



An examination of social support and social identity factors and their relationship to certified chefs' burnout

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationship between certified chefs' burnout and its antecedents and intention to turnover. Applying self-identity and social exchange theories, the authors examined organization-based self-esteem and perceived organizational support as determinants of burnout. The Maslach Burnout Inventory was modified and operationalized to measure chefs' burnout and the Michigan Organizational Assessment Questionnaire was used to measure intention to turnover. Data were collected from certified chef members of the American Culinary Federation. Using structural equation modeling, the researchers examined path relationship of organization-based self-esteem, perceived support, exhaustion, cynicism, inefficacy, and intention to turn over. This paper reports the results of principal components analysis and alternative structural equation models and the implication for owners, managers, and chefs.

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1. Introduction

The food industry is a booming sector of the U.S. economy. Nationally, there are over 954,000 restaurants from fast food to full service to social caterers (National Restaurant Association, NRA, 2008), creating plentiful jobs in food service. As of 2006, there were over 3.1 million chefs, cooks, and food preparation workers employed in the United States and the number is expected to grow to over 3.5 million by 2016 (Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), 2008).

The growth of the hospitality industry, including restaurants, and the low skill requirements for entry-level jobs makes hiring and retaining labor difficult. Annual worker turnover has been over 110% and manager turnover has been over 30% (People Report, 2004). Thus, labor retention is the number one concern of restaurants today (NRA, 2008). A major contributor to this high turnover rate is burnout at all levels of the organization. This paper looks at some antecedents and consequences of burnout of the middle level managers in the culinary field, specifically the chefs that are tasked with the artistic and delivery dimensions of food management. It can be said that the chef is instrumental in the

success of the business, whether it is a fast food establishment or a four star dining experience (Cullen, 2001).

Chefs are particularly susceptible to burnout and subsequent turnover. The fast pace, long hours and high energy levels required to succeed cause some top chefs and cooks to leave for other jobs (BLS, 2008). Despite the perceptions fueled by media images of celebrity chefs that the work is glamorous (Pratten, 2003), chefs traditionally work in an atmosphere of constant stress. This stress stems from several factors; the physical environment of the workplace, human resources issues, and the nature of the work. The environment is hot, loud, and hectic. Slow, monotonous preparations are interrupted by daily chaotic business flows (Reynolds, 1995). Human resources concerns include long and anti-social (night, weekends, and holidays) hours, poor pay, aggressive discipline, including the threat of physical violence, and lack of training (Murray-Gibbons and Gibbons, 2007; Pratten, 2003).

The nature of a chef's work is complex in that the output of a manufacturing production environment is served and judged in a service environment. Noel Cullen, former president of the American Culinary Federation (ACF) discusses that a restaurant and chef's success derives just as much from end-user satisfaction verified by happy customers and guest retention as it does the quality of the food. Therefore, the chef must have knowledge of and control over, not only the kitchen but also service operations (2001). Fine (1992) further described the conflict between the aesthetics of culinary arts and the realities of production. Through

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observational and interview research, he discovered that chefs' creativity and work satisfaction were constrained by client demands, organizational efficiency requirements, such as production timing, and the resource base, primarily the cost of materials and labor. Chefs' actions in this environment were also moderated by the restaurant status, their career stage, and their specific occupational tasks.

The chef plays an integral, if not the most important role, in ensuring the success of a foodservice establishment (Cullen, 2001). Thus, burnout and turnover among chefs can have a negative effect on the whole operation. This study examined reasons why chefs, with diverse levels of education and training and high aspirations of culinary service, burnout and move to other jobs or out of the food service industry entirely. This article begins with an examination of the relevant literature on burnout, its antecedents and consequences in a reference to social exchange and social identity theories. This is followed with the presentation and discussion of a full structural equation model of burnout in a culinary setting.

The objective of this research is threefold: (1) identify the underlying path structure of chefs' burnout and turnover intention based on the organizational frame (rather than personal traits), (2) statistically investigate the mediation impact of a self-identity component of burnout to intention to turnover, and (3) finally revisit the importance of mediator variables using full structural equation modeling.

2. Literature review

There are multiple factors that directly and indirectly influence the extent of employee's burnout (Bakker et al., 2006; Shirom et al., 2006; Ter Doest and de Jonge, 2006; Tummers et al., 2006). These factors can often be manipulated or tuned through the individual's relationship with the respective organization, which is characterized by strong mutual commitment between 2 parties. In recent years, much of the research on commitment and covenantal relationships of employees has been based upon the norm of reciprocity (social exchange theory). Social exchange theory explains the mutual relationship between an organization and its employees through social or even psychological exchanges. More recently, social identity theory has added some insight in support of this relationship (Fuller et al., 2003; Twigg et al., 2007). The following section discusses the development of these significant organizational support variables and their conjugative effect on burnout and intention to turnover, which are heavily used as outcome variables in organizational behavior literature. This study examines the intertwined relationship among social exchange, social identity, burnout, and turnover intention constructs.

2.1. Social exchange

The norm of reciprocity or social exchange states, "one should repay help with help, or at least not repay help with harm" (Gouldner, 1960, p. 171). From social exchange perspectives, help may not only consist of material goods, but also non-material goods such as symbols of approval or prestige. Once engaged in the organizational relationship, employees feel further obligations, not precisely specified ones, and the nature of the return cannot be bargained about but must be left to the discretion of the one who makes it (Blau, 1964). Felt obligation is defined as "a prescriptive belief regarding whether one should care about the organization's well-being and should help the organization reach its goals" (Eisenberger et al., 2001, p. 42). Therefore, unlike economic exchange, social exchange requires the parties to trust each other due to the unspecified nature of the future return (Blau, 1964). In

other words, if individuals are to become committed to their organization, they must first trust their organization's commitment to them (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Trust is therefore considered a central part of social exchange and maintaining social relationships (Blau, 1964) and commitment is an exchange commodity.

One way to measure employees' trust in their organization is through individual's perceptions of organizational support. Perceived organizational support creates a feeling of obligation that is likely to be exhibited by increased commitment to the organization (Eisenberger et al., 1986). It should enhance calculative involvement by creating trust that the organization will take care to fulfill its exchange obligations of noticing and rewarding efforts made on its behalf (Eisenberger et al., 1990). Perceived organizational support is defined as an "attribution concerning the benevolent or malevolent intent of the organization's policies, norms, procedures, and actions as they affect employees" (Eisenberger et al., 2001, p. 42). Given that benevolence is one of the most often mentioned characteristics thought to foster trust (Mayer et al., 1995), support perceptions reflect an evaluation of the trustworthiness of the organization (Fuller and Hester, 2001). Therefore, support perceptions should be positively related to a person's willingness to make themselves vulnerable to the actions of another party (i.e., trust).

Eisenberger et al. (1986) developed the Survey of Perceived Organizational Support (SPOS), which assesses an individual's global beliefs about the extent to which the organization cares about their well-being and values their contributions (i.e., is committed to them). Perceived organizational support is based upon the idea that individuals tend to anthropomorphize (i.e., personify) the organization by the actions of organizational agents, and organizational traditions and policies (Levinson, 1965; Fuller et al., 2003). To the extent that employees interpret these actions, traditions, and policies as positive personal evaluations, perceptions of organizational support develop (Eisenberger et al., 1986).

Research has consistently found that perceived organizational support is positively related to an individual's commitment to their employer (Fuller and Hester, 2001; Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002; Pierce et al., 1989), which eventually leads to reduction in the degree of burnout. Byrne and Hochwarter (2008) found that perceived support enhances employees' performance by affecting the degree of burnout, especially the cynicism dimension. In Humborstad et al. (2008) study, service employees were found to be more committed to their job and less susceptible to burnout with higher perceived organizational support. Ross (1997) also found that greater attention of managers to the needs of employees and to communication alleviated work stress. Humborstad et al. (2008) and Tabacchi et al. (1990) also found that service employees' burnout level was mitigated by higher perceived organizational support. Based on the aforementioned literature review, the following hypothesis is proposed.

H1. Perceived organizational support will reduce the likelihood of burnout among certified chefs.

2.2. Social identity

Until recently, social exchange theory has been the only theoretical lens through which the support relationship has been viewed. However, others (Fuller et al., 2003; Twigg et al., 2007) suggest that social identity theory might add additional insight to organizational support theory. According to social identity theory, a person's self-esteem and self-worth is largely based upon status/respect judgments. Tyler (1999) suggests that people become committed to their organization in large degree because the organization bolsters their self-image. He believed that judgments

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