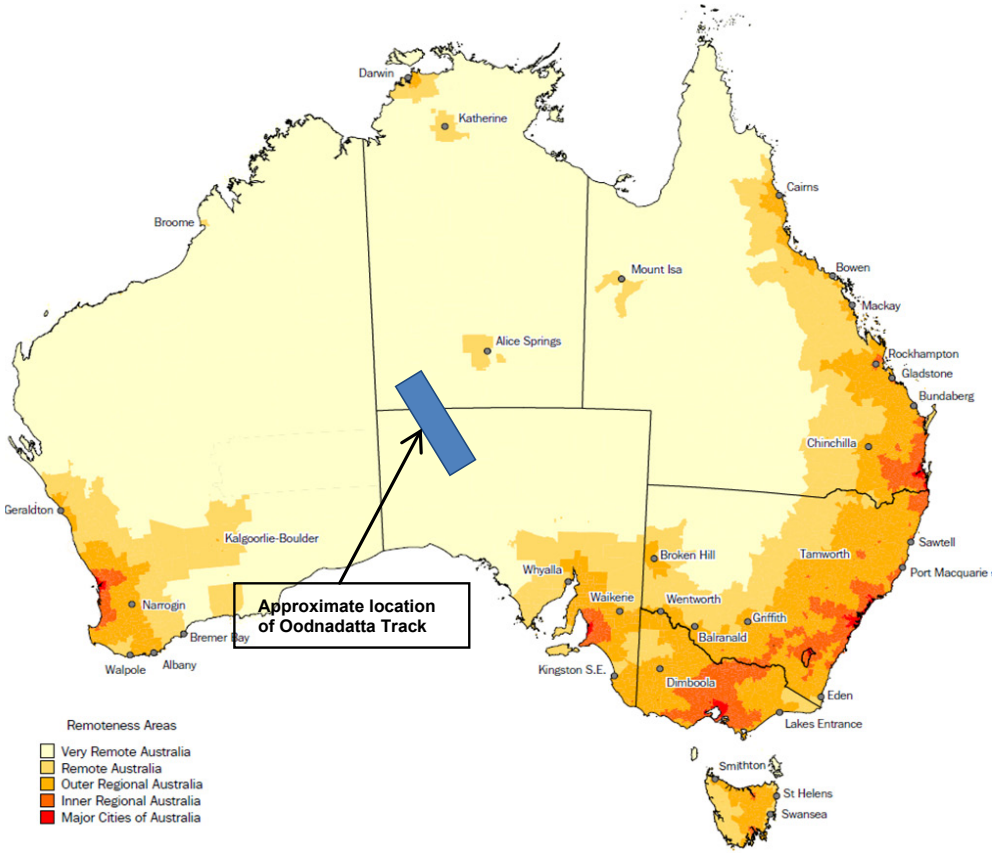
The management of tourism destinations raises a variety of issues. One significant and challenging variable is how those involved in the provision of the tourism experience (accommodation, tours, attractions, food and beverage, government agencies, intermediaries etc.) are organised. The term "organised" here refers to the purposeful arrangement of providers and includes the nature of the nexus between them, how and why they are connected, and how they find direction. The nature of this organisation is especially important in remote destinations because of their inherent environmental, social and economic challenges, and where the destination itself is not a single attraction, but rather multiple attractions which are geographically dispersed over considerable distances. The Oodnadatta Track (OT), a popular four wheel drive destination, is representative of these destinations. This paper will explore the utility of adopting a geographically dispersed teams (GDTs) framework to understand the organisation of tourism providers on RTTs. It will consider the following questions: Is this a conceptually useful lens? What diagnostic insights might it provide? Can it inform an agenda to improve the quality of the tourism experience?

This paper is comprised of five sections. Following this introduction is description of the Oodnadatta Track and its remote environment. The next section is an explanation of the GDT framework used in this paper. The findings of the study are then considered. Finally, the discussions and implications are explored.

The Oodnadatta Track

The OT is situated in remote Australia (refer to Figure 1). It is referred to as one of Australia's great desert tracks, and is frequently described as one of Australia's great four wheel drive desert tracks (Glover & Zell, 2007). This track is well known in the four wheel drive fraternity and is frequently mentioned in the four wheel drive publications (see for example Cartan, 2008). The track itself comprises some 635 kms of unsealed surface with extensive challenging corrugations, sections of rough rocks and stones and wet conditions that often make it impassable. Tourists are attracted in large part by this mix of driving experiences which are wrapped in the raw beauty of rugged outback landscapes (Narayanan & Macbeth, 2009; Waitt & Lane, 2007).

Figure 1: Approximate Location of Oodnadatta Track, Australia



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Along the OT there are two small towns at Marree (population approximately 350) and Oodnadatta (population approximately 200), offering basic supplies to

travellers, fuel and some accommodation. There are two other lesser populated areas at William Creek, consisting largely of an outback pub (population less than five), and at Coward Springs (population two), with its rustic bush campground and natural thermal spring. The northern extremity is Marla (population approximately 20), comprising hotel and camping accommodation and motor vehicle service station, located on the Stuart Highway. In addition the OT winds through several large pastoral properties, some of which provide tourism experiences (for example the stations at Arckaringa and Muloorina).

The OT comprises a variety of tourism attractions along its length. There are opportunities for bush camping which appeals to many four wheel drivers, as this provides opportunities to exercise choice and independence, an important quality for this genre of tourist (Prideaux & Coghlan, 2011). It has a rich historical and cultural heritage. For example the remains of many railway sidings (some restored) and heavy equipment along the Old Ghan railway line (Austral Archaeology Pty Ltd, 2001) are popular with tourists, as is the Aboriginal Culture Centre in Marree. However the OT does not simply provide access to these assets but is, in its own right, a definitive part of this extended destination (Prideaux & Coghlan, 2011). Whilst these points of interest could be accessed via several other gravel roads from the main highway, the typical visitor travels in a four wheel drive with the express purpose of experiencing the actual drive along the OT. The track connects a series of tourism points of interest to create a destination with geographically dispersed tourism attractions, services and infrastructure. This is characteristic of other remote touring track (RTT) destinations in Australia, such as the Gunbarrel Highway (Cartan & Carson, 2009). Whilst these tracks have distinctive built assets, they also exhibit an attractive mix of natural beauty (Prideaux & Coghlan, 2011) set in a "pristine environment, [amidst] rare wildlife and different cultures" (Carson & Harwood, 2007a, p. 1). Scott, Cooper & Baggio (2008) suggest that analysis of such destinations requires a consideration of all providers, and their connectivities: a whole of destination approach.

The physical environment of remote regions has been described as "uncompromising" (Centre for Arid Zone Research [CAZR] 2005). Conditions include spatial remoteness and isolation (Carson & Harwood 2007a; 2007b; National Centre for Studies in Travel and Tourism 2005), unpredictable variability in both rainfall and seasonality, low soil fertility and "patchy" natural resources (Stafford Smith, 2008), and a sparse population (averaging 0.05 persons/km2) which is unevenly spread and highly mobile (Brown, Taylor & Bell, 2008). There is also a shortage of skilled labour and associated high labour costs (Stafford Smith, 2008). Associated with this is a shortage of critical infrastructure (Carson & Harwood, 2007a) such as unsealed roads (National Centre for Studies in Travel and Tourism, 2005), and poor information and communication technology (ICT) (Brown, Taylor & Bell, 2008; National Centre for Studies in Travel and Tourism, 2005).

Remote areas have often been described as disempowered, with considerable power residing in institutions in distant major population centres (Stafford Smith, Moran & Seeman, 2008). Holmes (2002) describes a capital drain from remote areas, whilst Brown, Taylor and Bell (2008, p. 29) conclude that "economic linkages are

externally-focussed". There is a small and somewhat tenuous economic base in remote regions comprising pastoralism, mining, government spending and tourism (Brown, Taylor & Bell, 2008). Remote regions are also acutely susceptible to international fluctuations in commodity markets which impact directly on pastoral and mining industries (Carson & Harwood, 2007b) and on tourism, which is in turn directly affected by general global financial health. Stafford Smith (2008) describes these regions as volatile.

Since RTTs are destinations set in a harsh physical and challenging economic and social environment, and comprise multiple, dispersed touch points, their continuing vitality as destinations relies on individual and collective effort. However, it is this very environment and destination structure that in fact presents challenges to working together.

An approach to fostering collective effort, which seems logical and is intuitively appealing, is to consider organising providers on RTTs into teams. Kozlowski and Bell (2003, p. 334) define teams as "collectives who exist to perform organizationally relevant tasks, share one or more common goals, interact socially, exhibit task interdependencies, maintain and manage boundaries, and are embedded in an organizational context". Within the context of RTTs potential team members would include those critically involved in the delivery of the tourism experience: direct customer interface organisations in close proximity to the tracks, government agencies (concerned with, for example, tourism and the environment), local government bodies, tourism intermediaries and community groups. Active membership would be governed by the strength of the nexus with the track.

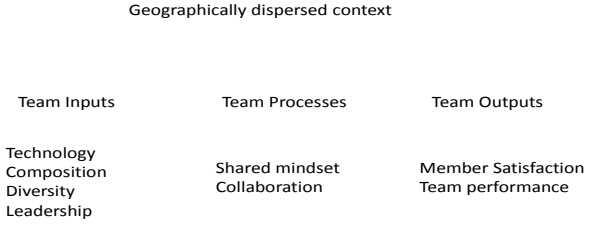
Teams have been the subject of extensive research in management-related fields over many years (see for example literature reviews: Cohen & Bailey, 1997; Kozlowski & Ilgen, 2006; Mathieu *et al.,* 2008) but they have received surprisingly little attention from tourism researchers (for exceptions see de Araujo & Bramwell, 2002; Monica Hu, Horng & Sun, 2009; Ogaard, 2008). However, a "teams analysis" does seem particularly appropriate to these remote destinations. RTTs comprise multiple providers with individual interests but with a collective interest in the entire destination. This whole of destination creates a need for providers to ensure the integrity of the entire experience, which implies a degree of interdependence and collaboration. The management literature suggests organising as a team might be appropriate in this type of context, because like RTT providers team members must cooperate, support, share and pursue overarching common goals. Further, given the special configuration of RTTs, the lens adopted for this study was a particular type of team referred to as a "geographically dispersed team" (Gibson & Gibbs, 2006; Connaughton & Shuffler, 2007; Polzer *et al.,* 2006; Hinds & Bailey, 2003). In these teams members need not be co-located and rely for contact heavily on information and communications technologies (ICTs). Martins, Gilson & Maynard (2004, p. 808) define GDTs as, "teams whose members use technology to varying degrees in working across locational, temporal, and relational boundaries to accomplish an interdependent task."

Whilst this form of work organisation has been studied in a variety of settings including multi-national dispersed teams (Connaughton & Shuffler, 2007), R&D teams (Kratzer, Leenders & Van Engelen, 2006) and telecommunications (Lawley, 2006), it has been subject to only limited scrutiny within the tourism industry. For example Matlay and Martin (2009) and Matlay and Westhead (2005) researched entrepreneurship in GDTs of e-entrepreneurs within the European tourism industry. Matlay and Westhead (2005, p. 297) reported that when using GDTs: "sustainable competitive advantage is achieved through team dynamics and collective contributions towards a common strategy and/or entrepreneurial goal." Building on this initial study Matlay and Martin (2009) point specifically to higher profits in these teams, which they claim are attributable directly to collaborative strategies. This GDT lens is intended to supplement other literature which has considered tourism destination dynamics such as networks, collaboration and clusters. The study does not purport to provide a superior framework for analysis but simply to contribute to the extant body of knowledge.

GDT Framework

Martins, Gilson and Maynard (2004, p. 809) assert that the inputs-processes-outputs (I-P-O) model "is the dominant framework used in the study of teams". They describe inputs as the resources available to the team, processes as the mediating events that convert inputs to outputs, and team outputs refer to both issues of personal satisfaction and quality of product and service. For example, culturally diverse team members, experience a shared mindset within the team, and as a result have greater personal satisfaction and the team performs more effectively. Whilst the I-P-O model has been subject to scrutiny and modifications suggested (see for example Mathieu *et al.*, 2008), it remains a core analytical tool for examining teams. The I-P-O model is adopted in this research as an organising template to categorise/connect the GDT elements employed. Seven elements constitute the framework for this study: geographic dispersion, technology, composition, diversity, leadership, shared mindset, and collaboration (see Figure 1 below). These elements are consistent with those identified by Martins, Gilson and Maynard (2004) and were particularly appropriate to the RTT context because of the characteristics of these destinations, including the geographic location of providers, the existence of culturally diverse entities, and the need for collaboration. Each element is described below.

Figure 1: I-P-O Model of GDT Functioning



One of the most frequently cited and defining qualities of GDTs is some degree of geographic dispersion of team members (see for example Polzer *et al.*, 2006; Gibson & Gibbs, 2006). Chudoba *et al.* (2005, p. 282) conclude that in fact, people working in different geographic locations is the nexus of all conceptualisations of virtual teaming.

Kirkman & Mathieu (2005), take a slightly different approach, acknowledging that the usual approach is to include the element of geographic dispersion, but contend that it is not a necessary prerequisite. They suggest that members can be co-located provided they are utilising virtual tools in furtherance of common objectives. The fact that some members can be co-located is echoed by Connaughton & Shuffler (2007), who suggests that distribution or proximity ought be seen as a sliding scale, and not dichotomous (see also Hoegl, 2007). In other words for GDTs there exists a continuum of virtuality (Gibson & Gibbs, 2006) where some members can be dispersed and others co-located.

Martins, Gilson & Maynard (2004, p. 809) identify "technology" as an important team input. A frequently cited dimension of GDTs is the use of virtual tools or ICTs to connect team members (Cascio 2000; Chudoba *et al.*, 2005; Kirkman & Mathieu, 2005). The technology employed enables the geographically dispersed members to "work together through electronic means with minimum face-to-face interaction" (Malhotra Gilson & Maynard., 2007, p. 60). In remote regions Abolhasan and Wright (2008) assert that ICTs are inadequate, and Taylor, Ffowcs-Williams and Crowe (2008) report that some remote businesses make no use of information technology.

The composition of GDTs is another important input variable (Martins, Gilson & Maynard, 2004). Because GDTs do not have the need for member co-location due to technology usage, a much deeper and broader pool of human resources becomes available, providing opportunities for diverse and cross functional membership (Malhotra *et al.,* 2007; Martins, Gilson & Maynard, 2004; Peters & Manz, 2007). Members might for example be included on a permanent basis if their capability is core to the team's purpose or on a temporary basis to meet short-term needs (Gibson & Gibbs, 2006; Griffith, Sawyer & Neale, 2003). Whilst Gibson & Gibbs (2006) warn that not all GDTs are dynamic in this fashion, they frequently do demonstrate, and certainly have great potential to benefit from, this type of flexibility. Members may occupy positions that are core to the operation of the team or more peripheral to it (Matlay & Westhead, 2005). Core members are intimately and regularly involved with the business of the team while peripheral members have a less central role to play and might be called on to participate on an occasional basis. Both core and peripheral members might also have other significant business interests outside of the team. However, regardless of the composition of the team, it is essential that team members identify with the team and experience a sense of connection (Joshi, Lazarove & Liao, 2009).

A third input of GDTs is a diversified culture (Martins, Gilson & Maynard, 2004). Within teams the nature of cultural diversity might emanate from member differences associated with race (Aboriginal and European, for example), functional speciality (pastoralists and tourism operators) or home organization (government agencies and small tourism businesses) (Gibson & Gibbs, 2006). Connaughton &

Shuffler (2007, p. 395) comment on the "complex, multifaceted nature of culture" and suggest that it "includes ethnic, racial, gender, and other demographic characteristics as well as collectives or groups with which an individual may associate." As a consequence, GDTs exhibit a distinctive, robust cultural mix. Members' relationships are affected by their individual frames of reference, priorities and objectives, work backgrounds and styles (Martins, Gilson & Maynard, 2004). The risk with such diversification is that "faultlines" might develop within the team, creating threats to cohesiveness and effectiveness (van Kippenberg , 2010).

Leadership is another input within the GDT framework. The role of the leader is to manage the implications of "virtuality" if full benefits are to be drawn from the GDTs (Kratzner, 2006). Hoegel, Ernst and Proserpio (2007) suggest that the GDT leadership function is more challenging than in co-located teams, with issues such as information sharing and commitment requiring particular attention in virtual environments. Because of their dispersion, GDT Team members are more self-managing rather than closely supervised in a hands-on vertical leadership fashion. Self management implies a style of leadership which encourages empowerment, which Peters & Manz (2007) argue is more appropriate to GDTs than conventional settings. Distributed leadership meets these requirements and has been the subject of some research in virtual environments (see for example Peters & Manz, 2007). Distributed leadership has also been referred to as shared, democratic, devolved, participative and collaborative (see Currie, Lockett, & Suhomlinove, 2009, for a summary of this literature). Several studies have shown this form of leadership can produce more effective teams (Carson, Tesluk & Marrone, 2007; Ensley, Pearson & Pearce, 2003; Mathieu *et al*., 2008). In particular it has been shown to be capable of producing strong collaboration (Peters & Manz, 2007), and developing a common sense of purpose and shared identity (Solansky, 2008).

Shared mindset is identified as a key process in the I-P-O model. Lawley (2006) points to the need for GDT members to be connected to, and reliant on, each other through a common framework and shared objectives. Hoegl, Ernst and Proserpio (2007) define teamwork as an effectiveness factor that includes such items as mutual support and information sharing, cohesion, commitment to the team and shared goals. The need for team members to share common ground cannot be overstated. The requirements are a greater awareness of the collective good and a willingness to work toward that outcome. This is referred to by Chudoba *et al.* (2005) as a requirement for a smooth working relationship, consisting of a tacit appreciation of team needs and requirements.

A second process for GDTs is collaboration, defined by Huxham and Vangen (2005: 4) as "any situation in which people are working across organisational boundaries towards some positive end." Collaborative arrangements have been utilized in a wide range of settings and industries, including for example biotechnology (Chiesa & Toletti, 2004), resource management (Bidwell & Ryan, 2006), the non-profit sector (Guo & Acar, 2005), and health care (Cramer, Atwood & Stoner, 2006). The process of collaboration may be operationalised through a variety of configurations (see for example Hibbert, Huxham & Ring, 2006; Guo & Acar, 2005) including

GDTs. Kratzner *et al.* (2006) go so far as to suggest that in very broad terms the prime objective of GDTs is to generate superior outcomes through the process of collaboration despite the spatial distribution of members. Matlay and Westhead (2009) argue that collaboration has shown to be profitable in GDTs and that it is a sound strategy for growing market share. In a case study of GDTs at Orange, Lawley (2006) describes how successful collaborative processes resulted in superior knowledge management. However, virtual collaboration also presents significant challenges, including for example how to cultivate a acceptance by members for the need for a functioning level of interdependence (Kratzer *et al.,* 2006; Peters & Manz, 2007). Where team members have minimal face-to-face contact, developing the requisite trust and cooperative mindset can be problematic.

As discussed above the purpose of the study was to explore these dimensions of GDT functioning in the context of the Oodnadatta Track as an RTT. The aim was to consider specific input and process dimensions. Whilst output factors were not measured, they are considered later in the paper as potential areas for further research.

Methods and Findings

A case study research design was adopted for this study. This focus of this research was a complex, contemporary real life phenomenon, with unclear boundaries, over which the researcher had little control. This is a scenario ideally suited to a case study research design (Yin, 2009; Gerring, 2007). In addition, case studies have been used extensively in tourism research and in the study of GDTs (see for example Xiao & Smith, 2006; Carson & Macbeth, 2005; Kirkman *et al.,* 2002; Lee-Kelley, 2006).

Data were collected in two phases. The first adopted internet mediated research (IMR), and involved an extensive series of internet searches (see Cartan & Carson, 2009 for complete description of the process). Searches of each identifiable point of interest and populated centre resulted in detailed data about types of organisations, activities and locations, and were acquired from 99 sites. The second phase was a field study involving interviews, on-site observations and document collation. A total of 22 interviews were conducted from 12 locations. Each populated tourism point of interest within each site was represented. In addition some interviews were conducted in Adelaide and Port Augusta. Interviewees were representative of tourism operators, other commercial interests, aboriginal communities, local government, local communities, pastoral stations, government tourism organisations and tourism consultants. These were in-depth, semi-structured interviews (Fontanna & Frey, 2005) seeking information about general economic activity, current tourism activities, the nature of within-site relationships and what the future might hold for tourism within the site. The data analysis was guided by the elements of the GDT Framework, which were used as categories/codes for classifying data. Phase 1 and 2 data were analysed separately, then collapsed to form a composite picture of the site. The GDT framework was used as the structure to present the findings reported below.

The OT case study data revealed varying degrees of geographic dispersion between providers. Some were co-located in small towns (for example in Marree

providers offered services including a hotel, a shop, a caravan park and a cultural centre). Other providers were separated by significant distances. For example a roadhouse at Oodnadatta was 202 kilometres from the William Creek hotel, which in turn was another 136 kilometres from the Coward Springs camp ground. In addition some providers were not in close proximity to the track; for example the Outback Communities Authority is located in Port Augusta some 375 kilometres from Marree, and the South Australian Tourism Commission is located in the capital city of Adelaide some 300 kilometres further to the south. Providers on the OT occupy various positions along Connaughton and Shuffler's (2007) continuum of virtuality, but are predominantly significantly dispersed. For example Marree is separated from William Creek by approximately 200 kilometres, and then another 400 kilometres to the next town of Oodnadatta. The closest major regional centre is Coober Pedy some 170 kilometres from the track. The sole operator organisation at Coward Springs is mid way between Marree and William Creek. These distances are compounded by the rough and unpredictable nature of the road surface.

The utilisation of ICTs varied considerably on the OT. Some entities (in particular the government agencies, for example Tourism SA and the Outback Communities Authority) had access to more sophisticated communication tools (for example video teleconferencing) whilst others (notably the provider organisations located in close proximity to the track) were limited to more basic technology such as telephone calls and email. The nature of providers' websites provides some insight into the use of ICT. The sites of those providers located in close proximity to the OT in the main had quite limited functionality (static web sites, no booking engines, no interactive features etc.). One quite isolated provider made the comment: "Yes I do get on the Web a bit; I usually just rely on e-mails and the phone."

Regarding team membership, some providers on the OT were engaged full-time in tourism related activities (for example at the Coward Springs camp ground), whilst for others tourism represented only a portion of their agenda. Hotels and shops fall into this latter category, servicing both residents and tourists. Similarly, government agencies have broad responsibilities in addition to an interest in tourism on the OT. In this sense some providers were core to the team's operation and some more peripheral. Some members were permanent and others temporary. The composition of a provider-team was quite fluid with some members engaged full time because of their intense connection with the track and others joining the team as required. In addition, there was little sense of connection between members; they did not see themselves as a collective of providers or as team members. No interviewee described interactions with others that indicated they were operating as part of a collective pursuing the tourism interests of the entire track.

There is a diverse mix of cultures amongst the providers on the OT. Organisational cultures varied from small owner operator businesses (a roadhouse) embedded in the remote region, to large government agencies located some distance from the site (a Government Department with natural resource management responsibilities in Adelaide). The racial mix of Aboriginal, Afghan and European (for example at Marree) was also evident. Clearly there is a need to manage this diversity to

achieve positive outcomes. A lack of understanding or acceptance of others cultures was evident. For example, several providers in close proximity to the track made strong observations about "the suits from Adelaide" who don't really understand the issues they face. Diversity of this type can either be destructive, for example evidencing high degrees of conflict, or it can be a catalyst for innovation provided creative tensions can be managed (Bassett-Jones, 2005).

Many OT providers did demonstrate the traditional leadership function with respect to their own businesses (for example a hotel, a roadhouse, a gymkhana and a campground). However, no evidence was found of leadership behaviours or activities with respect to the site as a whole. No one person or organisation could be identified as legitimately possessing, or informally adopting, a comprehensive position of leadership. This lack of leadership is evidenced by the comments of one provider who suggested the need for some form of overall leadership: "I think that proper management needs to be put in place to look after the interests of the track … and with the responsibility of maintaining and promoting tourism."

Further, many informants indicated an expectation that leadership might shift to various individual organizations, depending upon the issue, the context and expertise. This expectation was directed to specific government agencies and was frequently raised by respondents in the context of the responsibility to provide funding. For example one subject suggested that some form of lead role was expected from Transport SA with respect to the safety and development of the track: "The Department of Road Transport [sic] haven't spent a great deal of money developing the infrastructure for tourism along the track – especially on road maintenance and signage."

The South Australian Tourism Commission was seen to have a leadership responsibility to promote and develop some aspects of tourism along the track. For example, several comments were made about the need for interpretative and directional signage within the site: "It wouldn't take much to make the town really friendly; a few signs would do." The Commission also produces written material relating to aspects of the site (see for example "The Oodnadatta Track – String of Springs"). These indicate some leadership role in the marketing of the track for tourism purposes.

There was little evidence of a widespread shared mindset amongst providers. The comment of one provider, "we don't have much to do with each other" provides insight. Certainly there was a general acceptance that the general purpose which drives activity amongst providers was the enhancement of the tourism experience, but there was no evidence that this translated into a sense of strong connection and overtly expressed shared common goals between providers. It would seem that most providers were concerned almost exclusively on their own immediate interests. This dominant frame of reference was also evident in their tentative approach to collaboration.

All providers saw collaboration as important to current and future tourism initiatives. One provider reported that "with collaboration the sky could be the limit."

Whilst there were some examples of collaborative activity, the practice could not be regarded as extensive; for example a tour operator and a pastoralist worked together to extend the OT tour into the pastoral property and some providers worked together in the delivery of a Gymkhana and racing events. These somewhat limited examples indicated a preparedness of providers to work together from time to time, usually to promote their immediate sphere of interest, but not consistently and not to promote the OT as a tourism entity. These comments of providers are indicative: "there's not much (collaboration) occurring at the moment and not much likely to happen" and "there is no collaboration in the town between people."

Collaboration seemed to be hampered by cultural differences, levels of trust, and perhaps a lack of strategic vision. One provider commented, "collaboration is very bad; because of personalities and differences of opinion; it just doesn't happen; everyone works for themselves." Collaboration was also more likely to occur between organisations at some distance from each other as this was less likely to involve direct competitors. One provider observed:

> *Yeah I'll work with others, but not with people who are located close by; they're competitors; but collaboration with people more at a distance would be quite useful; that might be down in the Flinders or somewhere like the Barossa.*

Conclusions and Implications

Whilst the strength of these conclusions must be tempered by the exploratory nature of this study, and hence the need for further research, it is possible to make some quite robust assertions. It would seem that the proposition to conceptualise the tourism providers on RTTs as constituting a GDT is both defensible and useful. Through the GDT lens, the data analysis provided useful insights about current activities, including explanations of certain phenomena, and also provided some guidance about possible intervention strategies that might enhance the delivery of the tourism experience.

The findings indicated that the OT providers were not operating as an optimal GDT. Whilst a continuum of virtuality (Gibson & Gibbs, 2006) did exist amongst providers, the collective of providers did not make effective use of ICTs. This indicates the need for a high priority on enhanced ICT infrastructure, but perhaps more importantly this must be accompanied by educating suppliers as to the potential benefits and collaborative uses. Whilst collaboration was seen as important, specific examples were quite limited. Even successful examples such as the gymkhana, were isolated and did not act as a catalyst for more consistent efforts to collaborate on a wider range of issues. There was a mix of cultures amongst providers and also evidence of associated faultlines (van Kippenberg *et al.,* 2010). These were reflected in the lack of a strong shared mindset and the low levels of collaboration. There was the potential to benefit from a fluid team membership (Malhotra *et al.,* 2007) but strong competing commercial self-interests often hampered the development of a sense of connectedness between providers. These factors mesh to create strong barriers to collective effort and subsequent benefits.

The critically important and somewhat vexed issue of leadership requires discussion. Using a GDT lens forces a close scrutiny of current leadership practices and offers some future guidance. To date there does not seem to have been any holistic, all-of-destination approach to the question of leadership. Leadership is present but scattered and quite often parochial in nature. In any team leadership is a critical element, perhaps more so in GDTs because of the lack of face-to-face contact. The form of leadership identified in this paper (distributed leadership) would perhaps be more acceptable to providers than a more traditional top-down approach. Also it is clear that leadership has a direct impact on several of the other elements of the GDT framework. Leadership influences the team's ability to leverage the innovative benefits that diversity offers, the development of a shared mindset between providers and the capacity and willingness to collaborate. The opportunities afforded by fluid membership would all rely heavily on skilled and subtle leadership that is acceptable to stakeholders. Given the potential and wide ranging impact of the leadership element it might well be that the I-P-O model should be reviewed identifying leadership as a moderator of the relationship between inputs and outputs rather than as an input. In fact Martins *et al.* (2004) does mention leadership as both a potential moderator (one in need of more research) as well as an input but does not discuss it in depth. These results would suggest that if serious ground is to be made in the organisation of providers into geographically dispersed teams then the question of leadership must be given high priority.

The proposition that providers on RTTs can be usefully conceptualised and operationalised as a GDT is strong but requires further investigation. Further research is needed to explore in greater depth the utility of each element of the framework and their impact: for example, are there specific antecedents to developing a common mindset? It may well also be that other elements could be included in the framework, for example trust and conflict resolution have been identified in previous studies as important to the functioning of GDTs. Issues of trust were also evident in the current study. As mentioned at the outset, the aim was to consider specific input and process dimensions of GDTs. Output factors should also be considered in future research into the functioning of RTTs.

Two broad observations might be made of these outcomes. The first is the utility of these findings. As a diagnostic tool, the GDT lens encourages a focus on these important factors and on their connectedness. As a team, providers collectively and individually represent the entire destination and hence need to be interdependent, to possess a common purpose and mindset and to collaborate. They ought to demonstrate a common interest in promoting the entire destination and actively work together to deliver the tourism experience. To assist these requirements a serviceable level of ICT is required. Effective teamwork requires these conditions. The GDT analysis has demonstrated a shortfall in all these areas, pointing to the nucleus of an improvement agenda.

The second more broadly addresses the implication of adopting a GDT frame of reference. The existence of the types of issues identified in this study are considered a normal part of the functioning of GDTs rather than as problems. The GDT mindset

would reframe these from challenges to norms. They are still to be addressed, but are not seen as debilitating or acutely dysfunctional but as a focus of attention. This more positive frame of reference may well be the first step in improving collaboration and ultimately the provision of the tourism experience. As in Matlay and Martin's (2009) study, it has the potential to harness the creative and positive energies of individuals on the OT rather than attempting to normalise them.

The data indicate that tourism providers on RTTs can be conceptualised as a GDT, according to the framework adopted. Viewing RTTs in this way provides a useful analytical tool. This analytical lens also offers a means of identifying an agenda that might enhance the delivery of the tourism experience on these remote locations. Further research is required, however, to assess how well existing GDT frameworks suit the specific context discussed in this paper. There are some hints in the research thus far that remoteness, for example, brings with it certain types of entrepreneurs who may be seeking independence and isolation and so be less interested in collaboration than those in more rural or regional destinations. As mentioned above there may also be some limitations that the market places on collaboration – four wheel drive tourists value their independence and the ability to make their own decisions regarding how the tourism experience is put together (Prideaux & Coghlan, 2011). Too much (perceived) collaboration among tourism suppliers may lessen the value of the (self determined) experience. Further research is required to see how GDTs, which allow for these unique characteristics, can be maintained.

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