

**Title:** The Art of Working Together: Collaboration as a Trust Exercise

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**Abstract:**

In a world where technology is relied upon as a dominant communication method, and where emphasis is placed on a business's profitability, have we lost the art of working together? Has our lack of face to face communication, and our drive to compete with one another, reduced our ability to collaborate and share? In conversations with small tourism businesses and public representatives from regional Australia, this research advances the concept of trust and how it affects one's ability to collaborate and work together. Using the determinants of trust by Ferrin, Blight and Kohles (2007), this research contributes understanding to the elements of monitoring, cooperation, and trust, and their integration to achieve collaboration. Based on interviews in 2017 with 24 small tourism business owners/managers and representatives from the local council and regional tourism organization from the Granite Belt Region in South-East Queensland, Australia, this study reveals exactly how trust impacts the collaborative climate within a destination. Results indicate that while some businesses recognize the benefit to sharing knowledge, resources and information for the betterment of the region as a whole, other businesses approach collaboration with a mentality that sharing will only allow idea stealing, and that it will have detrimental impacts on their business, rather than benefitting it. This indicated that there was a lack of trust between businesses, reducing their willingness to share. Further to this, there was a lack of trust between tourism businesses and the local public sector, additionally affecting the level of collaboration within the region. Tourism businesses felt unsupported by local public sector organizations. This resulted in businesses having a lower level of trust in the public sector and not engaging with public sector in effective collaborations. To further this, Ferrin, Blight and Kohles (2007) called for research to progress the understanding of trust and its development between parties overtime. This study, as well as advancing the present understanding of trust, responds to that call by reporting on results of organized collaboration within the same group of participants a year later in 2018. The collaboration was organized with help from intellectuals from Griffith University using a participatory action research approach, and reveals insights into levels of trust and their development overtime. The results indicate that communication and transparency are key elements in developing and building trust. It has proven essential that parties wishing to collaborate must be transparent about their goals, both personal and for the collaboration, and be open in communicating these to other involved parties. The organized collaboration within industry continues to grow and reveal insights into effective cooperation between tourism stakeholders, with the reported outcomes serving as development of understanding of trust and collaboration within the tourism literature, and offering advice to collaborating tourism businesses within industry around the world.

Ferrin, D. L., Blight, M.C., & Kohles, J.C. (2007). Can I trust you to trust me? A theory of trust, monitoring, and cooperation in interpersonal and intergroup relationships. *Group & Organization Management*, 32(4), 465-499. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1059601106293960>

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