Linkages between creativity and intention to quit: An occupational study of chefs

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ABSTRACT

Human resource issues persist as a vexation for tourism managers. Foodservice is a core component of many tourism destinations and attractions yet the foodservice labour market is historically volatile. This article reports on the findings of a job satisfaction survey of chefs working in Australia's tourism and hospitality industry. This study's aim is to determine empirically whether there is a positive relationship between creativity and job and occupational satisfaction. A customised instrument is designed to mitigate the shortcomings of generalising scale items and findings of generic job satisfaction surveys to a single occupation. This paper focuses on identifying a range of dimensions of job satisfaction and occupational attributes connected to creativity and its associated dimensions. Reliability and data reduction analyses were conducted to validate the construction of composite 'creativity' variables for the basis of further comparisons. The findings indicate that the sample ranks creativity more highly than working conditions and that there is a clear relationship between creativity and both organisational and occupational satisfaction. Results vary as a function of gender. In conclusion, theoretical and practical implications for occupational and tourism management are discussed.

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There is currently a critical imbalance between labour supply and demand in the tourism and hospitality industry, with skills shortages reported in almost every industry sector. Workforce development issues drive the agenda of tourism operators, industry representative bodies (Ibrahim & Wason, 2002) and governments globally. While this paper limits itself to the discussion of tourism and hospitality workforce development issues as they affect the developed world, where skills shortages are of a fundamentally different nature to those in the developing world, scant attention is still paid to this topic in the broader tourism literature. A recent content analysis of preeminent tourism journals shows that research pertaining to human resource issues represents only two percent of publications. Moreover, the space afforded to the related topics of education and training and hospitality diminished for the period from 1994 to 2004 in these same journals (Ballantyne, Packer, & Axelsen, 2009). A proportion of this work, while undoubtedly welcome, leans towards the conceptual (e.g. Baum, 2008), meaning even less attention is given to practical solutions that might ameliorate the current crisis.

1. Introduction

Research suggests that upwards of 25% of tourism expenditure is attributable to food and beverages (e.g. Correia, Moital, da Costa, & Peres, 2008; Hall & Sharples, 2003). An emerging body of tourism literature reveals the primacy of foodservice to the broader tourism experience (Kivela & Crotts, 2006) be it in hotels and resorts, restaurants and the emerging conference, or gambling metropolises. Moreover, as a cultural artefact, food is fundamental to destination imaging as well as a maturing niche tourism market in its own right (Hall and Sharples, 2003). Since the turn of the millennium a distinct body of work which investigates food (gastronomy) tourism has evolved (e.g. Hall, Sharples, Mitchell, Macionis, & Cambourne, 2003; Hjalager & Richards, 2002). Indeed, as Scarpato (2002) identifies, gastronomy is inextricably linked with cultural, social, and economic factors – each of which resonate as sub-themes in much of contemporary tourism literature.

There is a compelling argument then, to suggest that those engaged in the production of foodservice are inevitably linked to the success and sustainable development of the tourism industry. Skills shortages are particularly acute for chefs, or the occupation of cookery. This investigation is set in Queensland, Australia, where a job vacancy series study reveals a critical imbalance between labour supply and demand for chefs (Robinson, Arcodia, Tian, & Charlton,

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2010). These shortages are accentuated by high turnover (intra-occupational) and attrition (interoccupational) rates (Cameron, 2001; Lee-Ross, 1999; Pratten, 2003). Some commissioned research suggests the occupationally-specific annual turnover rate for chefs in Australia is as low as 20% (Deery, 2006) as compared to the national hospitality industry average of 50% (HospitalityMagazine.com.au, 2006). Perhaps more telling are data which reveal that up to 50% of cookery entrants leave the occupation before completion of apprenticeship and as many as 65% within 10 years (Casey, 2003). Skills shortages for the occupation of cookery have been on the Australian national agenda for at least the past decade (Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs, 2001). Key to addressing the demand for chefs is arresting the high attrition rates. Queensland government data report that between 2000 and 2007 only 39% of apprenticeship commencements in commercial cookery were completed (Department of Training and the Arts, 2007) although other environmental factors need acknowledging.

Apprenticeships in Australia, operating under a work-based learning model, have been subject to a complex political environment. This is manifest, for example, in problematic apprentice/employer relations, where the former aspires to be well-trained and the latter hankers after a good-value labour proposition. An archaic wage structure, the capacity of employers to effectively deliver training, the privatisation of the technical and further education sector where the cookery occupation's fundamentals are also taught and assessed and governments' ability to develop policy and legislate in these contested spaces (Cornford & Gunn, 1998) are among the issues conflagrating labour force tensions. Moreover, recent developments in domestic candidates seeking trade qualifications through recognition of prior learning (RPL) and the eligibility process for immigrants to gain residency visas have been the catalyst for the introduction of accelerated trade-recognition programs for cookery candidates, which circumvent the traditional apprenticeship trade-recognition pathway requirements. While RPL may assist in retaining previously unqualified candidates and, despite resident visa seeker enrolments for these programs increasing eight-fold between 2004 and 2008, there is little evidence that this is alleviating the chronic occupational skills shortages (Birrell, Healy, & Kinnaird, 2009). This is somewhat paradoxical especially during a period of sustained low unemployment (ABS, 2009).

Despite the *milieu* in which the occupation of cookery functions, the previously cited figures regarding occupational turnover and attrition and apprenticeship incompletions would seem to imply a lack of job, or more pertinently, occupational commitment. Much research has provided a clear linkage between commitment and job and occupational satisfaction. To this point the predominant Marxian aetiology in hospitality research, as epitomised by Wood (1997), routinely cites poor working conditions as antecedents to occupational [dis]satisfaction, but since Maslow (1957) the human resource (HR) literature consistently shows intrinsic aspects of work also impact upon job satisfaction. Intrinsic needs relate to higher order human needs, such as self-respect, achievement, reputation, recognition, and realising one's potential. Clearly, creativity is linked to some of these constructs and has been considered in the management and HR literature from a number of perspectives and at organisational and occupational levels. Further to this, a rich vein of literature, beginning with Mobley (1977), has identified a positive relationship between job satisfaction and organisational commitment and occupational satisfaction and occupational commitment (Wright & Bonett, 1992). There is little in the literature however, that explores the relationships among creativity and intrinsic satisfaction and how they relate to organisational/occupational satisfaction in the occupation of cookery.

The purpose of this paper is to present the findings of a study of southeast Queensland chefs, which investigated the relationship between creativity and organisational/occupational satisfaction. These findings are discussed in relation to existing theory, and in conclusion the practical implications are considered and recommendations are offered. For these implications and recommendations to be considered in context it is first necessary to present an overview of the relevant literatures.

1.1. Creativity

As a construct, creativity is nested within several disciplines. From divine Creation to the Renaissance in art, creativity has gradually become humanistic. By the middle of the 20th century sociologists explored further dimensions of creativity. "What is new in Creativity is the growing realization, the emerging discovery, of the tremendous unsuspected potentialities in the creativity of man, in the nature of human resources, in the meaning of respect for the individual" (Anderson, 1957, *p.x*). This is the physical manifestation of creativity. Another manifestation, Anderson posits, is that which he labels "psychological or social invention" (1957, p.119). The product of this – "creativity in human relationships is a positive view of human behaviour that admits the uniqueness and dignity of man" (Anderson, 1957, p.120) – is intangible reward. Couched here are several ideas – on a meta-plane that creativity is a human trait that can be leveraged for the good of humankind, and that for the individual, creativity might be a powerful tool for expressing higher order needs such as self-worth. These ideas have found expression in the generic business management literature, where creativity is also viewed as an exploitable resource.

1.2. Creativity in business management

As a construct relevant to business management, creativity has been explored from several standpoints. Organisations value creativity because it assists in responding to rapidly changing global and external forces and provides the stimulus for internal flexibility and revitalisation (Tan, 1998). Definitions of creativity are widely contested. It has been described as an individual skill or process, which "depends to some extent on personality characteristics" (Amabile, 1997, p.43), and one, which is of interest for this study that, can be heightened when aligned with intrinsic (task) motivation. The terms 'creativity' and 'innovation' are frequently used interchangeably, yet as recent authors point out, they can be distinctly different concepts (Beesley & Cooper, 2008; Davila, Epstein, & Shelton, 2006). According to Beesley and Cooper creativity is "the emergence of new ideas through the original combination of common understandings, or the transformation of existing concepts through the reorganisation of existing knowledge networks" (2008, p.55). In contrast, innovation corresponds to the application of new and creative ideas and the implementation of inventions; or, as Davila et al. suggest, "creativity implies coming up with ideas, it's the "bringing ideas to life… that makes innovation the distinct undertaking it is" (2006, p.*xvii*). It is important to draw these distinctions, and for clarity in the interpretation of data, to clearly delineate creativity as it pertains to this investigation.

Clearly though, creativity and innovation are intrinsically linked and much research energy has focused on identifying the factors that promote employee creativity, whether personal or (workplace) environmental. Personal characteristics, though more complex than is achievable here, emanate from biographical history, cognitive styles and intelligence (Oldham & Cummings, 1996). Alternatively, Unsworth, Wall, and Carter (2005) suggest four work factors are prominent: empowerment, support for leadership, sanctioning innovation and time pressures. A range of training regimes, consultancies, leadership programs and integrated approaches (Tan, 1998) have been utilised to exploit the myriad of ways in which personality and work environment may intersect to enhance organisational innovation and gain