



The relationships among professional competence, job satisfaction and career development confidence for chefs in Taiwan

Wen-Hwa Ko*

Fu-Jen University, Department of Restaurant, Hotel and Institutional Management, No. 510 Zhongzheng Rd., Xinzhuang Dist., New Taipei City 24205, Taiwan, ROC

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the relationship among professional competence, job satisfaction and the career development confidence for chefs, and examines the mediators of job satisfaction for professional competence and career development confidence in Taiwan. The analytical results demonstrate that work attitude was the most influential construct for professional competence, and culinary creativity had the lowest reported ratings. Job selection satisfaction showed higher ranking than current job satisfaction. The structural equation modeling results showed that professional competence significantly affects job satisfaction, and that job satisfaction predicts actual career development confidence. Additionally, job satisfaction mediated the influences of professional competence and career development confidence. The implications of these findings are discussed.

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1. Introduction

The hospitality and tourism industry is economically significant for many areas of Taiwan, particularly the food and beverage sector. According to the Executive Yuan, the service industry accounts for more than 70% of Taiwan's GDP, meaning that Taiwan's economy has transformed from manufacturing-oriented to service-oriented (Lin et al., 2011). Though a growing food and beverage industry provides positive economic effects the problems encountered by employees, such as high levels of stress, long hours, high turnover rates, and narrow career paths, along with rapid changes and severe competition, have caused widespread low job satisfaction in Taiwan (Wang and Horng, 2008).

Hospitality is an industry that has been long been plagued by turnover rates traditionally ranging from 60% to 300%, resulting in lost training wages, frustrated accountants and financial statements crying for reductions in wasted human resource dollars (Jones, 2008). The entire global tourism and hospitality industry faces difficulty in attracting and retaining quality employees and seeks a solution to the shortage of skilled hospitality personnel (Deery and Shaw, 1999; Ferris et al., 2002). Chefs, the subject of this paper, frequently leave the hospitality industry due to job dissatisfaction, poor working conditions and heavy work load, resulting in high staff turnover and wastage of trained and experienced employees (Jenkins, 2001). The low job satisfaction

is contradictory to the current trend of personal pursuit for achievement and self-direction (Wang et al., 2011).

Studies show that employees are less satisfied with their current job, the low professional career development potential and the absence of motivating factors in the hospitality industry (Jenkins, 2001; Kong et al., 2011; Kong and Baum, 2006). College students generally do not believe that a career in tourism and hospitality will enable them to fulfill career needs they find important (Richardson, 2009). A good way to retain qualified employees is by helping them to increase their job satisfaction and developing their own careers in hospitality industry (Barnett and Bradley, 2007).

Chefs are involved in strategic planning, product sales, and presentation, as well as food quality, safety and sanitation, in the food and beverage industry. The current competitive environment is such that, in order to succeed, restaurants must hire high-quality chefs and maximize their contributions (Richardson, 2009). However, the serious problem retaining quality employees in the hospitality industry has led to a shortage of skilled employees (Pratten and O'Leary, 2007). Pratten (2003) showed that almost half of students beginning a course for chefs never work in the catering industry and many leave within a few years. The reasons given by chefs exiting the market include low salary, heavy hours, and poor work environment in the kitchen. Because chefs are critical to the success of food businesses, enabling them to find satisfaction in their professional competences and in their job is important for hospitality industry managers.

The current highly competitive and rapidly changing environment requires chefs to be professionally trained and to have completed advanced education and training in producing large quantities of appetizing food (Alexander et al., 2009; Hu, 2010).

* Tel.: +886 2 29053755.

E-mail address: 073770@mail.fju.edu.tw

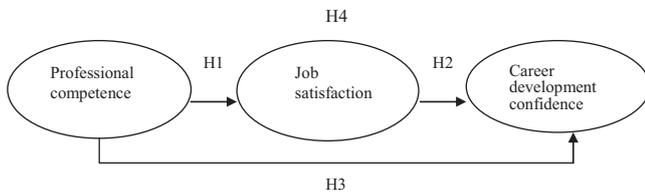


Fig. 1. Conceptual model of this study.

Maintaining high culinary quality requires chefs to continuously upgrade their skills. Successful professional competence development dictates that chefs remain in the industry over the long term. This investigation thus explores how the professional competencies of chefs contribute to their high performance (Birdir and Pearson, 2000).

Career planning is important, as are job satisfaction and opportunities for promotion and development. Employee job satisfaction is particularly relevant in service-based organizations because of the practical relationship satisfaction has with turnover intention (Davy et al., 1991), organizational commitment (Brooke et al., 1988), job performance (Meyer et al., 1989), and customer satisfaction with and involvement in service exchanges (Frye and Mount, 2007). In the hospitality industry, employees who are satisfied with their jobs are more likely to treat customers respectfully (Arnett et al., 2002; Karatepe et al., 2003). Identifying specific determinants of job satisfaction is a first step toward developing organizational strategies to reduce employee turnover and increase employee retention. Positive employee behavior, service quality, and customer satisfaction are all correlated to job satisfaction (Arnett et al., 2002).

Taiwanese research on hospitality has focused on management (Horng et al., 2011; Horng and Wu, 2002; Yang, 2001), and the literature on chefs, professional skills, and job satisfaction is scant. The purpose of this study is thus to investigate the relationship between professional competence, job satisfaction and the confidence of chefs in their career development, as well as the mediators of job satisfaction. These study findings may help in planning continuing education courses for chefs and in providing a reference for hospitality industry professionals regarding human resource management.

A conceptual framework of this study is depicted in Fig. 1. We suggest that professional competence and job satisfaction have a positive affect on career development confidence. However, this study also proposes that job satisfaction plays a mediating role in the relationship between professional competence and career development confidence. The hypotheses and supporting literature are discussed in detail below.

2. Literature review

The variable constructs including professional competence, job satisfaction, career development confidence and the relationship between these constructs are discussed in the literature review.

2.1. Professional competence

Professional competence defined as the degree to which employees can apply to work conditions their professional knowledge, skills, motives, and traits (Kane, 1992). It includes high-level skills, such as critical thinking, teamwork, communication, and permanent learning (Litchfield et al., 2002). The cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains all play important roles in the development of a competent culinary professional (Brough, 2008). Ko and Hsiao

(2008) showed that culinary knowledge is the most important factor among major alternatives, followed by personal characteristics and communication. To detect the professional competence for hospitality students, Ko (2010) developed five constructs, including culinary basic knowledge, culinary innovation, culinary basic skills, culinary management, and culinary attitude. If the restaurant offers greater training to the staff, particularly as the need to manage new skills such as stock control are encountered, they could more confidence in this area (Pratten and O'Leary, 2007). Additionally, the ADA (American Dietetic Association) has identified assurance safe food as a critical competence and a responsibility for food service directors or chefs. The findings of the survey indicate that the most important management skills for food service industry are food safety, cultural sensitivity, interpersonal relationship skills, and managerial flexibility (Kriegel, 2000). Professional staff and service have the most significant influence on customer decision-making in relation to restaurants. Therefore, chefs play an important role in providing offerings that match consumers' tastes and sensory needs. The culinary art field is interdisciplinary, involving technical skills, communication skills, business expertise, and food basic knowledge (Harrington et al., 2005). Consequently, promoting culinary quality in Taiwan requires creating for chefs a stable work environment that encourages the development of professional skills such as creativity (Hu, 2010).

2.2. Job satisfaction

Smith et al. (1969) described job satisfaction as workers' feelings regarding their jobs. Job satisfaction is thus a function of the perceived relationship between workers' expectations regarding a job and what they actually obtain from that job, as well as the importance or value that workers attribute to their jobs. Job satisfaction is an attitudinal measure that relates workers' perceptions of past events and rewards to their current impressions of a job (Lawler, 1995). Measures of job satisfaction include intrinsic and extrinsic satisfaction. Intrinsic satisfaction is determined by achievement, independence and variety, while extrinsic satisfaction includes pay, promotion, relationships with coworkers and working conditions (Mount and Bartlett, 2002). Most people establish a dominant career anchor that significantly influences their future job choices and decisions (Stewart and Konwles, 1999). According to Lent and Brown (1996), family influences are powerful contextual determinants that mediate the relationship between interests and goals, between goal and actions, and between action and accomplishment. Current job satisfaction relates to employee turnover (Rambur et al., 2005). Job satisfaction is an attitudinal measure which relates awareness of past experiences and rewards to current impressions of a job, it is a perceived relationship between what employees expect and obtain from their jobs and how important or valuable it is to them (Lawler, 1995). Pettijohn et al. (2008) also argue that employees' identification of current business ethics and resulting behaviors has a huge impact on their job satisfaction. Lee and Mitchell (1994) contend that person-organization fit occurs in advance of job satisfaction. High job selection satisfaction enhances the development of career confidence, and contributes positively to work emotion and attitude (Ho, 2001). Career satisfaction has attracted considerable attention because of its influence on both individuals and job satisfaction (Perry, 1992). Frye and Mount (2007) showed job satisfaction as pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job or job experiences. Therefore, previous research pertaining to job satisfaction in the hospitality industry indicates that job selection and current job satisfaction are the first concern for the chef career.

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