Talent orchestration and boomerang talent

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Talent Orchestration and Boomerang Talent: Seasonally Employed Chefs' Evaluation of Talent Management Practices

Abstract

Purpose: The aim of this study is to shed light on the talent management practices in the unique context of seasonal work in professional kitchens. Acknowledging that in the context of seasonal work in the hospitality industry it is rather difficult to rely on mainstream strategic talent management practices (e.g., training and development), we draw on resource orchestration, an extension of the Resource Based View, and propose a conceptual model of talent management tactics that could potentially increase seasonal employees' likelihood of returning to the same employer.

Methodology: Given the uniqueness of the context of this study and the dearth of prior relevant research, we employ a grounded theory approach. Specifically, we analyse and draw conclusions from 25 interviews with employees in commercial kitchens.

Findings: We develop a 'talent orchestration model', which places emphasis on management of talented employees across three dimensions: structuring, leveraging, and developing talent.

Implications: Extant literature in human capital management focuses mostly on the development of human capital but our results place more emphasis on utilising or leveraging human capital.

Originality: We move beyond the well-researched context of hotels and focus on talent management behind closed doors as in the case of kitchen chefs and, drawing on resource orchestration, we further examine talent management practices with shorter time frame targeted on seasonal employees.

Introduction

While talent management literature has proliferated over the last 20 years, the realisation that in talent management "context matters" (Gallardo-Gallardo *et al.*, 2020) has propelled industry-specific investigations of talent management techniques, processes, and outcomes. In this context, a recent body of work has explored talent management in the hospitality and tourism industry, motivated by the sector's unique characteristics, such as the long working hours (Muskat *et al.*, 2019), its trait of hospitableness (Bratton and Waton, 2018), higher-than-average turnover rate (Liu-Lastres *et al.,* 2022) and reliance on younger and often lower-skilled workforce (Golubovskaya *et al.*, 2019). However, literature in talent management has typically focused on large, multinational, for-profit organisations, raising doubts about whether its assumptions and results can guide understanding in other contexts, including specific sectors, countries, or company sizes such as small and medium enterprises (SMEs) (Jooss et al., 2022).

Further, most scholarly work in the field of talent management in the hospitality and tourism industry is based on hotels- a sub-sector of this industry characterised by often larger companies and bigger investment. Hotels employ staff for three years on average (Statista.com, 2018) and can afford to make long-term talent management planning and development. For example, literature suggests that hotel managers should focus on organisational culture and employer branding, offer more opportunities for career progression to recruit and retain talented employees, and a long-term career planning trajectory (Marinakou and Giousmpasoglou, 2019). Many of these strategies, however, are not applicable for short-term

employment and do not adequately take into consideration an important characteristic of this industry: seasonality.

While high employee turnover, a rather expensive problem in the hospitality and tourism sector (Gupta, 2019), has garnered the attention of researchers, the talent management literature often adopts a one-size fits all approach in its turnover-related suggestions. However, talent management needs and practices for short-term employment are arguably different. The seasonality of the tourism and hospitality sector is often viewed as the "hallmark of the industry" (Muskat *et al*., p.3906) and a key characteristic that places firms in the sector at a disadvantage when competing with other industries for the high-level talent (Baum, 2008). Seasonality also means that more and more hospitality and tourism employees work with fixed and short-term contracts, and, consequently, the employer-employee phycological contracts in seasonal work tend to be very weak, fragile, and characterized by relatively low expectations (Subramony *et al.*, 2018). Seasonality places a lot of pressure on employees; especially in regions that rely on tourism during limited seasons. For managers too, relying on seasonal, often part-time employees (*e.g.*, 4-5 months for summer destinations and even less for ski-resorts) suggests that most of talent management practices and initiatives are not directly applicable, or need to be redesigned.

Acknowledging the importance of turnover in the hospitality and tourism sector (e.g., Gupta, 2019), this study puts the spotlight on a rather underexplored topic: "boomerang" or returning employees. Returning employees have been broadly defined as individuals who return to work for the same employer after a period (Swider *et al.*, 2017, p. 871). Despite the short-term duration of seasonal work in the hospitality and tourism sector, research shows that seasonal employment of the same individuals *can* be recurrent (Ainsworth and Purss, 2009). Moreover,

employers in the specific context can reap several advantages from attracting and employing returning employees. For instance, the cost for initial training and socialization is reduced as the returning employees already know the employer's processes and practices (*e.g.,* Zimmerman, 2006) and some recent research findings in different contexts show that returning employees can outperform new hires (Keller *et al.*, 2021).

In this paper we argue for the need for talent management research in other sub-sectors of hospitality and tourism such as the restaurant industry, and a focus on seasonal employees as most of the documented effective talent management practices would not necessarily be applicable in this context. For example, prevalent advice for successful talent management in the hospitality and tourism sector include enhancing work-life balance and flexible working (Schneider and Treisch, 2019) and offering more opportunities for recognition (Lee and Chao, 2013), which could not work in the short-term but fast-paced environment of seasonal work in the restaurant industry (*e.g.,* a restaurant that is open only for the four months of summer).

The present study contributes to addressing the paucity of systematic, theory driven research on talent management in smaller firms in the hospitality and tourism sector and specifically in the context of restaurants which employ seasonal employees. Specifically, drawing on the resource-based view (RBV; Barney, 1991), we acknowledge the importance of talent and, more broadly, human capital in the potential of employers to generate sustainable competitive advantage (Nyberg *et al.*, 2014). We also adopt the more recent trends in the RBV literature that suggest the importance of the combination of talent or human capital with the appropriate human resource management practices in building sustainable competitive advantage (*e.g.,* Delery and Roumpi, 2017). On this basis, we are interested in the complex, nuanced mechanisms, and processes of fixed-term seasonal hospitality workers and we aim to answer

the following research questions: *i) how do seasonal workers for smaller, individually owned restaurants perceive and evaluate their employers' talent management practices?* And *ii) What key talent management practices influence talented employees' choice to return to the same employer for another season?* Next, we answer these research questions by employing a qualitative, in-depth evaluation of talent management practices used for seasonal, fixed-term, talented workers in the restaurant sector and we develop a conceptual model about how smaller firms' limited resources in the hospitality and tourism sector and, can be augmented by capabilities and managerial acumen, for successful talent management.

2 Literature Review

2.1. Talented employees and talent management in the hospitality sector

While there is no universally accepted definition of talent and talent management, most researchers agree that talented employees combine skills, knowledge, charisma, and commitment and fit to the firm (McDonnell *et al.*, 2021). Alternatively, talent is defined as the individuals who demonstrate high levels of performance and high potential for career success (Collings *et al.,* 2018). For the purposes of this research, we adopted the talent definition of Nijs et al., (2014) which refers to talent as "systematically developed innate abilities of individuals" and as enabling individuals to "perform better than other individuals of the same age or experience, or as performing consistently at their personal best" (p. 182) keeping in mind, however, that different stakeholders in the hospitality and tourism sector might have different definitions of talent.

As there is a "disturbing lack of clarity regarding the definition, scope and overall goals of talent management" (Lewis and Heckman, 2006 p.139) in the literature, we examined the perspective most commonly used in the hospitality and tourism industry. Recently, Kravariti

et al., (2022) reviewed how talent management is defined in 74 hospitality and tourism articles and conclude that it is a 'mindset', 'process' or 'practice' adopted by top management which involves "the attraction, development and retention of the right people who are able to develop their full potential within a H&T organisation" (p.337). From this perspective, talent implies an exclusiveness, or rareness as firms compete to attract the best candidates. This managerial belief adopts the view that only a small percentage of talented employees exists and assumes that they can make a disproportionately high contribution to organizational performance. This *exclusive* talent philosophy has triggered a 'war for talent' and prompted HR managers to identify talented employees internally and to actively headhunt talented employees externally from competitors (Basko *et al.,* 2021). The *inclusive* view, on the contrary, assumes that all individuals have the potential to become extraordinary performers via training, a better person-job fit, more and better accumulated experiences, and on-the-job lessons learned (Kaliannan, *et al.,* 2022).

However, recent empirical research in the hospitality sector has uncovered a third option – a *hybrid approach* (Stahl et al., 2012) where talent management practices are offered to all employees, but some further practises are bespoke to the ones recognised as more talented, stemming from the realisation that even at the exclusive approach, talent needs to be nurtured (Marinakou and Giousmpasoglu, 2019). For the mostly small or medium sized restaurants of the hospitality and tourism sectors, we expect a hybrid perspective, consistent with evidence that examples of both inclusive and exclusive talent management approaches can be found in SMEs (Chung and D'Annunzio-Green, 2018), perhaps due to their constant lack of resources, the mostly unsystematic and informal management style (Carrigan et al., 2017) and the lack of awareness of formal talent management tools and practices.

2.2 Resource-based view and the importance of talent: Employees' evaluation of talent management practices

RBV suggests that organizational resources that meet specific criteria, namely generate value, are rare, are inimitable, and cannot be easily substituted, constitute a potential source of sustainable competitive advantage (Barney, 1991) and a long line of research provides empirical evidence and theoretical support that human capital can be such a resource (Kryscynski *et al.,* 2021). Newer approaches to RBV suggest, however, the importance of combining human capital with the right practices. For instance, as Delery and Roumpi (2017, page 5) emphasize: "human capital only has the potential to generate sustainable competitive advantage – it has to be leveraged appropriately to do so". Similarly, in the talent management literature, most of the definitions of talent management (*e.g.,* "attracting, selecting, developing and retaining the best employees in the most strategic roles"; Scullion et al., 2010, p.106) focus on how an organisation can gain access to, develop, and retain talent, but less emphasis is given on leveraging talent.

This discussion is more nuanced in the context of smaller tourism firms which face more difficulties in attracting and retaining talented employees, due to fewer resources allocated to HR practices or lack of a strategic and formalised talent management policies (Chung and D'Annunzio-Green, 2018) and, therefore, the importance of the role of managers and their decisions is heightened. Further, talent management of seasonal employees is "front-loaded" with more attention and resources focused on the recruitment, selection, and induction, and much less so in their development and retention (Ainsworth and Purss, 2009, p. 230). It's unsurprising, then, that "seasonal staff are less likely than permanent staff to have their needs and expectations met" (Arasli and Arisi, 2019, p. 176) and that motivating and keeping seasonal employees has become a major challenge for the hospitality industry (Arasli *et al.*, 2020). On

this basis, it is important to gain a better understanding of the nature of the talent management practices in the context of restaurants and the extent to which these practices are perceived as effective (*e.g.,* employees view them as useful and/or a factor that would lead to their retention). We are, therefore interested to explore *how do seasonal workers for smaller, individually owned restaurants perceive and evaluate their employers' talent management practices.*

2.3 Returning employees and talent management practices

In the era of the "war for talent" (Michaels *et al.*, 2001), an organization's ability to attract, retain, and properly manage talent can be the key to achieving sustainable competitive advantage (Delery and Roumpi, 2017). Consequently, the turnover of talented employees can be particularly harmful for an organization leading to disruption of routines, and loss in social capital (*e.g.,* ties to customers and suppliers). Turnover does not necessarily signify the permanent resolution of the employment relationship, as some employees might choose to resume their employment at their former employers (Shipp *et al.*, 2014). This returning or "boomerang" talent can be defined as "individuals who have previously worked for an organization and, after a period of time, returned to work for the same organization" (Swider *et al.*, 2017, p. 871) and constitute a significant portion of new hires (10% to 20%; Kronos, 2015).

As Shipp *et al.* (2014) summarize, there are multiple advantages associated with the employment of returning talent: a) reduced costs for socialization and training, as returning talent is already familiar with the organizational processes and routines (Zimmerman, 2006), b) increased loyalty upon rehire (Sertoglu and Berkowitch, 2002), and c) their talent and social capital have increased through employment at and experiences with other organizations (Bruque *et al.* 2016). Interestingly, in a recent study, Keller *et al.* (2021) showed that boomerang

employees outperformed new hires, especially in jobs that required high levels of internal coordination (*e.g.,* high interdependence of tasks). In addition, Snyder *et al.* (2021) highlighted that rehiring boomerangs is a very valuable talent management strategy as it is a significantly more time- and cost-efficient recruitment process and the organizations are well-versed with the returning employees' past performance.

Traditionally, the phenomenon of boomerang employees or returning talent has been studied in contexts where continuous employment is an option if not the norm (*i.e.,* non-seasonal employment). For example, Chung and D'Annunzio-Green (2018) interviewed owners of tourism SMEs and conclude that "Boomerang hires [..] appear to be common practice within the hospitality sector, especially when such employees have been identified as an asset to the organisation" (p. 109), but they define these as talented employees who leave for 5-10 years and reconnect later. We contend that studying the phenomenon of returning talent in the context of seasonal employment can offer us some unique insights. First, in general, there is an increase in contingent and temporary employment (Burgess and Connell, 2006). Second, as Ainsworth and Purss (2009) aptly note, even though seasonal work, by definition, is considered to have a specific duration (*e.g.,* five months over the summer), "the nature of seasonal demand means that employment can be recurrent and extend over years at the same time as it is precarious and short term" (p. 218).

A final reason for examining boomerang hires in seasonal employment is related with the unique context of the hospitality industry where often people work *e.g.,* for 6 months over the summer and then have the option to return the next season. In restaurants specifically, a commercial kitchen needs to operate like a well-oiled machine because there is high interdependence in terms of tasks, the outcome is contingent on the complementarity of talents,

and everyone needs to know and adhere to the processes in a very fast-paced environment. Given that learning the processes and how to collaborate with each other can take some time (and, therefore, the initial performance of the team might suffer), employers have an incentive to target returning talent, as these individuals possess firm-specific knowledge (*e.g.,* Keller et al., 2021), do not require extensive training and socialization (Zimmerman, 2006), and can help new hires learn and adjust faster (Ainsworth and Purss, 2009). On these grounds, the second research question *is to examine what key talent management practices influence talented employees' choice to return to the same employer for another season.*

3. Methodology

3.1 Context of the study

While talent management literature has focused on front-line employees in the hospitality and tourism sector, we know less about what happens behind closed doors. We focus exclusively on commercial kitchen personnel as a unique context that offers distinctive peculiarities and, therefore, an ideal population to explore talent management in seasonal, short-term employment by hospitality and tourism SMEs. The culinary field is characterised by exceptionally high turnover, occupational health hazards and hierarchical overtones where chefs are trained after many years of hard work and apprenticeship next to senior colleagues (Wellton *et al.,* 2018). The title of the chef is often used to describe someone who has been trained in the culinary arts and is used to demarcate individuals from "cooks" who merely prepare food and lack the status, knowledge, and experience of professional chefs (Harris and Giuffre, 2010). There are various ranks (sous chef, chef, executive or 'head' chef) and specialisations (e.g., pastry chef).

Moreover, there is widely reported abuse between head chefs and junior chefs, possibly due to stress and a pressurised environment with long, unsociable hours, and hot and cramped conditions or since some chefs see themselves as artists, so therefore "temperamental" by nature (Johns and Menzel, 1999). Workplace bullying was found to lead to job loss (Smith *et al*., 2021) while a survey of chefs confirmed that workplace incivility increases turnover intentions (Chen and Wang, 2019) emphasising the importance of talent management focused on commercial kitchens. This need is further highlighted by the fact that head chefs often lack skills in people and talent management, which are not part of their qualifications. Talent management practices are increasingly relevant for the restaurant industry, therefore, to retain and attract employees who often leave for other industries (Chen and Eyoun, 2021), recruit more women in a male dominated field (Harris and Giuffre, 2010) and to reduce hostile and abusive practices (Smith *et al*., 2021). However, they are also increasingly difficult to implement, due to the fast-paced environment of professional kitchens, the resource-poor SMEs who most likely run these restaurants and the seasonal nature of the industry.

We limited our study to one country, Greece, to provide a sufficient depth of analysis and to equalize factors such as financial, social, and cultural environments, as well as the legal framework of seasonal work. The choice of Greece was made as it is a popular tourist destination, with a large percentage of its GDP attributed to tourism, and it has a long-standing issue of employee retention in tourism-related professions. Given the nature of our research questions, we wanted to focus on individuals who are perceived by their employers as talented. This approach is consistent with our adopted view of a hybrid perspective on talent management: while every person's talent needs to be identified and nurtured, there is still recognition that some people are more talented than others.

We adopted purposive sampling (Patton, 2015) to access information-rich cases of talented employees. The inclusion criteria were i) being identified by the employer as 'highly talented' and ii) having worked at least 3 seasons in a professional kitchen setting. We first contacted 44 owners/managers in popular touristic destinations in Greece and asked them to identify individuals whom they would characterise as "highly talented." They gave us the contact information of 48 people. We collected data in the period between January and March 2022, an appropriate timing as it was off-season for participating owner/managers and employees. From the initial pool of 48 employees, 25 individuals met the inclusion criteria and agreed to be interviewed. The interviews lasted between 35 and 70 minutes and were conducted by the third author in Greek and translated verbatim resulting in approximately 140 pages of transcript material. Table 1 contains the demographic information of all participants.

Insert Table 1 about here

3.3 Analytical Approach

Interested in obtaining comprehensive interpretations of the talented employees' reality based on their experiences and perspectives rather than seeking an absolute truth, we adopted an interpretivist paradigm. To make sense of subjective and socially constructed meanings we employed a grounded theory approach, by systematically obtaining data and analysing it using comparative analysis. We employed the Classic Glaserian grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) which accounts "for a pattern of behaviour that is relevant and problematic for those involved" (Chun Tie *et al.,* 2019 p.2). In terms of our analytical approach, we followed the Gioia methodology (Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991). We attempted the first-order coding inductively; purposefully semi-ignorant of the relevant literature so that we remain faithful to informant terms unencumbered by preconceived frameworks (Charmaz, 2006; Gioia *et al.*, 2013). At this step, 57 codes emerged, which were later reduced to 35 unique codes when we

started confirming similarities and differences among the many categories, similarly to the process Strauss and Corbin refer to as "axial coding" (1998). We then focused on aggregating these codes into second-order themes or dimensions, paying particular focus on concepts that did not have enough theoretical references in the current literature, transitioning our approach from inductive to abductive, where data and theory were examined together (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2007). After continuously comparing, merging, and classifying, logical connections between categories emerged (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). The second-order coding process concluded with the emergence of 9 broader themes. To ensure the reliability of our coding scheme, two researchers coded independently the interviews and, via discussions, reached consensus about the coding (Gillespie and Cornish, 2010).

4. Findings.

4.1 The context of seasonal work in restaurants in Greece from the participants' perspective

Our interviews started by enquiring about participants' experience with seasonal work, and asking them to reflect on motives, processes, and outcomes of the seasonality as an integral part of their work. Interviewees identified both positive and negative aspects of seasonal work in restaurants in Greece.

Most of our interviewees were "serial seasonal workers", working for the six months of summer in various touristic destinations in Greece and "*taking things slowly, making up for lost time with friends, recharging or training on [the] craft" [C7]* during the rest of the year. Upon reflecting on the advantages of seasonal work, many chefs have focused on the better average pay per month [C2, C14, C19], more flexibility for the non-working months [C7, C22, C24], and opportunities to see new people and locations [C2, C6, C8, C12, C21] and start fresh every year: A serially seasonal worker, has the opportunity to re-introduce themselves every

summer by adopting a new identity (or *working persona*; Riach and Loreto, 2009) depending on previous experiences or different social settings. Indicatively, participant C8, describes this phenomenon:

> "In my first three summers in [luxurious restaurant in Mykonos, Greece] I was always seen as the young apprentice, always asked to take out the trash or clean the working station. Upon starting my fourth year, however, I tried to set some more clear boundaries, you know, from day one: I appeared less friendly with staff and not afraid to say no, I won't do it. I really believe in that first day you affect how the next six months will be".

On the other hand, seasonal work meant hard work, with no days-off for weeks or months at a time, and kitchen work particularly lead to a "*hot, cramped, hellish*" (C19) environment during the hottest days of the summer, in a stressful work atmosphere. A younger female participant (C21) recollected their first seasonal work in a prestigious restaurant in a Greek island and described it as "*the most hostile, stressful, unfriendly and abusive 4 months of my life*". While abusive conditions among chefs have been long documented in the literature when asked why she did not quit, the same participant from before helps us uncover a new, potentially relevant for talent management, reason:

> "Of course, I thought about quitting, day and night. Before the season, I had two more 'offers' for work, in different islands or even more pay, I went with that particular choice because of the well-known Chef, who, it turns out, I only met twice. He designed the menu, trained the key employees, and skedaddled back to the city. However, all other restaurants had found personnel by mid-June, it was too late for me to move" (C21)

Other chefs too discussed that due to seasonal work, they had less flexibility to switch jobs mid-season and thus had to put up with abusive relationships, employers who did not pay the promised bonuses or terrible living arrangements.

4.2 Employees' definitions of talent in the context of professional kitchens

As our participants were identified as "highly talented" by their previous employers, we were interested to hear their understanding of what talent is because that might influence the nature of talent management practices that they consider as effective.

Almost all chefs interviewed saw themselves as "artists" more than labourers in the kitchen. The artistic, creative flair was cited as the main motive for pursuing this profession and a source of enjoyment. Interestingly, though, an inherent talent was not always a desirable characteristic in the kitchen. In fact, many accomplished chefs focused on the fact that they succeeded in their career by advancing through the ranks, "tested by fire" (Mack, 2012, p.98) in a rite of passage achieved through hard work withstanding abusive relationship and seeing figurative and literal scars of the profession as badges of honour (Wellton et al., 2018):

> "We get one or two of those, every year. Graduate of the [prestigious chef school] or previous employers of [prestigious restaurant in London]. I always enjoy breaking their confidence on the first day by letting them screw up on a dish and hear the complaints from the Chef or even better, the customer. Relax, I have peeled more potatoes than you can count [shows off scarred index finger]. You spend 6 months in a school, and you think you are the new Gordon Ramsay" (C14).

This approach is closer to what Meyers and van Woerkom (2014) define as "developable" talent: the view that talent is a potential that needs to be nurtured/developed, and it confirms our expectation for a 'hybrid' perspective of talent management in participating restaurants. While opportunities to gain experience and develop their talent exist for all members of the kitchen, more talented, better performing individuals received more compensation, (C5,C19), recognition (C1,C9,C10,C16) and opportunities to lead on specific projects, dishes or events (C2,C6,C9,C20).

4.3 Evaluating the talent management practices and the likelihood of returning to the same employer.

The main research aim of this has been to uncover the various context-specific talent management practices and discuss how do talented employees evaluate these when exploring the potential of returning to the same employer the next season. The structure of the relevant codes is presented in Figure 1.

Insert Figure 1 about here

Talent Orchestration: Extending RBV, resource orchestration suggests that the decisions managers make regarding organizational resources and, more specifically, how these resources are managed influence important organizational outcomes (Symeonidou and Nicolaou, 2018). According to the resource orchestration perspective, structuring focuses on the acquisition and accumulation of resources, bundling refers to the grouping of resources that allows them to be tailored to the needs of the organization, and leveraging encompasses the effective mobilization or deployment of these resources (Chadwick et al., 2015). Applying the concept of resource orchestration to the codes we developed, we identify here a series of talent management practices that contribute to the orchestration of talent and seem to be linked to higher chances of returning to the same employer.

First, structuring talent requires that employers can understand what truly constitutes talent and, also, offer recognition to talent. Specifically, as the findings regarding the definitions of talent our participants provided (see section 4.2) there are often discrepancies in terms of what employees and employers view as talent. Our participants indicated the importance of employers understanding the employees' perspective on what constitutes talent and, on this basis, make recruitment and selection decisions accordingly. For example, many participants mentioned that they receive constant feedback from the Chef on the job but doubted that the owner of the firm shares their definition of a talented employee:

"To be honest, I was surprised that [my employer] gave you my contact info. I thought they only recognise [as talent] Chefs who are the big names, that bring press attention and customers. Perhaps she realised that the big names come for the cash, but you need us lowly ants of the kitchen to be doing the work, providing consistent results every day, dealing with customer complaints, not being allowed to even get sick for a day working 180 days straight. Maybe I need to ask for a raise, ha-ha!" (C5)

Second, regarding bundling, a very important topic that emerged during the interviews related to how these teams are brought together: "*A kitchen brigade is much more than the sum of the individuals and you can't feel the positions based on CV or experience: much like a sports team, the right chemistry is key and businessmen who haven't set foot in the kitchen don't get it*" (C22) asserted one of our more senior participants. The notion that the employer should allow chefs make the decisions regarding the synthesis of the team on their brigades was quite prevalent. Specifically, they highlighted the critical role of giving freedom to the chef and meritocracy in choosing the team with *no employees that can't keep up* (C23) or "*friends and family of the owner*" (C6).

Third, the interviews reveal three basic forms that leveraging can take in this specific context: offering all the required resources, respecting employees, and giving room for creativity and innovation. Specifically, interviewees explained that it is important for employers to offer to their talent all the resources that are required to be effective and that includes both tangible and non-tangible resources (C2, C17, C14). In terms of tangible resources, it is important to offer high quality equipment and ingredients. In terms of non-tangible resources on-the job training and continuous feedback emerged as critical factors. Participants also highlighted the importance of respect. For instance, interviewees mentioned that is important for employers to offer accurate and honest information even during the recruitment phase (realistic job previews; Templer *et al.*, 2006). As one interviewee noted: - "*if I am going to be living in a rat hole for 6 months, just tell, me, what, do you think I forgot what you promised 2 months ago?*" (C9).

Along these lines, other talent management practices that interviewees mentioned as positive

signals of respect were on time and reasonable compensation, including a fair allocation of tips *(C4, C6, C19),* and overall, *an inclusive environment (C11)* where employees felt as they were *valued members of a team (C25).* This last quote is important, as it came from executive chef; the most highly ranked in our participant pool, who recognized that despite the fast-paced, direct and sometimes tough management style needed (or expected) in the kitchen, all members of the team were needed for a particular role:

> *"Do you mean formal personnel reviews? The answer is no… but there is a lot of firefighting, friendly chats over a beer in the end of the shift. In my kitchen there is room for 8 people, and you need all 8 doing something different. I can't deliver plates at the expected quality if the humbler position of cooks hasn't cut the onions properly or missed a potato that has gone bad" (C25).*

Leveraging in this specific context also refers to giving room to employees to utilize their talent and creativity:

"We didn't become chefs to follow recipes but to create them! The creative process is complex and difficult for businessmen to appreciate but at the same time it's beautiful and useful if you let it evolve. Being creative helps us understand ourselves and the world. It's essential to let us inspire with our cooking and get inspired by others; to create and sustain a system involving the right people, knowledge, and resources".

Our conceptualisation of talent orchestration uncovers unique talent management processes that can affect the likelihood of a talented individual returning in the same employer however this relationship is depended on various other conditions. As shown in Figure 1 our interviewees identified several "push" and "pull" factors that would either discourage or encourage them to return to a previous employer.

Other than compensation and terms of employment, the most commonly mentioned pull factor that featured highly in our participants' evaluation of employers is the credentials and reputation of the executive Chef in combination and often in contrast with that of the owner/manager. This contradiction led to one of the most surprising findings from our

discussion with seasonally employed kitchen workers. When evaluating their return to a previous employer or their agreement to work for a new one, there is a dual, sometimes conflicting, source of influence: the employer and the head Chef for whom they will be working. One of our first participant described this best:

> "Sometimes you choose based on the name of the restaurant. You want to put in your CV a prestigious, highly ranked, and well-known restaurant, or a prestigious destination. For me however, I am in a point in my career I need to go up or out... I am 36. If I am to become an executive Chef soon, I need to learn from the best, and work with the best. I don't care about the name of the firm or the destination" [C3].

Upon questioning, more participants reflected on this. C19 explained how she has been working for the same executive Chef for 4 years in three different restaurants, and "*will follow them to the end of the Universe*". And C7 describes the tension on a recent dilemma: "*On one hand, you have the well-known kitchens; but they are usually the ones which pay the least and have the most abusive executive Chefs. For me, I will take a kinder, more relaxed family restaurant any day of the week.*" C22, finally, summarised the discussion quite eloquently when asked what advice they would give to a junior chef starting their career: "*always go with the good Chef. This is the person you will be spending any breathing moment of your work-life with, not the owner/boss who is outside collecting tips.*" Clarity on who is the leader or line-manager, who makes the decisions and who forms the team was an important attribute of the sought-after talent management practices. This was important because the Executive Chef is not only the decision maker in the kitchen, but also the person who does the training so it was important for most of our participants to work for people from whom they would learn more.

On the other hand, many of our participants described important factors that would keep them away from the same employer the next season. Even though everyone recognized that a hostile, stressful environment came with the job, this was not acceptable for everyone as in the case of our participant above (C7) who was willing to work for less money and a less prestigious

restaurant in exchange for a more relaxed environment. Another source of dissatisfaction came from the boundaries placed by our chefs in the "sacred space" of the kitchen. Well-meaning manager/owners who *only made profit-based decisions* (C1, C2, C11), did not offer the raw material, tools, and support to chefs (C1), did not respect their expertise (C14) and wanted a say in kitchen decisions were intrusive (*e.g.*, recipes, times, material) and discouraged future employment.

5. Discussion and Results

5.1 General Conclusions

In the words of one of our informants, working in professional kitchens is like a series of partnerships. Seasonally employed chefs work under impossible conditions on 10-hour shifts, often without a single day off for six months at a time. Then, they take six months off, where they either take up other work, study, and train on their craft, or try to catch up on their personal life which has been put on hold, before the next season starts. In our lengthy discussions with them, we uncovered talent management practices done in a more informal, relaxed way and career planning which is done via series of employment spells. We also discussed on-boarding and training meetings done informally over drinks, and performance reviews taking place after *e.g.*, 5 days of employment rather than the standard 6 months or 12 months in larger firms. The extreme, hostile, fast paced, male dominated context of professional kitchens offers insights for talent management practitioners and academics alike. If employers in the hospitality and tourism industry wish to re-attract former employees who already possess a deep knowledge of the processes and routines, they need to offer a more flexible and inclusive working environment, recognise and reward talented individuals, but at the same time nurture and not exclude and alienate every other person in the firm.

5.2 Theoretical Implications

Resource orchestration postulates that "it is not the possession but the management of resources" that can lead to desirable outcomes (Symeonidou and Nicolaou, 2018, p. 1997) and that organizations need to align the investments they make in resources with how they leverage these resources. The results of our study suggest that in the specific context, structuring talent takes the form of employers being able to not only understand what talent really is (something that requires a better understanding of employees' perspective in defining talent), but also both executive chefs and owners/managers recognizing talent. In terms of bundling, a very important topic that emerged during the interviews is that the employer should allow chefs make the decisions regarding the synthesis of the team on their brigades. Finally, we postulate that, leveraging can take three forms: First, offering all the resources that are required in order to be effective such as equipment and high-quality ingredients and non-tangible resource such as on-the job training and continuous feedback. Second, employers need to respect the individuals they have chosen to work for them and, third, give room to their employees to utilize their talent and creativity.

Our study has various implications and contributions in theory and practice. Theoretically we contribute to the limited attention in the academic literature on talent management in a hospitality context (Golubovskaya et al., 2019) and answer calls for instance by Gallardo-Gallardo *et al.* (2020) for a deeper and more nuanced context-specific conceptual development and conceptualization of talent management in the area. We advance the discussion on the attraction, identification, and retention of talent, which remains a key challenge in the hospitality industry (Jooss *et al.*, 2019). We develop our talent orchestration model, which places emphasis on management of the talented employees across three dimensions: structuring, leveraging, and developing talent. In doing so, we add to the largely fragmented

and "without adequately developed theoretical foundations" talent management literature in the hospitality and tourism (Kravariti *et al*., 2022, p. 340).

Further, we focus on a sub-sector of the industry which has received minimal attention so far helping produce evidence-based insights across different contexts. Academic literature in talent management in the food and beverages sector remains scarce. Previous published work is limited and includes accounts from the perspective of owners or managers (Chung and D'Annunzio-Green, 2018) and HR practitioners, or focuses on employees whose accounts would not be applicable in the context of seasonal restaurants. For example, DiPietro et *al*.'s (2019) study of employees in fine dining restaurants screened out employees who had less than 2 years of work experience with that firm, and Murillo and King (2019) explored the evaluations of employees of a large restaurant chain. We uncover that more long-term talent management practices still exist but take place in a vaguer timeframe across many different seasons. We also explore how seasonality facilitates the alleged abusive and hostile environment of kitchen work by suggesting that limited options to change employment mid-season but uncover those talented employees will feel stuck, unhappy and may engage in counter-productive work behaviours when this happens.

Our study also contributes to the "boomerang" or returning employees literature. We argue that applying the concept of returning employees in the context of seasonal work is theoretically and practically meaningful. First, rehiring seasonal employees is a rather common practice in the hospitality sector. Second, in the context of seasonal work and, especially, the high-pressure professional kitchens the ability of owners/managers to attract returning talent becomes crucial for the seamless functioning of the brigades. A final contribution is related to the individual our participants identified as a leader and to whom they displayed loyalty when making

employment decisions. All our interviewees were broadly considered "talented", with good references, studies, and extensive work experience and no one indicated they had trouble finding a job for the next season. This placed them in a position to be able to choose between employers and one of the main criteria in their decision was who leads that firm. Previous literature has suggested that seasonal employees need and expect fair, supportive, and visionary leaders, however, the split between intention to work again for the same company or the same executive chef is a new finding. Kitchen workers are managed by a dual leadership; the owner-manager of the firm and the chef who leads in the kitchen and participants made it clear that their loyalty lied with the latter. In an industry that executive chefs traditionally change restaurants frequently, the other kitchen workers often preferred to follow that person rather than work with the same company again. Not unlike a professional team sports player who decides the next team based on a combination of the location, the employer, and the coach our talented chefs decide where to work next based on a variety of criteria suggesting that traditional HR approaches to measure "boomerang employees" might fail to capture this type of loyalty.

5.3 Practical Implications

Our study has practical implications for hospitality and tourism managers and recruiters interested to benefit from better talent management practices and more employees returning for employment. During the COVID-19 pandemic many restaurant employees moved to other industries in need for workers such as delivery services in the sharing economy (*e.g.*, Uber Eats) or grocery stores, however sharing labour pools with other sectors might be "a double-edge sword in the future war for talent as hospitality workers fail to return to their sector of origin" (Baum et al., 2020, p.2822). Hospitality will need to be a lot more competitive in the future as Covid-19 has amplified long standing issues of non-standard work forms, seasonality, and job insecurity (Robinson *et al*., 2019). We hope that our conceptualization of talent

orchestration, studied in the context of Greek restaurants employing seasonal employees may offer practical advice to restaurant owners in that direction. Another practical conclusion that can be drawn from our study is that teams working in professional kitchens are operationally and culturally different from other organisations in the hospitality and tourism industry, suggesting we need to go beyond the underlying assumptions of 'one size fits all' approach in talent management. A first difference comes from the important role a respectable executive chef plays in the kitchen, both in attracting employees and in constructing their team. Another key insight is related to the seasonality of the industry: training and development needs to be conducted in much shorter timeframes and career progression opportunities need to be examined with the next season in mind. Further, our participants often viewed themselves as artists, in contrast with employees in most traditional business organizations, emphasizing the importance of allowing room for creativity and innovation and managing them if not always as talented, at least as creative, hardworking individuals. Finally, a rather unique aspect of the studied context was related to the management of talent that occurs 'behind closed doors' in an often fast-paced, stressful, abusive, and hostile environment. Many talented individuals prioritised collaborative, supportive work environment over career and training opportunities. It is up to both the owners and executive chefs to ensure a better work culture as the complexity and task-interdependence characterizing the work in professional kitchens, the very short time frame of seasonal work, and limited resources suggest that increased likelihood of the chefs returning to the same employer for another season will lead to increased business benefits.

5.4 Limitations and Future Research

Our findings and contributions need to be qualified by a few limitations, which however suggest directions for future research. Firstly, we limited our study to one country, and future research could explore talent practices in other settings and contexts that are also characterised by seasonal work (e.g., manufacturing, agriculture, hotels etc.) or Asian and African

destinations, keeping in mind that talent management literature currently heavily relies in Anglo-Saxon countries (Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2020). Another limitation comes from the qualitative nature of our research which offers limited generalizability of our results. More empirical research is needed to confirm our finding before they can be applied in different populations. Empirical work may also be able to explore resilience and ways of coping among talented individuals who are not always managed as such.

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Table 1. Demographics and Participants information

Interviewees	Gender	Age	Employment status	Position	Education
C-1	Male	45	Fine Dining	chef	culinary and other studies
C-2	Male	37	Fine Dining	chef	culinary studies only
C-3	Male	37	Fine Dining	chef	culinary studies only
C-4	Male	40	Fine Dining	executive chef	culinary studies only
C-5	Female	22	Casual/Theme	sous chef	culinary studies only
C-6	Male	23	Casual/Theme	sous chef	only practical experience
C-7	Male	25	Casual/Theme	sous chef	culinary studies only
C-8	Male	27	Casual/Theme	sous chef	only practical experience
C-9	Male	30	Fine Dining	chef	culinary studies only
C-10	Male	32	Fine Dining	chef	culinary studies only
C-11	Male	33	Fine Dining	chef	culinary studies only
C-12	Female	27	Fine Dining	pastry chef	culinary studies only
C-13	Male	33	Restaurant in Hotel	chef	culinary studies only
C-14	Male	32	Fine Dining	chef	culinary studies only
C-15	Male	29	Fine Dining	chef	culinary studies only
C-16	Male	28	Casual/Theme	pastry chef	culinary studies only
C-17	Male	28	Casual/Theme	chef	culinary and other studies
C-18	Male	28	Casual/Theme	chef	culinary and other studies
C-19	Male	25	Casual/Theme	chef	culinary and other studies
C-20	Female	22	Fine Dining	sous chef	culinary studies only
C-21	Female	24	Fine Dining	sous chef	culinary studies only
C-22	Male	41	Casual/Theme	sous chef	only practical experience
C-23	Male	20	Restaurant in Hotel	sous chef	only practical experience
C-24	Male	28	Restaurant in Hotel	pastry chef	culinary studies only
C-25	Female	38	Fine Dining	executive chef	culinary and other studies

Figure 1. Talent Orchestration and Other Push/Pull Factors: Data Structure, First and Second order Coding.

1st Order Coding

2nd Order Coding

Compensation (on time and decent)

Owner/manager's and restaurant's name and reputation

Chef's "name" and opportunities for training

"Pull" Factors

Talent Management Practices

Understand what talent is - aligning with employees' perspective

Recognition from both the executive chef and owner/manager

Allowing chefs to choose the members of their team

Meritocracy in building teams

Respecting employees

Giving room for creativity/innovation

Offering all required resources (e.g., equipment, training)

Talent Orchestration

Structuring Talent

Bundling Talent

Leveraging Talent

Likelihood of Returning to The Same Employer

Employer being intrusive

Employer making decisions only based on profit/cost-effectiveness

Lack of respect/ recognition for talent

Abusive and/or hostile work environment

"Push" Factors