

Chapter 16

Focusing on Knowledge Exchange: The Role of Trust in Tourism Networks



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16.1 Introduction

The link between innovation and knowledge management is long established. Contemporary tourism academics emphasise the importance of knowledge acquisition and exploitation to innovation and, in turn, sustainable organisational success (Fuglsang et al. 2011). Importantly, such studies also confirm that while a degree of innovation based on existing knowledge may occur, for progressive organisations seeking competitive advantage the ability to source and successfully exploit external knowledge is imperative (Cantner et al. 2011). Yet, most small tourism organisations have insufficient information to competitively innovate on their own (Thomas and Wood 2014) and require inter-organisational partnerships, or innovation systems, for the purpose of acquiring and exploiting new knowledge (Powell et al. 2005). This may occur through acquiring skills and knowledge via collaborations (Cavusgil et al. 2003) or alliances (Inkpen 2002) through which explicit and tacit knowledge may be transferred or exchanged (Cavusgil et al. 2003). In tourism, innovation systems commonly reflect a network structure (Cooper 2015) based on non-market relationships which require active rather than passive involvement of a-spatially located members to achieve goals using co-operation rather than competition (Asheim et al. 2011). Studies also suggest that knowledge transfer between partners of such networks can improve knowledge processing capabilities in the short run and develop the speed of further innovation in the long run (Cantner et al. 2011).

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While the case for tourism organisations to positively engage in knowledge transfer activities within networks has been made (Thomas 2012; Hjalager 2010), the reality of achieving successful knowledge exchange is, in practice, often difficult. Tourism organisations must learn how to engage in inter-personal and inter-organisational knowledge transfer within collaborations (Van Wijk et al. 2008). While this may seem obvious, Easterby-Smith et al. (2008) remind us that innovation requires the integration of dissimilar yet complementary knowledge which necessitates, to some degree, organisational change, while such change may be difficult to achieve (Hjalager 2009).

16.2 Knowledge Transfer in Tourism Networks

The link between knowledge management and innovation in progressive, contemporary, post-bureaucratic organisations has been much debated by researchers (Weidenfeld et al. 2010; Darroch 2005; Thomas and Wood 2015) with an emphasis being placed on the importance of linking such activities with the strategic goals of the organisations (Rhodes et al. 2008). Central to knowledge management activities is the development of a culture or ‘intent to learning’ (Hamel 1991) in which individuals, teams and departments are encouraged to capture and utilise appropriately sourced knowledge which is shared through inter and intra-firm knowledge transfer (Cantner et al. 2011). Though knowledge management strives to create platforms for such collaboration, the desired levels of knowledge transfer may not be realised. The body of research on barriers to knowledge transfer highlight issues such as selection of appropriate sources of information (Minbaeva 2007; Hjalager 2010) and use of inappropriate knowledge transfer process (Cooper 2006). To overcome such challenges, the innovation system must consider the nature of the task (Spraggon and Bodolica 2012), the type of knowledge being transferred (Cavusgil et al. 2003; Cohen and Levinthal 1990) and special consideration should be given to attributes such as the ‘stickiness’ of tacit knowledge (Reed and DeFillipi 1990). Holistically, organisations must consider the complexity of knowledge being transferred and its context dependency (Tsoukas and Vladimitou 2001) and the new knowledge’s fit with the destination and its recipients (Cooper 2006). The use of appropriate media (Dennis et al. 2008) is also imperative to ensure understanding by the recipient (Spraggon and Bodolica 2012). Given the above, an appropriate taxonomy of knowledge transfer must be considered by the tourism network to encourage and facilitate members to engage in knowledge management activities.

In their study of inter-firm knowledge transfer, Spraggon and Bodolica (2012) propose an integrative taxonomy comprised of four theoretical dimensions: the degree of programmability, level of discretion, scope of coverage and process orientation. They then propose a model which incorporates a variety of intra-organisational knowledge transfer types, processes and communication methods. The aim of the model, see Fig. 16.1, is to help address the issue of how best to facilitate inter and intra-organisational transfer knowledge (Garvin 1990).

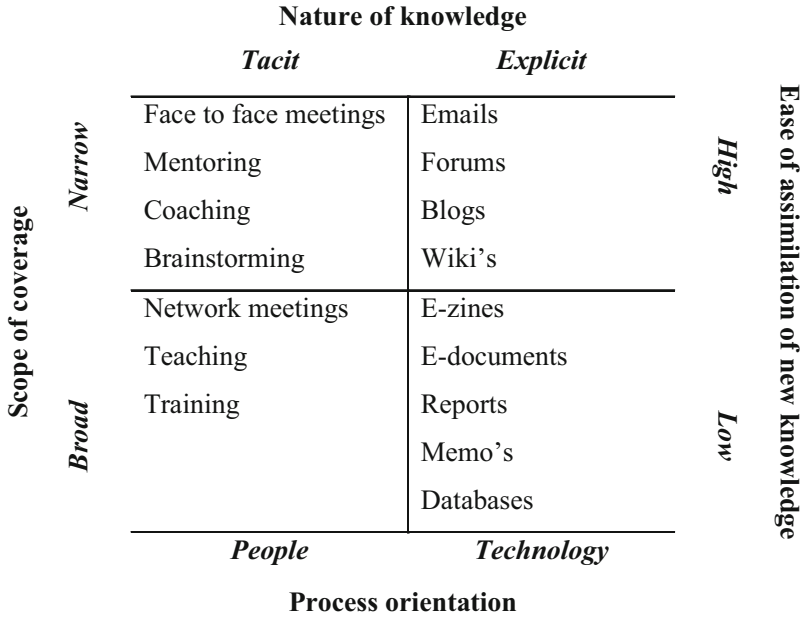


Fig. 16.1 Taxonomy of knowledge transfer within a network

By allowing for a variety of knowledge transfer types and predicting the most effective communication method, this model addresses the challenge of improving the transformation capacity of the recipient organisation and increases the likelihood of realised absorption capacity i.e. of converting external knowledge into innovations (Zahra and George 2002).

A taxonomy of knowledge transfer can only be useful in a tourism network if the formal structure encourages the development of inter-organisational and inter-personal relationships (Shaw and Williams 2009; Argote and Ingram 2000; Shaw 2015). To increase co-operation and knowledge transfer, non-hierarchical, horizontal organisational structures should be used, as they encourage organisational learning (Rhodes et al. 2008). Rhodes et al. (2008) also argue that the type of knowledge transfer required may determine the structure and suggest that formal structures best facilitate explicit knowledge transfer while tacit knowledge transfer requires an informal system. Whether formal or informal, the allocation of resources by senior management is essential as it creates a culture of commitment to knowledge transfer initiatives and to the innovation system (Hjalager 2010; Thomas 2012).

A culture based on inter-personal relationships is a significant mediator in knowledge transfer between collaborators and those members who adopt a hierarchical, individualistic and competitive stance can experience lower levels of knowledge transfer, with a resulting negative impact on organisational innovation (Rai 2011). In essence, all members must ‘buy-in’ to the process, with a focus on long-

rather than short-term gains (Novelli et al. 2006) and tourism organisation members must be discouraged from 'free-riding' (Hjalager 2002).

Contemporary tourism organisations are encouraged to adopt work practices and organisational cultures which motivate staff to participate in wider stakeholder communities with a view to the creation of short-to-medium term collaborations which can result in innovative products and processes (Dovey 2009). Such outcomes are difficult to achieve in practice, especially where vested interests are perceived to be under threat (Dovey 2009). Therefore, trust in partners is required (McEvily et al. 2003). The presence of trust can encourage actors to participate in knowledge sharing (Maurer 2010). It can be seen as a facilitator of positive relationships and co-operation (Wong and Cheung 2004) and may encourage more willingness to engage in co-operative interactions (Nahapiet and Ghoshal 1998; Clegg et al. 2002b).

16.3 Trust

The proliferation of academic articles on the subject of trust demonstrates the importance on the concept in such disciplines as economics, sociology and psychology (Rousseau et al. 1998). In the management literature, trust is usually considered to be imperative for organisational success (Meyerson et al. 2006; Kramer 1999). Trust has been linked with problem solving (Nielsen and Nielsen 2009), reduction of transaction costs (Chow 2008) and increased profitability (Bibb and Kourdi 2004). Trust facilitates alignment of partners' interests (Atkinson et al. 2006), enhanced stakeholder satisfaction (Brensen and Marshall 2000) and the development of organisational health (Clegg et al. 2002a, b). Trust is often deemed essential for organisations pursuing innovation as it acts as an 'organising principle' (McEvily et al. 2003) and influences allocation of resources to create value to the firm (Maurer 2010).

Trust assists acquisition of new knowledge (White and Fortune 2002) and knowledge transfer (Molina-Morales et al. 2011) and is deemed to be a source of competitive advantage for organisations (Nahapiet and Ghoshal 1998). Trust between collaborating partners is important in improving innovation performance (Petersen et al. 2005; Wang et al. 2011) as collaborating partners can share knowledge and learn from each other for the purpose of improving products and processes (Cohen and Levinthal 1990). All of this suggests that trust must exist at many levels to influence innovation. While previous studies have examined the relationship between trust and knowledge transfer (Butler 1991; Ko et al. 2005), trust and knowledge creation (Niu 2010) and trust and innovation (Sankowska 2013), few have explored the role of trust in knowledge transfer within tourism networks.

16.3.1 What is Trust?

Trust is a derivative of the German word *trost* which means comfort (Fadol and Sandhu 2013). It is a concept that has been examined from a variety of disciplinary perspectives. Perhaps because of this, a concise and universally agreed definition of trust has yet to emerge (Kramer 1999; Grey and Garsten 2001; Molina-Morales et al. 2011; Rousseau et al. 1998; Mayer et al. 1995; Cook and Wall 1980). At its core, trust is an expectation concerning the intentions and behaviours of others (Rousseau et al. 1998). The expectation that parties will meet their obligations (Woolthuis et al. 2005) is imperative in knowledge sharing collaborations. Fine and Holyfield (1996) suggest that it is important that all parties not only think that trust exists, but feel it too. This perception suggests that trust is a psychological state (Kramer 1999) or as Dovey (2009) contends, it is a mental model acquired tacitly through life based on assumptions of how relationships work. Trust is based on acceptance of risk and vulnerability where the vulnerability presupposes that something of value can be lost and the risk is deemed acceptable; trust is not risk taking per se but a willingness to take a risk (Mayer et al. 1995). Fundamentally, trust encourages people to embrace risk-taking behaviours, such as knowledge transfer collaborations, and accept corresponding vulnerabilities (Sankowska 2013).

The link between *confidence* and trust has also been explored by early trust academics. They established that trust is reinforced if there is confidence in each other i.e. 'I have confidence that you will do what you say' (Coleman 1990). Holistically, Misztal (1996) stressed the importance of both parties being concerned with their opposite's interests and the importance of good faith in the development of trusting relationships was noted by Cummings and Bromiley (1996).

Early trust researchers recognised that trust is a social capital resource (Nahapiet and Ghoshal 1998) in that it is embedded in the relationships between people (Misztal 1996) and is created and developed through regular social interaction (Dovey 2009). It is a complex phenomenon which allows the individual or group to understand the social environment through emotional, situational and cognitive dimensions (Dovey 2009). It was also suggested that trust is a fragile resource (Tyler and Kramer 1996) in that it can easily be destroyed much faster than it is created and requires relational commitment and vigilance from all parties for trust to be sustained (Dovey 2009). Given the above, the challenge for trust researchers is to identify variables or indicators of trust which appropriately describe the absence or presence of trust within risk taking, and in this case knowledge sharing, relationships.

Butler's (1991) seminal research on the indicators of trust acknowledges that no list is exhaustive and that many studies fail to assess the psychometric properties of trust. Gabarro (1978), a pioneer in this area of research, developed nine empirically identified 'bases' of trust. They include *integrity* (moral character), *motives* (intentions), *consistency of behaviour* (reliability), *openness* (expressing ideas freely), *business sense* (common sense), *discreetness* (maintaining confidences), *interpersonal competence* (people skills), *functional competence* (specific task skills and knowledge) and *judgement* (the ability to make sound decisions). Allowing for the

subtleties of language, it could be suggested that later researchers have used similar terms or grouped them in differing ways.

One example of related approaches emerges from the work of Gambetta (1988) who emphasises *predictability*. Predictability is also cited by Butler (1991) as a key manifestation of trust, but notes that predictability is one of three elements which form loyalty; the others being *accessibility* (the mental openness and acceptance of different ideas) and *availability*, (being physically present when needed). Butler (1991) identified similar elements and termed them ‘conditions of trust inventory’.

More recently, Sankowska (2013) identified the key attributes of trustworthiness as *competence*, *reliability* and *concern*. *Concern* can be constructed as a judgement of empathy from the perspective of both the trustee and trustor. In their examination of trust within the innovation process, Clegg et al. (2002a, b) suggest that key indicators of trust from a subordinate’s perspective are ‘trust that is heard’ and ‘trust that will benefit’. The former relates to the expectancy that an organisation or group will take ideas and suggestions of the individual proposer seriously and the latter relates to the issue of the benefits of any changes will be bestowed on the creator of the idea or proposer of change.

Contemporary quantitative and qualitative trust researchers maintain that Mayer et al.’s (1995) *ability*, *benevolence* and *integrity*, or ABI, remain the essential variables which should be used when assessing the development of trust in inter and intra-organisational trust studies. Ability refers to the skills, competencies and characteristics of the party to complete a task (Mayer et al. 1995). Other academics have used similar constructs such as *competence* (Cook and Wall 1980) or *perceived expertise* (Butler 1991). Benevolence refers to the extent that the trustee believes the trustor wants to do good (Mayer et al. 1995). Other similar terms include *altruism* (Larzelere and Huston 1980) and *loyalty* (Butler and Cantrell 1984). Integrity refers to the trustor’s perception that the trustee adheres to a set of guiding principles which are acceptable to the trustor (Mayer et al. 1995). Fadol and Sandhu (2013) refer to integrity in this sense and their interpretation of the term ‘reliability’ resembles Mayer et al.’s ‘benevolence’.

While such categorisation and definition of terms encourages debate in the development of a trust research agenda, Nunkoo and Smith (2015) note that trust studies have progressed from the early person-centric studies of trust of the 1970s to the conceptualisation and examination of the mediating impact of inter-personal trust on relationships and partnerships. Such development has informed contemporary trust studies in tourism. For example, in his studies examining the role of trust in tourism planning, Nunkoo (2015) contends that trust between the citizen and government actors is influenced by such variables as perceptions of the economic and political performance of local government, existing levels of inter-personal trust between host community and government and the perceived level of power held by host communities in tourism planning. Nunkoo (2015) argues that host communities’ support for tourism development is influenced by their perception of its costs and benefits and by their trust of government actors. Germann Molz (2013) goes further suggesting that trust should be examined within perspectives of the sharing economy and cites Airbnb as an example (see also, Cheng 2016). Having identified

the key descriptors of trust used in historic and contemporary research, the following section assesses the development of trust between collaborating knowledge transfer partners.

16.3.2 Trust Development in Knowledge Transfer Collaborations

Trust amongst collaborators is required to mobilise partners to contribute resources in a way that may realise value to all firms (McEvily et al. 2003). It can be seen as a facilitator of positive relationships and co-operation (Wong and Cheung 2004) and encourages collaborating partners to engage in positive social exchanges (Nunkoo and Gursoy 2016; Nunkoo and Smith 2015). Moreover, co-operative interactions within a trusting collaboration, leads members to absorb shared knowledge as trusted partners are expected to deliver reliable insights (Levin and Cross 2004).

Trust can facilitate the alignment of collaborating partners' interests (Atkinson et al. 2006) and support the achievement of project goals (Kadefors 2004). Trust can create mutual confidence and act as a substitute for a formal control mechanism that encourages common interests and facilitates dispute resolution between partners (Jones and George 1998). Trust can also facilitate repeated interactions that can assist in the complicated process of tacit knowledge transfer (Tsai and Ghoshal 1998). Trust between collaboration partners can encourage sharing of confidential information and ideally reduce the risk that one party will opportunistically exploit it to another's disadvantage (Utterback 1994; Oberg and Svesson 2010). Knowledge transfer partners should note that trust can be reduced by partners lack of collaboration experience (Hjalager 2009), an insufficient time allowance for the project (Nordqvist et al. 2004) or high levels of conflict or suspicion (Hawke 1994). This suggests that collaborations must be managed if they are to be effective and sustainable.

Conceptualising trust as a single form in a given context fails to acknowledge the diversity of trust (Rousseau et al. 1998). Mayer et al. (1995) argues that trust should be viewed as a continuum rather than describing a trustee merely as being trustworthy or untrustworthy. In an effort to visualise the fluid nature of trust, Rousseau et al. (1998) contend that trust should be viewed as having a 'bandwidth'. The authors suggest that, based on a static level of institutional trust, over a period of time actors are likely to progress from a calculative or lower level trust to a relational or higher level of trust (see Fig. 16.2).

A key objective of a long-term collaboration is that trust, rather than a contract or a calculation, becomes the control mechanism for coping with the inevitable tensions that will arise from time-to-time (Dyer and Singh 1998).

It could be argued that trust is considerably more influential in tacit knowledge transfer as it requires a relational based social exchange (Nunkoo and Ramkissoon 2012). The encouragement of personal relationships can assist in achieving trusting

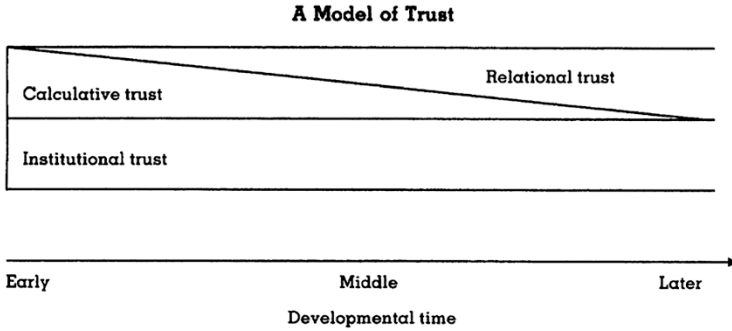


Fig. 16.2 A model of trust (Rousseau et al. 1998)

knowledge transfer (Mooradian et al. 2006) and ensuring collaborating teams have members who understand collaborative knowledge management processes, may increase the impact and embeddedness of transferred knowledge (Inkpen and Tsang 2005). Yet, Hjalager's insights into the Roskilde Festival in Denmark also suggest that a stable pool of members allows for predictability and facilitates the formation of trust, especially if the collaborators consider themselves as peers (Hjalager 2009).

Knowledge sharing partners should consider the use of appropriate rewards as this may encourage the development of trust (Inkpen and Tsang 2005) and enhances the perceptions of resource distribution fairness, further encouraging trust (Robson et al. 2008). Werner et al.'s (2015) study of knowledge transfer processes within mega-events highlighted the importance of encouraging and recognising the contributions of individuals, suggesting that such contacts facilitate 'learning through exchange', a key learning mechanism for collaborating partners.

Finally, to encourage collaborating partners to progress from a calculative to relational based trust, tourism networks should consider facilitating regular contacts between individuals and organisations who consider themselves as peers (Hjalager 2009). Previous studies assert that peer perception facilitates trust development between knowledge transfer partners (Szulanski et al. 2004) as the ability, benevolence and integrity of peers reduces the potentially negative impact of inappropriate power within a knowledge transfer collaboration and peers are more likely to be deemed appropriate sources of knowledge (Nunkoo and Ramkissoon 2012). This is supported by Stacke et al.'s (2012) research of tourism clusters in Brazil which noted that rates of knowledge transfer between different public and private sector tourism organisations was not equal and that private companies were more likely to engage in knowledge transfer activities with competitors than with public sector organisations.

16.4 Conclusion

This review of the role of trust in knowledge management and exchange has highlighted the importance of this under researched issue. Although valuable conceptual work has been produced in the context of tourism, there has been limited progress empirically. This prevents the promotion of a comprehensive set of recommendations for effective practice but, instead, highlights the need for further research. Such research should be set within wider questions concerning knowledge management i.e. those that go beyond 'trust'.

Several prominent research themes are prompted by the discussion contained in this chapter. These encompass questions relating to the articulation of public policy-makers (or tourism agencies) with private sector actors. A key strategic and operational challenge for stakeholders is that all participants are mindful of the overarching goal of inter-personal and inter-organisational trust development; the facilitation of knowledge transfer for the purpose of innovation. The allocation of appropriate resources by stakeholders to the trust development, such as time and finance, must be commensurate with potential innovation outcomes. This does not suggest that an investment in inter-personal or inter-organisational trust should be considered in terms of quid pro quo or traditional transaction cost economics but that relational trust must have an ethos of social exchange as its foundation. Therefore, collaborating policy-makers and practitioners should consider the negotiation of stated partnership outcomes as a key stage in inter-personal and inter-organisational trust development as it is often during such contacts that the trustworthiness (the ability, benevolence and integrity of the other) is determined.

The benefits of gaining mutual trust appear to be incontrovertible but the mechanisms for doing so are little understood. Does trust emerge from working on shared policy or business problems? Does trust emerge differentially within different types of formal tourism networks? If so, on what basis? What contribution can higher education make to such networks? The key question for future tourism research may focus on assessing how trust contributes to greater knowledge sharing in a variety of contexts. Yet, to understand such contexts from a tourism perspective, further insights into the motivations, experiences and perceptions of collaborators are required. Knowledge transfer between collaborating partners does not occur in a vacuum and, therefore, contemporary studies on the role of social capital in knowledge transfer between tourism sectorial bodies and practitioner network members may highlight trust related barriers and enablers of knowledge transfer. Such studies may also provide contextual insights into the key indicators of inter-personal and inter-organisational trust. Addressing these and related questions would be particularly valuable for policy-makers engaged in attempts at strengthening collaboration within destinations.

Future research that casts light on the role of trust in enabling competitors to share knowledge also offers the prospect of overcoming one of the perennial challenges to enhancing competitiveness within tourism. Studies that explain the conditions under which inter-personal trust overcome the well-documented barriers to collaboration,

would enable organisations to invest time and other resources in appropriate activities. It is probable that this knowledge will emerge from detailed qualitative analyses of specific (contrasting) instances. It must be remembered that trust is a psychological state and eliciting the descriptions and insights from experienced tourism collaborators could illuminate a path to relational trust development. Researchers may be rewarded by examining whether the requirements for inter-organisational trust in knowledge transfer are directly influenced by the nature of the knowledge being transferred—tacit or explicit knowledge—and if the former or latter directly influences organisational innovation. Equally, academics may assess indirect personal and organisational variables such as culture, leadership experience, organisational scale and pre-disposition to collaborate and to examine how these influence trust-based knowledge transfer within tourism networks.

Finally, as the role of trust in inter-organisational knowledge transfer is at early phase of academic development, it is important for tourism scholars to consider a multi-disciplinary and multi-sectorial approach to any future research agenda. Eliciting insights into trust development, knowledge transfer or exchange and their impacts on innovation from different industry sector perspectives encourages a broadening of debate. All of this implies a role for academic researchers acting as ‘engaged scholars’ (Van de Ven 2007) and draw on notions of transdisciplinarity. Access to existing studies, if coupled with an openness to the tacit knowledge of practitioners that these terms imply, is likely to yield the kinds of understanding that will be of value of those seeking to improve their practice. Although the very gradual pace of research progress witnessed thus far suggests that increased insights may not materialise in the near future, the growing official concern in many countries with funding ‘relevant’ or ‘with impact’ research may change this. Though many scholars are legitimately critical of the ‘neoliberal university’ (e.g. Dredge 2015; Thomas 2015), its emergence may, in this instance, result in creating the dynamics for valuable collaboration.

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