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## **Chefs' Perspectives of Failures in Foodservice Kitchens, part 2: A phenomenological Exploration of the Consequences and Handling of Food Production Failure**

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## Chefs' perspectives of failures in foodservice kitchens, part 2: A phenomenological exploration of the consequences and handling of food production failure

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### ABSTRACT

This paper explores the consequences of food production failure (FPF) and its handling in foodservice operations from the perspective of chefs. A phenomenological epistemology and qualitative methodology were followed. Fifteen semi-structured interviews with chefs working in independent restaurants and hotels were carried out using purposive sampling, and employing an emic posture. Interviews were transcribed verbatim, read repetitively, and coded. Thematic analysis yielded themes on the consequences of FPF, on operation and staff, handling failures with kitchen staff, front of the house (FOH), and management. The findings revealed that the major ramification of FPF is financial through food loss. Representing both internal and external failure costs, FPF costs were classified into four tangible types: bin cost, rework cost, lost sales cost, and recovery cost. However, the serious intangible cost of staff demoralization was also identified. Handling failure is a complex task involving different parties and the management of various emotions (anger, frustration, etc.). Furthermore, the phenomena of failure ownership, secrecy, and historic marginalization of chefs, coupled with doubts over management competency, can all obstruct learning from mistakes, the much-cherished by-product of FPF, thereby negating the notion of the “learning organization.” Moreover, error management training (EMT) seems to be a potential approach to combat FPF.

### KEYWORDS

Food production failure;  
failure consequences;  
foodservice operations; chefs

## Introduction

Food quality has been consistently identified as a key characteristic of successful foodservice operations. Failing to produce quality food directly affects customers' dining experiences, a phenomenon that is not uncommon (Silber et al., 2009); however, this phenomenon has only recently been given the nomenclature of “food production failure” (FPF) (Mac Con Iomaire et al., 2021). Professional kitchens and the practice of chefs have up until recently

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remained relatively under-researched within the hospitality literature (Allen & Mac Con Iomaire, 2016; Cooper et al., 2017; Giousmpasoglou et al., 2018). Following the practice turn in sociology (Kalogeropoulos et al., 2020; Schatzki, 2018), practice theory, which incorporates Bourdieu's theory of practice, assists in understanding *how* things are done “know how” and not just *what* is done “know that.” Drawing on Bourdieu's toolbox, this phenomenological paper explores chefs' lived experience of FPF in the foodservice industry within their “habitus” and concerning their “praxis.”

Some FPF occurs in the kitchen but is spotted and dealt with without anyone outside the kitchen ever-becoming aware of them. However, failures that find their way to customer tables can result in dissatisfaction and complaints (Chan et al., 2014), and more damagingly, to customers expressing and documenting their opinions to a wide audience through electronic media (Bilgihan et al., 2018). While service failure and recovery have drawn scholarly attention, becoming “popular topics of study” (Koc, 2019, p. 2), FPF has remained largely overlooked (Mac Con Iomaire et al., 2021). Indeed, Chan et al. (2014, p. 223) asserted that previous studies have profusely investigated “the facet of service in the restaurant setting, leaving the product aspect largely unaddressed.” This left a significant gap in the literature as to one of the root causes of restaurant failure, that of FPF. Therefore, this qualitative exploratory research contributes to building theory relating to FPF in foodservice kitchens, thereby addressing this lacuna.

Koc (2019) reviewed the service failure and recovery literature; yet, the consequences of FPF remain overlooked. Another deficit of knowledge lies around the handling of FPF with different stakeholders, e.g., kitchen staff, front of house personnel (FOH), and management. Hence, these represent the foci of this paper. In doing so, some of the future research issues proposed by Koc (2019) may be broached. The findings of the paper should be of value to industry practitioners, hospitality educators, and academics, providing deeper insights into the consequences and handling of FPF in foodservice operations. Whereas Mac Con Iomaire et al. (2021) identified three thematic FPF causes, space considerations dictate that the consequences and handling of the supply/supplier theme will be addressed in a separate paper.

## **Review of literature**

### ***Food production failure: what we know so far***

Restaurants may fail because of either internal reasons, e.g., organizational culture, or external ones, for example, taxation (Healy & Mac Con Iomaire, 2019; Parsa et al., 2005). Nevertheless, restaurant continuation is more influenced by internal issues than external ones (Self et al., 2015). A major internal cause that may adversely affect restaurant success is “poor product” (Parsa

et al., 2005). Food production in professional kitchens is a multi-dimensional and convoluted process where FPF can occur for an array of causes (Mac Con Iomaire et al., 2021). Chan et al. (2014, p. 224) observed that earlier studies on service failure concentrated on staff-related and servicescape failure, however, “[N]o studies have looked into the core element, product failures.”

Notably, explicit investigation on why kitchens fail is scarce, whereas some dispersed literature exists on various aspects of the kitchen environment and production procedures (cf., Feinstein & Stefanelli, 2012; Kivela, 1994). For instance, Chan et al. (2014) in their content analysis of complaint cases filed by customers of two chain restaurants in Malaysia identified product-related failures as sensory quality, safety quality, and others. They discovered that sensory quality, e.g., taste and texture, was the greatest cause of discontent. Silber et al. (2009) in their attempt to discover recovery strategies for service failures identified some common service failures including, for instance, defective dishes, out of stock, and incorrect temperatures. These food issues were gleaned from interviewing eleven restaurant managers. However, while Chan et al. (2014) and Silber et al. (2009) cite examples of failures, no further investigation of why and how these happened was conducted. For example, they cited defective dishes but reason(s) behind this were not scrutinized, and how this happened, in reality, was not examined either. Similarly, using critical incident techniques to illicit restaurants managers’ responses on service failure and recovery strategies, Yang (2005) cited examples of product defects that were categorized under core service failure. Likewise, the roots behind these were not within Yang’s research scope. Any relevant evidence on FPF is fragmented. Not a single study unequivocally tackled FPF, particularly as contributed by chefs. FPF was slightly referred to only as a by-product of studies on service failure.

To fill this gap, Mac Con Iomaire et al. (2021) qualitatively explored FPF in Irish restaurants and hotels. Chefs interviewed frankly acknowledged the phenomenon of FPF conceiving it as mishaps during food storage, preparation, and production. However, a constructive discovery was that FPF was regarded by some chefs as an opportunity to learn and improve. FPF was incurred at different stages of procurement (e.g., receiving substandard supplies) and preparation (e.g., missing ingredients) through production (e.g., overcooking). One of the interesting findings is the timing of failures, where chefs provided contrasting opinions on this, seeing both slack and peak periods as chances of occurrence (Mac Con Iomaire et al., 2021).

Remarkably, Mac Con Iomaire et al. (2021) identified three principal types of FPFs: sensory or organoleptic quality, safety-related, and “other,” (e.g., communication-related failure, system-related failure, failure of supervision, and lack of standard operating procedures), comparable to Chan et al.’s (2014) typology. Three thematic FPF causes: people-related failure; operation-related failure; and food supply/supplier-related failures were also delineated. Firstly,

people-related failures were mainly caused by inadvertence and poor attitude. Interestingly, carelessness seemed to be related to staff attitude toward the work. Other people-related causes included weariness due to overwork, staff shortage, extended hours, and a lack of rest time. Operations-related failures covered several factors including layout, design, work process, workload, menu design, and lack of equipment. Supply/supplier-related failures were caused by the delivery of substandard supplies and the mishandling of supplies. Finally, a conceptual model was created for these groupings, underpinned by management control systems, continuous training, clear communication, and the organizational culture and climate of kitchens, which can lessen the chances of FPF (Mac Con Iomaire et al., 2021). Chef shortage is an issue within the literature, be that in Ireland (Allen & Mac Con Iomaire, 2016, 2017; Gray & Farrell, 2021) or elsewhere (Graham et al., 2020; Mac Con Iomaire et al., 2021).

### ***Consequences of FPF***

Food loss provides a thread to start at this point as no research has been explicitly conducted on the comprehensive consequences of FPF. According to Okumus (2020), food loss happens before service, while waste mainly occurs after service and refers to edible foods. However, Okumus (2020) uses the terms loosely. Such a distinction has not always been adopted in the literature where waste and loss are used interchangeably (Dhir et al., 2020). It is imperative to state early in this discussion that waste due to customers' misuse, i.e., plate waste, is irrelevant here.

Kitchens have been identified as a major source of food waste (Filimonau & Sulyok, 2021). Food loss/waste can be created during the different stages of food production and consumption (Dhir et al., 2020; Filimonau & Sulyok, 2021; McAdams et al., 2019; Okumus, 2020). However, most of this is produced during planning, preparation, and consumption (Okumus, 2020). Food waste generated in the kitchen can be ascribed to many factors, such as equipment issues, decomposition propelled by inadequate sanitation, deficient storage, over-ordering, over-production, and the shortage of cookery and service skills (Filimonau & Sulyok, 2021).

Human errors during food preparation and production were found to be a key reason for producing enormous amounts of waste in restaurants (McAdams et al., 2019; Okumus, 2020). However, Heikkilä et al. (2016) and McAdams et al. (2019) suggest that as chefs' skills increase, the chances of errors – and consequently of loss – are decreased. This highlights the importance of the back-of-house activities in generating and consequently, reducing loss/waste (Filimonau & Sulyok, 2021; Heikkilä et al., 2016; McAdams et al., 2019; Okumus, 2020). It is noteworthy that food loss/waste can increase food costs, which deplete earnings, lessen competitive advantage while also harming the environment (Okumus, 2020).

Food loss due to FPF – adopting the prevention-appraisal-failure (P-A-F) model of costs of quality – manifests an internal failure (Oakland, 2014; Ramdeen et al., 2007). However, internal failures are inherently internal, i.e., they did not leave the kitchen. But in fact, some failures reach tables and hence gain the status of external failures. Customers upon detection of failures may or may not complain. The expected reaction to complaints is to provide some sort of compensation, be it financial and/or emotional (Bae et al., 2021). To recover from failures, disgruntled customers may be provided with free food, discounts, coupons, or a dish may be replaced (Silber et al., 2009). Management may intervene, provide an apology, or bizarrely, take no action (Silber et al., 2009). Notably, the success of the recovery strategies hinges upon the type of failure (Bae et al., 2021; Silber et al., 2009).

However, such recovery plans are minor compared with product liability. Cavico et al. (2017), Swanger and Rutherford (2004), and Wilson (2005) warn foodservice operations of possible lawsuits as customers consume defective foods. This would violate the assumption that food sold is wholesome. Product liability – classified as an external failure cost – is established if a “product is defective when, at the time of sale or distribution, it contains a manufacturing defect, is defective in design, or is defective because of inadequate instructions or warnings” (Wilson, 2005, p. 8). Furthermore, regrettably, FPF can lead to customers contracting diseases; foodborne illness, injury, and perhaps even death (Swanger & Rutherford, 2004). For an operation, this would involve legal procedures and possibly monetary compensation that could amount to millions, e.g., \$15,600,000 in the case of *Kiner v. Foodmaker, Inc.* (Swanger & Rutherford, 2004); and dramatically results in a damaged reputation (Cavico et al., 2017; Swanger & Rutherford, 2004), i.e., “loss of goodwill” (Oakland, 2014). Both internal and external failures create the “costs of getting it wrong” (Oakland, 2014, p. 127).

While the consequences of service failure on guests were examined, the ramifications of this on staff were not. Furthermore, how failure is handled in the back of the house is seldom researched. Hence, this forms the focus of our research.

## Research objectives and questions

The main objective of this paper is to investigate the consequences of FPF and its handling. This includes three different cohorts: kitchen staff, FOH, and management. Specifically, this research endeavors to answer the following questions:

- RQ1. What are the consequences of FPF on foodservice operations and staff?
- RQ2. How is FPF handled among kitchen staff, FOH, and management?



## Methodology and sample

This study adopts phenomenology to study the consequences and handling of FPF. There are two major branches of phenomenology: descriptive which was embraced by Edmund Husserl (1859–1938) and carries a positivist inclination, and hermeneutic advocated by Martin Heidegger (1889–1976), which accentuates interpretation and understanding (Pernecky & Jamal, 2010). Hermeneutic phenomenology, or more precisely “Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis” (IPA), is adopted for this study (Smith, 1996).

The “lived experience” is the cornerstone concept in phenomenology (Kirillova, 2018; Pernecky & Jamal, 2010). Phenomenology “focuses on the conscious experience of how a person relates to the lived world that she or he inhabits . . .” (Orbe, 2000, p. 605). Recent literature on hospitality and tourism has shown an interest in phenomenology (Kirillova, 2018; Quigley et al., 2019; Wassler & Kuteynikova, 2020), particularly recent phenomenological studies on chefs (Gill & Burrow, 2018; Mac Con Iomaire et al., 2021; Robinson et al., 2014; Traynor et al., 2021). As an exploratory phenomenological study, we used purposive sampling and chose head chefs due to their depth of experience, not only as leaders but also as cooks and apprentices on their journeys to the position they now hold.

A major advantage that phenomenology brings to this study is its endeavor to attain a more profound comprehension of what may be considered mundane issues as it “encourages a certain attentive awareness to the details and seemingly trivial happenings of our everyday lives” (Orbe, 2000, p. 606). This can help to get close to the professional life and “lived experience” of the participating chefs to explore how they experience the consequences of FPF and how they handle it. This aligns well with Practice Theory, which underpins this research, exploring the “habitus” and “praxis” of chefs (Schatzki, 2018).

## Data collection

To answer the research questions, an interview guide was created. Questions revolved around the consequences of FPF and how FPFs are handled with staff, FOH, and management. However, questions were modified – during interviews – to probe relevant issues that may emerge (Gill, 2014; Smith, 1996).

Candidate interviewees were approached and briefed about the research background before being invited to partake. This resulted in 15 face-to-face semi-structured interviews with chefs selected purposively (Kirillova, 2018) based on many years of experience in various types of hospitality operations and holding senior positions (see, Table 1). Interviews took place between February and May 2018 at numerous sites in the Republic of Ireland until data



**Table 1.** Outline of Participants.

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Position	Years in foodwork	Highest educational qualification	Type of establishment	Years in current position	Location
Mary	Female	31–40	Head Chef	21 years	Advanced Certificate	Restaurant	7 years	City
David	Male	41–50	Head Chef	30 years	Advanced Certificate	Restaurant	<1 year	Rural
James	Male	41–50	Exec Chef	26 years	Bachelor's Degree (Ord)	Hotel	<1 year	Rural
Brian	Male	31–40	Head Chef	13 years	Bachelor's Degree (Hons)	Restaurant	3 years	City
Martin	Male	31–40	Chef/Owner	17 years	Advanced Certificate	Restaurant	5 years	Rural
Linda	Female	31–40	Chef/Owner	20 years	Bachelor's Degree (Ord)	Restaurant	3 years	City
Conor	Male	41–50	Exec Chef	25 years	Advanced Certificate	Restaurant	1 year	Rural
Cathal	Male	50+	Exec Chef	32 years	Post-Graduate Degree	Hotel	17 years	Rural
Thomas	Male	31–40	Head Chef	20 years	Bachelor's Degree (Ord)	Restaurant	5 years	City
Catherine	Female	31–40	Head Chef	20 years	Bachelor's Degree (Ord)	Restaurant	5 years	City
Colm	Male	50 +	Relief Chef	55 years	Advanced Certificate	Hotel	5 years	Rural
George	Male	41–50	Head Chef	27 years	Advanced Certificate	Hotel	1 year	City
Sean	Male	41–50	Chef/Owner	22 years	Bachelor's Degree (Ord)	Restaurant	3 years	Rural
Seamus	Male	31–40	Chef/Owner	22 years	Advanced Certificate	Restaurant	10 years	City
Diarmuid	Male	31–40	Exec Chef	17 years	Bachelor's Degree (Hons)	Hotel	2 years	City

saturation was realized (Hennink et al., 2017). In our case, having participants who shared occupational identity, a simple research topic, and having a semi-structured interview guide may have contributed to reaching saturation with 15 interviews. Whereas the optimal sample size in a qualitative inquiry ranges between 15 and 40 participants (Okumus, 2020), a small sample size is not uncommon in phenomenological studies (Gill, 2014; Kirillova, 2018). Notably, Wassler and Kuteynikova (2020, p. 4) argue that saturation is not commonly applied to phenomenological investigations; “as they generally do not look for sameness or repetitive patterns, but rather for instances when insight on lived experiences arises.” IPA can be applied to even a very small number of rich in-depth interviews (Smith, 1996).

Before interviewing, absolute anonymity – of both identity and establishment – and data confidentiality were assured, and consent forms were presented. Table 1 shows the profile of the participants, using pseudonyms. Interviews spanned from 32 minutes to 56 minutes. Remarks and memos were jotted down throughout each interview, and these constituted ancillary records for transcripts to use at the data analysis phase.

### **Data analysis**

Interviews were transcribed verbatim and checked against the recordings for exactness. Orbe (2000) accentuates the significance of the transcribing process considering it as an initial analysis stage where accounts start to “speak” to researchers and themes are envisaged.

Qualitative inductive thematic analysis was used to analyze the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This technique started with data familiarization; initial codes were created, which in turn were then clustered around higher-order themes. Such analysis aimed at digging deeper to identify patterns and themes, constructing the relationships among these to realize an interpretation of the phenomenon. It should be noted, however, that this process was an iterative one (Gill, 2014). During and after the analysis, certain codes were canceled, others were created; some data segments were recoded, some were deemed a better fit for a different theme than the one to which they had initially been assigned. The product of the investigative process is a narrative account where the researchers’ analytic interpretation is presented along with verbatim excerpts from the interviewees (Filimonau & Sulyok, 2021; Gill, 2014). To ease the management, manipulation, and analysis of data, CAQDA software QDA Miner Lite was utilized, thereby increasing the integrity of data management (Dawson, 2020; Robinson et al., 2014).

Some procedures were followed to increase the “credibility” and “dependability” of the process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As three researchers collaborated on this project, two were assigned the duty of coding data separately to provide “researcher triangulation” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000), while the third had a neutral

status, “code-book editor,” following Robinson et al.’s (2014) recommendation. The two codings were then compared and discussed to detect convergences and divergences. An inter-rater reliability score of .78 using Cohen’s Kappa coefficient formula reflected substantial agreement between coders.

Pernecky and Jamal (2010, p. 1069) note that “Interpretive studies of experience and meaning . . . require thoughtful discussion of reflexivity,” as data and meaning are co-constructed by the investigator(s) and the participant(s). Reflexivity is the “active acknowledgement by the researcher that her/his actions and decisions will inevitably impact upon the meaning and context of the experience under investigation” (Horsburgh, 2003, p. 308). As we reflect upon this study, we realize that accessibility may have been eased by interviewers being both Irish and chefs, like most of the participants. Sharing the profession and having a similar background may have also helped to establish trust and rapport as we acquired the emic status of “the insider” (Berger, 2015). Consequently, this meant we had dual personalities (Berger, 2015): chef/researcher, and we had to be careful when each should dominate. Our emic position also resulted in us understanding the struggle of having a failure and the empathy for frustration and ensuing remorse. After each interview, we kept a log of our impressions, emotional reactions, and thoughts of how the interview went and the participants’ reaction.

However, coming from the same field may have threatened to overlook ordinary issues being taken for granted. Nevertheless, one of the authors – who did not participate in conducting the interviews – did not work as a chef. That was an advantage as he heeded to what seemed ordinary, i.e., he was not contaminated. Ultimately, the final writing of this qualitative piece was, according to Saldaña (2011, p. 90), “in itself an analytic act.”

## Findings

### *Participants’ profile*

Participants’ demographics are briefly outlined here, and a summary of this is provided in [Table 1](#). The sample was dominated by male chefs comprising 80% of the interviewees, while female chefs represented 20%. Chefs in the 31–40 age group formed the biggest cohort, five participants were in the 41–50 bracket, and two participants were over 50. Most of the participants had an extended record of employment in food service, totaling 367 years and the mean was 24.47 years. Chefs acquired their experience in various types of operations; however, at the time of the interview 10 (66.7%) chefs worked in independent restaurants, while five (33.3%) were employed by hotel restaurants. The majority retained the title “head chef,” “executive chef,” or “chef/owner,” while just one served as a “relief chef,” although he had formerly worked as an executive chef. Two chefs (13.4%) spent the briefest period in

a present post, less than one year. The most protracted serving individual (6.7%) had 17 years of service in the same position, while 40% of the interviewees devoted between 5 and 10 years in their current position.

## **Findings**

### ***FPF consequences: on the operation***

***FPF cost.*** The main consequence of FPF on operations was the cost incurred. Though there is no estimate of the actual cost involved, a realization of the severity of FPF is palpable as Colm explains, “well, if you kept having problems in your kitchen, even if they were not affecting the customer, they would be affecting your GP, and if that was happening you would not be kept long, would you?” So, not only is the operation affected by the cost of FPF, but senior chefs’ tenure may also be undermined if gross profit (GP) is jeopardized.

### ***Cost types***

FPF costs exposed here can be classified into five types according to their nature:

#### ***1-Bin cost (Internal failure cost)***

This is one of the straightforward costs of FPF, as it directly affects food cost, and perhaps it is relatively easy to estimate. The “bin cost”; involves food that is discarded and goes to the bin. Brian reported how he feels upon this “... I feel bad because I’ll have to throw something in the bin or salvage it for staff food or something.” Mary reported the costliest thing they experienced, an incident that represents both a monetary loss and a significant health hazard, “... [when] someone plugging out the freezer or the electricity going overnight or the cool room breaking, and you come in and everything has to go in the bin. If the meat fridge goes, there are risks you cannot take.”

#### ***2-Rework cost (Internal failure cost)***

This cost is related to reworking items, time spent, and effort exerted in doing so. Thomas expounded on this “from a production point of view, it gets people frustrated, as they must do the job again. Their own time is wasted.”

#### ***3-Lost sales cost (External failure cost)***

A subtle cost that seems hard to figure is noticeable rejected foods; Martin reports an occasion where an elderly lady sent back the lamb to be cooked some more, mistaking a beetroot garnish for blood. “Because the restaurant is so small everyone can see food being sent back and then don’t order what was sent back.” Poor ordering and preparation can also result in lost sales.

#### *4-Recovery cost (External failure cost)*

This is another tangible cost that involves discounts and complimentary items given to discontented customers. Colm recalls when they had a function and customers were served the wrong menu, so, to resolve matters, they were given free drinks and a discount.

#### *5-Demoralization cost (Internal failure cost)*

Frustration, remorse, and anger stemming from incurring failures exemplify a psychological cost of an intangible nature. Brian relates that “the knock-on effect of something going wrong is that firstly the person who made it feels bad . . . overall, it has a demoralizing effect on the person.”

#### ***Consequences of FPF: on kitchen staff***

“Everyone makes mistakes . . .” these are the words of Sean. As simple as they are, however, FPF’s can be costly on kitchen staff morale.

#### ***Demoralization***

Most of the participants acknowledged that FPF adversely affects staff morale, “I can tell you straight out it brings the morale down, chefs get cranky because they are doing food, they feel they are not worthy of. Morale just hits rock bottom . . .” (Catherine). David describes the psychological sequence a worker goes through when FPF occurs: “most of the time it is shock followed by embarrassment, then denial.” However, different personalities have different reactions, as Linda observes, “sometimes they might lose confidence or if someone does not care, there is no effect at all.” However, incurring failure can be a stimulus for perfection for those who care, while this is not the case for the imprudent ones.

#### ***Peers’ involvement***

It should be noted that failures would distress the whole kitchen as Brian reports “ . . . if something goes wrong, it ruins the day. The kitchen thrives off energy, positive energy.” Hence, when failures recur, peers may react as Seamus explains “ . . . the rest of the staff, in their way, reprimands that person. Kitchens have a funny way of ironing themselves out.” Such reaction may reflect colleagues’ concern over anticipated rework effort and time. Notably, this implies that peers can be a source of anxiety.

#### ***Handling FPF***

***Setting priorities.*** Once failures happen, priorities are clearly defined, as Sean asserts: “at the time we don’t do anything as service is important and then at the end of service you tell them ‘that was wrong’ and tell them they should have done it the way we showed them.” Martin’s father’s advice is kept well in his mind “ . . . to sort out the problem first and then sort them (staff) out later.

You still have the same problem 15 minutes later if you lose the cool.” Brian notes that handling failures would vary from one place to another. Most importantly, he argues that this is the time when seniors should live up to the moment and rise to the challenge. They set the tune as part of their leadership, as Brian asserts that “I try and remain super positive without being overly happy.”

### ***An opportunity to learn***

Cathal believes that learning from mistakes helps to avoid repeating them in the future, and that staff “. . . also must have the ability to change and adapt to the circumstances of the moment.” Likewise, George thinks positively of FPF incidents on staff, “I would like to think it would have a proactive effect on them that something has been pointed out to them and it should not happen again, and it should go down as an experience. We can make a mistake once, learn from it and move on.” However, as will be shown later, learning from failure may be curbed by several factors.

### ***Handling multiple stakeholders***

Handling failures includes handling the multiple stakeholders involved. The operation, as noted earlier, is one. Customers may also be involved when failures reach them before being spotted. This involves a recovery cost, and customers’ dissatisfaction may be gleaned. Other parties involved include FOH and management. Table 2 provides a synopsis of handling FPF with the different stakeholders.

### ***Handling staff involved – four styles***

Upon FPF detection, senior chefs would talk to their staff. Four styles of dealing with staff emerged from the participants’ accounts (Aggression; Passive Aggression; Pacifism; Compromise)

### ***Aggression***

In investigating FPF with the staff involved, chefs become assertive as Sean accentuates “you raise your voice to show authority.” Some chefs resort to verbal abuse throughout this, “. . . [I] probably let a few fucks out of me . . . ” (Colm). Industry norms tolerate this if not encourages it, as Colm reminds that “some people call it a macho industry . . . ” Within this “macho industry” fear plays a *visible hidden* role. Visible as fear can be seen in the way the kitchen works as it is part of the culture. Hidden in the sense that it devours the psyche of the staff much like physical illness.

However, a certain dose of fear is desired, as Diarmuid sees that “there is a sense of fear in the kitchen, all the time. It is that kind of balance that I want . . . I think it’s a healthy sense of fear. They need to know that they are

**Table 2.** Synopsis on handling FPF with the different stakeholders.

Handling failure	Handling staff involved	Relationship between kitchen and FOH	Relationship between kitchen and management
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Setting priorities: recover FPF.</li> <li>-Service is important.</li> <li>-<i>"To sort out the problem first and then sort [staff] out later."</i></li> <li>-Senior chefs set the tune as part of their leadership.</li> <li>-This is an opportunity to learn <i>"We can make a mistake once, learn from it and move on"</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Talking to staff to figure out what happened. Four styles of dealing with staff:</li> <li>-Aggression: verbal abuse, "macho industry," fear.</li> <li>-Passive aggression: <i>"it is the same when somebody is being very silent, the passive aggressiveness, that is even worse."</i></li> <li>-Pacifism: <i>"... shouting, screaming, cursing is counterproductive."</i></li> <li>-Compromise: <i>"somewhere in the middle."</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-FOH role acknowledgment: they are the eyes and ears of the kitchen.</li> <li>-Each can ruin the work of the other. Certain issues shape this:</li> <li>-<i>"Us and them": rivalry and dissonance.</i></li> <li>-FOH seasonality: obstructs team building and learning</li> <li>-Lack of communication: leads to errors.</li> <li>-Lack of menu knowledge: mistakes at taking orders.</li> <li>-Tough kitchen staff: unapproachable crew, FOH trepidation.</li> <li>-Chefs' arrogance: cannot err, hard to confront.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Marginalization: management may not regard chefs as managers, poor interpersonal interaction.</li> <li>-Doubts over management competency: <i>"managers not having enough operational experience to back up and understand that ok there is a problem here."</i></li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Factors that affect handling staff.</li> <li>-Failure type (genuine/negligence), failure frequency, chefs' styles, and the person's honesty.</li> <li>-Final resort: firing.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Handling FPF with FOH.</li> <li>-The priority is given to remedy the situation, then to investigate it later.</li> <li>-Customers should voice out their complaints on the spot.</li> <li>-FOH are the messengers who convey customer complaints, and this is a sensitive assignment.</li> <li>-Kitchen takes responsibility if it is kitchen's wrong.</li> <li>-The pass is a shared responsibility.</li> <li>-Lack of experience leads to mistakes on the pass.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Lack of menu knowledge: mistakes at taking orders.</li> <li>-Tough kitchen staff: unapproachable crew, FOH trepidation.</li> <li>-Chefs' arrogance: cannot err, hard to confront.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Handling FPF with management.</li> <li>-Having meetings with management is a way to discuss failures.</li> <li>-Documentation helps to communicate with management.</li> <li>-Kitchen opinion may be ignored: <i>"there is no one fighting the kitchen's corner."</i></li> <li>-Chefs' failure ownership: <i>"any problems in the kitchen are mine to fix with the resources that I have"</i></li> <li>-Clandestineness: <i>"what happens in the kitchen stays in the kitchen"</i></li> <li>-Management support to resolve FPF is not always sought, guaranteed, or depended on.</li> </ul>



working with someone with discipline . . . ” He justifies this in light of his enormous responsibilities concerning financial targets, health and safety regulations, and environmental policies to follow.

### ***Passive aggression***

Seamus sees that some chefs may abuse staff. Nevertheless, he observes another type of hostility “it is the same when somebody is being very silent, the passive aggressiveness, that is even worse. You can feel it in the kitchen, a sort of suction.” Diarmuid’s sous chef always tells him “you don’t shout, and you don’t scream yet everyone is afraid in the kitchen.” However, it seems that venting out, according to Seamus, is a healthy practice; “you want to address it, get it out in the air, clear it and move on, do not let it happen again.”

### ***Pacifism***

On the other hand, some chefs believe that aggression is not a solution, as Brian explains “if your son or daughter falls over on their bike you are not going to shout at them, it will not solve anything. Shouting, screaming, cursing is counterproductive.” Brian observes that a hostile reaction may terrorize staff and shake their confidence.

### ***Compromise***

Seamus has a compromising approach, “There are some chefs out there who shout and chefs out there who don’t shout, which I think is sometimes worse. I am somewhere in the middle.”

### ***Factors that affect handling staff***

Mary’s assessment of the situation depends on the staff member involved, “if I know it was a genuine mistake, I do not need to say anything or do anything because I know they feel really bad about it themselves.” James takes the frequency of failure into his consideration, “the first time it happens you go; ‘hey buddy that is overdone,’ the second time you go ‘that is twice now.’ But if it is regular you are saying ‘man pull your socks up or you are off the grill’ or whatever section they are on. I cannot keep having it, you are costing money.” Seamus emphasizes the honesty of staff as he does not tolerate lies. Eventually, one needs to be strict as Mary states, “if it is something that is going to keep happening, you need to tell them it is their last chance.”

Hence, it can be concluded that criteria that determine handling staff include failure type (genuine/negligence), failure frequency, chefs’ styles, and the person’s honesty. Debatably, the industry norms (*habitus*) set the back-stage of this.

### *Relationships between kitchen and FOH*

*FOH role acknowledgment.* Probably, the foundation for the relationship between the kitchen and FOH is to acknowledge the significance of the FOH role. Indeed, Martin concedes this “they are your eyes and ears out there, so they are just as important as we are. They are the first contact with the customer.” Cathal notes that their routes are tangled, and they affect each other “it is no good if I am trying and the FOH is destroying it with poor service standards and vice versa.” Hence, a smooth relationship would assuage work burdens for both. Remarkably, a smooth kitchen operation results in fewer failures and eventually work becomes enjoyable as Seamus notes. However, certain issues would shape and arguably ruin this relationship:

- **“Us and them”:** There is a sense of divide between the front and back of the house. Mary relates that in some restaurants “they are killing each other. There is always a certain amount of ‘us and them’ . . . ” Equally, Linda and Thomas confirm the prevalent “us and them” concept. George recalls his first days and describes it as a “war zone” making it “. . . not a nice atmosphere to work in or socialize in after work.”

- **FOH staff seasonality:** The seasonality of FOH staff, who tend to be inexperienced students, would also affect the relationship. It takes time to develop understanding between work teams and seasonality does not allow to create such a bond.

- **Lack of communication:** Communication between FOH and the kitchen is crucial but sometimes it suffers. Conor is not satisfied with his situation, “Service is a living breathing thing; it changes all the time. I do not see what is on the floor, I need their eyes and ears and I need them to communicate back to me.” Conor is frustrated as this influences his work, “it stops me preparing for it and I cannot do my job properly. They do not seem to get that.”

- **Lack of menu knowledge:** Martin believes that FOH are salespeople. But to master this role, they must develop familiarity with the menu. Nonetheless, it does not always happen. This irritates Conor, who noted, “it keeps coming up in reviews that the waiting staff do not know the menu and that kills me.” Sometimes staff are pushed to the front, and they are not yet ready for this.

- **Tough kitchen staff:** Kitchen staff may be tough. David himself admits that “I would not take the head off them like I did when I was younger when I had an ego.” David’s approach has seemingly changed with maturity “if I do not get on with the front of house and they are apprehensive about coming to me or my kitchen because they have an issue, then that is not good at all.”

- **Chefs’ arrogance:** Brian notes that “There have been places I have worked in and a dish would have been put up and nobody would have even tasted the dish. There is arrogance in some places that the dish is great, there’s no need

for the waiting staff to taste it, I know it is great, so it is great.” This means that such chef would not accept the reality that they can err, and confronting them would be an arduous job.

It is reasonable to think that handling FPF between the kitchen and FOH would be impinged by the nature of the relationship – already outlined – between them. For example, the number of failures may be influenced by the performance of each team, whereas it has been noted that each can ruin the work of the other.

### *Handling FPF between kitchen and FOH*

Mary indicated that when FPF happen, “. . . I think the FOH sees it as ‘oh the kitchen screwed up again.’ From their point of view, it is like ‘how could that happen?’ but they have never worked in a kitchen, so it can happen. I am sure plenty of things go wrong on the floor that we do not know about.” Seamus explains that if there is an issue with the food in the front, “. . . then they will come in and talk to whoever is on the pass. We try to rectify it as quick and soon as possible.” Linda, Martin, David, and James stressed that the priority was given to remedy the situation and then to investigate it later. Seamus indicates that dissatisfied customers should voice this out immediately to be rectified. FOH, however, are the messengers who convey such complaints, and this can be a sensitive assignment. On the other hand, Martin does not have a problem confronting FOH servers about wrongs, “. . . you have to be quite blunt about it, but it is not personal it is just work.” But, if it is a kitchen problem, James is ready to take the responsibility “. . . we hold our hands up, other times it can be miscommunication between the server and the customer, which could be due to lack of experience by one or the other.” James points out that, in the case of a steak degree of doneness, for example, customers may be unsure and “. . . experienced servers know when and how to check if a customer is ordering the right degree of doneness.” FOH is the first buffer of conceivable displeasures.

*The pass.* Thomas explains that the pass is a shared responsibility, “if you have the staff, there is a two-phase check where the chef or the person on the pass has checked something going out and the person on the other side checks as well. Double-check the docket [written or printed food order] to make sure all the food has gone out and the person on the other side also looks through it.” FOH are encouraged to point out if there is something wrong or missing on a dish they are taking out as Cathal mentions, “. . . we would rather the problem stayed in the kitchen, however, the lack of experience comes into play and they could be heading out with something that is missing half its garnishes and not know the difference, now when we have a busy period one of the more experienced FOH will stay on the pass to throw an eye over the dishes before they go.”

One way to handle FPF is through communication, according to Catherine, they have a monthly meeting where they discuss areas for improvement, and to “let them know how our production failures were handled and if they have any advice on how to improve.”

### ***Relationship between kitchen and management***

Most of the chefs enjoyed good relationships with their restaurant managers. Mary has worked with the manager for a long time, and she is content with their relationship. However, differences do exist, “we wouldn’t necessarily have the same ideas when it comes to managing staff, but we have worked together that long that we just get on with it.” Likewise, James appreciates the relationship with management, yet he reckons that “they are set in their ways . . . that kind of thinking is hard to change, and it takes time and patience. I am trying and will continue to try as I am very stubborn. Hopefully, we can come to some kind of compromise soon.” Nevertheless, two main issues arise that may forge this relationship:

### ***Marginalization***

Some accounts voiced the feeling of marginalization. James thinks that management may not class chefs as managers, “in one sense they do and in another they do not . . .” As a result, it happens that “the G.M. comes and says ‘look we discussed xyz,’ but there is no one fighting the kitchen’s corner” (James). Catherine’s request carries a radical question, “more defined roles, where head chefs lie within management or whether they are under management? The structure of management is not quite clear.” Even management’s social interaction with kitchen staff was castigated “for example, the manager here will bring in a new member of staff and they do not introduce them to the kitchen staff. Also, they come in the morning and say hello to the waiting staff and just walk past the kitchen staff. They are part of your team also!” (Conor).

### ***Doubts over management competency***

Conor thinks some managers lack acumen, “one of them was very inexperienced even though he worked in [well-known restaurant]. I think this might have been his first management position and he did not understand the role.” Conor echoed his concern over the management approach, “there is zero training to floor staff, their management style is completely reactive, and the service is reactive.” Diarmuid does not receive enough support from management, and he does not count on this “it is down to lack of awareness, managers not having enough operational experience to back up and understand that ok there is a problem here.” As Diarmuid was asked to elaborate on this he continued, “I think it’s down to lack of openness and understanding because

they have never worked in an operation and I think that the admin. staff like to hide downstairs and pop up for lunch and disappear again as opposed to looking and seeing what's happening.”

### ***Handling FPF at management level***

If an issue does occur, Catherine would talk about it after service and discuss if things need to be taken further. When there is a food issue, “the restaurant manager would come to tell you if there was a problem. We would tell them that we will do a fresh one if they want it” (Colm). Having meetings, whether daily or weekly, with management is a way to discuss failures, whereas documentation helps to communicate with management as Brian relates “every restaurant has a report at the end of the night. We generally try to nip things in the bud ... by having reports every night, it allows us to analyse what happened the next day, from a kitchen and FOH point of view.” Seamus also highlights the significance of documentation, “we have a manager's handover book. If we have any issues whether it is someone did not like something, or the big party were waiting, if there were any delays, it would all be documented in the book for the next day. We look at it the next day and basically say why did this happen, and someone will explain what happened ... the manager will always try and foresee ‘danger’ tables and makes sure everything is going well.”

Yet, this seems to be a model scenario that may not be the norm. Thomas states that “the ideal situation would be if management including the head chef could sit down and point out any problems that have happened and work out a way to fix that. Normally these problems do not get fixed. Mainly a time issue, as the kitchen looks after their problems. Thomas reported an incident where a problem happened with a young girl on the pass, “... the following morning there was a big meeting with the waitresses and the restaurant manager but there was no kitchen staff involved in that. We might have reported what went wrong, but we did not have any input.” Perceiving that their views were not considered may instill a feeling of being side-lined or marginalized, which was previously mentioned.

### ***Failure ownership***

Though most of the responses to the relationship with management were positive, when it comes to handling FPF, a sense of problem ownership is evident. James expresses this, “... any problems in the kitchen are mine to fix with the resources that I have.” The only case which compels a chef to bring an issue to management attention is when it is totally beyond her/his capacity. George reports that “I would try to sort it out as much as I can myself unless it was a major issue. Then I would go to him and say something needs to be done here. I need your support or commitment on this issue ... ”

### ***Clandestineness***

Cathal related that management may not know about failure happening “... what happens in the kitchen stays in the kitchen, the owner and GM know that I will do my job properly if I have a problem, I fix it, I do not go crying to them for the solution. That is what I am paid for.” Perhaps, chefs do not want to have failures exposed as this may undermine their professionalism. This can be inferred from Colm’s assertion “... it would be my problem to solve, or I would become the problem.” As mentioned elsewhere failures would affect customers and the bottom line and this would threaten the continuation of a chef in his/her position.

### ***Support from management to resolve FPF***

George’s “99.9% support” from the manager appears to be an exception. Mary reports on the lack of support she gets from owners and managers to resolve FPF, “none, it would be a case of ‘that’s your issue, deal with it.’” David has not asked for any support or resources “... as I see this thing, as part of my job and it is up to me to solve them and ensure they stop happening.” However, considering the failure secrecy that chefs maintain means they would not ask for support as they would not disclose failure happening.

Diarmuid thinks that to be able to provide exceptional service as emphasized by the hotel, staff should be empowered to do so, but it is not the case. He discussed his hotel’s “Yes, I Can” training emphasis, where whatever the guest asks for, the staff answer is “Yes I Can.” Diarmuid argues that “this is being trained but it has to be enforced by someone. It’s all about enforcement, and it’s about understanding it from our point of view, you employ us to do a job and you have to empower us to do the job and you have to respect opinion but don’t ask me a question and not like the answer because it’s not the answer you wanted in the first place.”

### ***Relationship between kitchen and restaurant owner***

Thomas, Cathal, James, Mary, and David have a good relationship with the owners. Mary has worked in this restaurant for 10 years. She describes the owner as “he is not hands-on, but he is always there. He would let me have free reign but if there was ever anything he didn’t like us using he would be very vocal.” Brian describes his relationship with the owner as “very unique relationship ... The relationship went from chef mentor to me going off doing my own thing in different restaurants, to me coming back to a business mentor relationship. We have a parental relationship.” Thomas believes that, “you need a certain amount of freedom from the owner to go about your business and report back and then, as the chef, you need that person to be open in sharing business on goings with you.” Mary notes that the owner would not have a big insight into production failure, “unless it was hugely affecting the GP.”

## Discussion

### *Consequences of FPF*

#### *On operation*

Having a typology of food costs (bin cost, rework cost, cost of lost sales, and recovery cost) emphasizes the importance of the back of the house in creating – and thus – controlling costs. As remarked earlier, blunders in preparation and production produce avoidable loss (Heikkilä et al., 2016; McAdams et al., 2019; Okumus, 2020). However, no study specifically tackled waste due to FPF. Prior studies have noted that the exact measuring of food loss/waste is a Byzantine mission (Filimonau & Sulyok, 2021; Martin-Rios et al., 2020; Okumus, 2020). However, auditing kitchen operations is a keystone in loss/waste reduction (McAdams et al., 2019; Okumus, 2020) and cost control in general (Cengiz et al., 2018). Innovative technology solutions such as specialized devices can aid with tracking loss/waste (Martin-Rios et al., 2020). As competition intensifies and prices and profit margins become static, reducing costs turns out to be the sole solution to increase revenue (Cengiz et al., 2018). As indicated by Colm, job security is threatened by feeble profits, “. . . it would be my problem to solve, or I would become the problem.” Hence, attaching a “monetary value” to FPF would make it visible (Filimonau & Sulyok, 2021). This may coax senior chefs to adopt waste reduction strategies, and this should cascade down the brigade. Engaging staff in loss/waste reduction quest and seeking their input cannot be neglected (Dhir et al., 2020). Proper training (McAdams et al., 2019), alteration of food preparation methods, cooking practices, and presentation styles can curtail loss/waste (Charlebois et al., 2015). Foodservice operations would benefit from quantifying the cost of quality using the P-A-F model (Ramdeen et al., 2007). Intuitively, the total quality management principle that should be adopted is “getting it right first time everywhere . . .” (Oakland, 2014, p. 16). This would thwart the accumulating inauspicious repercussions of failures.

Finally, the identified intangible cost related to having stressed staff – which ostensibly would be the most difficult to measure – is discussed in detail in the next section.

#### *On staff*

Handling staff involved in failure necessitates understanding how FPF affect them. It was reported that incurring failures would demoralize staff, which would reflect negatively on their self-esteem. Self-esteem is an “overall evaluation of one’s worth or value” (Akgunduz, 2015, p. 1085). Failing to do the job properly threatens staff to be shunned by the “family,” i.e., chef community (Cooper et al., 2017) defaming their “face/social image” and this also exacerbates their deteriorating self-esteem (Wang et al., 2019). It should also be mentioned that fear of failure would affect staff mental health (Kotera et al., 2020). Notably, frustration and ensuing anger can have both serious physical



and psychological health consequences on staff, and it can diminish productivity as well (Moreo et al., 2020). Furthermore, guilt was a feeling that was observed in the accounts given. Although workers who show high degrees of guilt-proneness are more likely to experience job burnout, feelings of guilt may also provoke some workers to exert extra effort to recover from failures. Conspicuously, the dominant emotions reported here, e.g., anger, frustration, denial – which are largely inexorable – may curb learning from failures; “negative grieving” (Wang et al., 2019). Yet, it hinges on staff “error learning orientation” level to either stop at this or to bypass such mishaps, learn from them and move on, leading to “positive grieving” (Wang et al., 2019).

Investigating the different relationships provides a background for handling failure.

### ***Handling staff***

Handling staff here involved verbal abuse, which is not unusual in the culture of kitchens (Gill & Burrow, 2018; Graham et al., 2020; Moreo et al., 2020). Kitchens have been typified as a “high-testosterone environment” (Albors-Garrigos et al., 2020). Indeed, Moreo et al. (2020) mark the “toxic masculinity” dominant in kitchens, which even overflow to include the whole restaurant. Abusive supervision may provoke employees to engage in counterproductive activities and retraction of helpful behaviors (Zhao & Guo, 2019). Fear is another emotion present in the accounts, and it comes in many forms. Initially, there is fear of making mistakes and the consequences of these, which is labeled by Gill and Burrow (2018) as “practice fear.” Another type of fear is implied as chefs do not disclose failure happening lest being seen as inept. This is akin to Gill and Burrow’s (2018, p. 451) “professional fear” which is “the fear of not being proficient or ‘good enough’ across a range of complex culinary skills to ensure continued employment.” Fear in kitchens has been studied, and it was regarded as an essential element of work, albeit in a haute cuisine context (Gill & Burrow, 2018). Chefs interviewed by Gill and Burrow (2018) viewed fear as the optimal method to spur and concentrate effort. Moreover, fear was believed to be the way to ensure that failures are not incurred again. Hence, fear acts as a double-edged weapon; it can trigger perfection but it consumes staff’s nerves. The resultant occupational stress, however, can lead to burnout and increased intention to leave. Perhaps, workers need to engage in “useful gossip” where they can talk freely about good and bad experiences (Lundberg & Mossberg, 2008). Many benefits can be garnered from this, from releasing stress to learning from peers. This can be thought of as a way of “informal learning” (Boccia & Cseh, 2021) where staff can share their experiences and insights and learn from each other (Boccia & Cseh, 2021; Wang et al., 2019).

However, it should be noted here that the ability of chefs to identify staff’s agitating emotions through, for instance, facial expressions, and body language upon incurring failures is important as it leads to “the development of

other positive interpersonal capabilities including trust, empathy and other prosocial behaviours . . . ” (Moreo et al., 2020, p. 38). Emotions seem to play a great role in the work-life of chefs. More research is required to understand this phenomenon better.

Mistakes should be perceived as chances for life-long learning (Boccia & Cseh, 2021; Wang et al., 2019) and that was a positive finding in this research. This would promote “incidental learning” which can be theorized as “experience-based learning” (Harteis et al., 2008). Indeed, errors can also provide a base for innovation and creativity if they are conceived as a start of development (Harteis et al., 2008). Participants (Catherine, David, and Linda) mentioned that those who care may reflect on their actions and modify these. Similarly, Harteis et al. (2008, p. 225) argue that “ . . . mistakes might lead to learning about consequences only if the individual is concerned about the incident, thus attracting her or his attention. The subjective estimation of the importance of the incident forms a motivational basis for initiating reflective processes.” Yet, mistakes may not be disclosed to avoid the following emotional stress, and this consequently would impede learning, collectively at least.

As the role of head chefs in regulating the tune and orchestrating the performance is central, they need to be transformative leaders (Mac Con Iomaire et al., 2021). Transformational leadership is “a process of influencing in which leaders change their associates’ awareness of what is important and move them to see themselves and the opportunities and challenges of their environment in a new way” (Kara et al., 2013, p. 10). This may improve staff wellbeing. In the same vein, the role of managers and senior staff in creating a conducive setting for learning cannot be depreciated as Boccia and Cseh (2021) and Wang et al. (2019) stress.

### ***Relationship with FOH***

#### ***Us and them: two worlds***

The literature highlights the “historic dissonance” between service and kitchen crew (Mac Con Iomaire, 2008; Moreo et al., 2020). Ingram and Jones (1998) observed a lengthy past of strife between groups of staff in food service businesses and adjured giving this deserved attention. Indeed, inter-group resentment could negatively affect work performance and delivering quality work (Ingram & Jones, 1998). Encouragingly, when the concept of “us and them” appeared in the interview data, it related more to the past than the present.

Another issue that was observed is staff seasonality. Chefs complained that some servers lack enthusiasm and concentration as they take their job as interim work (Murphy & Smith, 2009). Teambuilding is obstructed by staff turnover and seasonality, which hurdles learning (Mac Con Iomaire, 2008; Murphy & Smith, 2009; Richards et al., 2012). Chefs acknowledged that servers, as they

spend more time in contact with customers, are crucial to the quality dining experience; however, menu obliviousness was another problem brought up by interviewees. Servers should develop a scrupulous knowledge of the menu and ultimately this reflects positively on guests' experience (Murphy & Smith, 2009). Chefs can teach servers about food; however, tensions and rivalry between the two may constrain this (Murphy & Smith, 2009). Mac Con Iomaire (2008) promotes mentoring within the hospitality industry to nurture talent.

Wellton et al. (2019, p. 403) claim that a quandary for senior chefs is that “they often need to compromise between their professionalism as cooking experts and their role as managers/leaders, the latter for which they are seldom trained.” However, some chefs may not enjoy playing the leader (Wellton et al., 2019). Wellton et al. (2019) claim that the practice (praxis) of demonstrating and advising is an element of quotidian leadership and mentoring, which is particularly implemented during the preparation period in the kitchens.

Executive chefs need peculiar capabilities, according to Wan et al. (2017) whose study devised a four-quadrant model that includes both hard (managerial and operational) and soft (behaviors and skills) competencies which proves the multifarious nature of managing a professional kitchen. Executive chefs are associated with large establishments with high numbers of staff, particularly large-chain hotels. One of the chef respondents in a small hotel noted that high staff numbers or executive chefs are a luxury small establishments could not afford: “We could also do with more staff in the kitchen so that I could stay plating on the pass instead of cooking on a section, but this just isn't financially viable, I told you in the beginning we are a small operation, I am not a poncy executive chef, I am a working head chef, there is no money in the kitty for an executive chef” (Cathal).

Senses of marginalization were reported in the study, and the literature preserved examples of this, for instance, kitchen staff were not invited to team meetings, which entrenched the separation between the two (Richards et al., 2012). The ramifications of this on chefs should be monstrous considering that chefs tend to possess a strong self-identity (Mac Con Iomaire et al., 2021). Undeniably, impoverished communication can deflate spirits and output, further engraining the divide between kitchen and service and its negative implications, as previously highlighted.

## ***Relationship with management***

### ***Doubts over management competency***

Most of the participants had a long history of working in food service, 367 years in total, the mean was 24.47 years. Perhaps due to their long years in food production, some chefs within this study had the impression of managers' immaturity. Krone et al. (1989) mention that foodservice managers who may

not be available on the floor may be regarded as “unproductive.” Foodservice managers have several responsibilities and duties to tend to (Krone et al., 1989). However, if staff perceive managers as incompetent, then they would not disclose problems to them as they do not trust their capabilities to understand and handle this. Drastically, managers who lack acumen, among other factors, determine restaurant feasibility (Hua et al., 2013).

## Conclusions

This study has investigated both the consequences of FPF on operation and staff and the handling of FPF in foodservice businesses. In exploring how failure is handled among the different stakeholders – and how the relationships among these would reflect on failure handling – this research broadens knowledge in an uncharted area. In doing so, it highlights several managerial and theoretical implications. From a kitchen/operations management perspective, the role of the back of the house in curbing food waste/loss is evident. It can curtail internal and external failure costs which would reflect positively on an operation performance. We conclude that without determining the waste scale and pinpointing the causes, it cannot be combated.

Investigating the different relationships paved the background for handling failure. However, handling failure with staff is not that straightforward and may have managerial implications. Kitchen environments can be characterized by fear and abuse, making it difficult to handle staff properly. Fear of making mistakes and fear after committing them impedes learning. Handling FPF with FOH is complicated by the sense of divide between the two worlds, not to mention rivalry between them. Handling failure with management is branded by marginalization and poor social interaction on the part of management, and failure clandestineness, and fear of being futile on the part of chefs. Such indicators hint that failures would recur especially where learning from failure is encumbered. A major managerial implication of this research is that learning should be at the core of handling failure, but kitchen culture (*habitus*) is often not promotive enough. This would be an antithesis to the concept of the “learning organization” (Boccia & Cseh, 2021). There are some indications that this ingrained culture (*habitus*) is gradually changing. Traynor et al.’s (2021) case study of “elite chef” Michel reveals that breaking with the traditional kitchen culture through empathy and compassion helped him attain success. We conclude that transformational chefs can change the ingrained culture (*habitus*) of kitchens from that of fear and failure clandestineness to situating learning at the core of handling failure. This will require a change in the *habitus* of management also, and the data shows that chefs need to be included in managerial meetings and have their voices heard and have an impact on policy making within the business, helping to transform it into a “learning organization.”

Applying a phenomenological epistemology helped to get close to the professional life and “lived experience” of the participating chefs to explore how they experience the consequences of FPF and how they handle it. A major advantage that phenomenology brings to this study is its endeavor to attain a more profound comprehension of what may be considered mundane issues as it “encourages a certain attentive awareness to the details and seemingly trivial happenings of our everyday lives” (Orbe, 2000, p. 606).

Theoretical implications of this phenomenological study include practice theory, the theory of hospitality, and the theory of Error Management Training (Lashley, 2015; Schatzki, 2018; Yao et al., 2019). Exploring the “lived experience” of chefs allows for a better insight into their “habitus” and “praxis” which, with transformational leadership, can be adjusted and modernized. The theoretical framework of practice theory has been outlined in Mac Con Iomaire et al. (2021, pp. 189–90). “Praxis” refers to the journey from novice to expert, from tacit to articulate, and also practice, training for competence development and insight. Practice theory is of high value to identify *how* things are done and not just *what* is done. This research has used the practice theory lens to explore the consequences and handling of FPF in foodservice kitchens, which ties in theoretically with Heidegger’s phenomenology (Heidegger, 1962). Heidegger’s idea that human activity rests on something that cannot be formulated has been variously conceived and labeled as habitus, practical consciousness, skills, and knowing how to go on. Managers need to be fully aware of not only *what* is done but also *how* things are done.

Hospitality professionals should be hospitable not only to guests but to each other as well (Lashley, 2015). One way to do this is to recruit staff with proper soft skills or develop these through training, and mentoring. That being said, the shortage of chefs is a major issue globally, both prior to and following the Covid-19 pandemic. Nevertheless, soft skills encompass different facets that can help better cater to guests’ needs and – significantly – peers as well, e.g., empathy, social skills, networking, teamwork skills, problem-solving skills, and communication skills (Glińska-Neweś et al., 2020). These are traditionally expected from front-line staff, while hard skills are emphasized in the back of the house. This, arguably, needs to change to accentuate the soft skills of the non-contact personnel as well. Graham et al.’s (2020, p. 29) research on open kitchens impact on chefs’ work showed that chefs in such settings became “part of the frontline workers dramaturgy”; their job satisfaction levels increased, while contempt, masculinity, and abuses declined, thus enhancing the relationship with waiting personnel and improving customer service skills. The presence of customers – an external pressure – meant chefs need to hone such skills. The challenge then would be how to refine soft skills in the traditional working environment in the absence of outside pressures.

In conclusion, this research strongly urges the industry to explore the potential of “error management training” (EMT) and embrace “error management culture” (Guchait et al., 2020). In EMT, participants are overtly stimulated to incur mistakes and learn from them. Errors are valued as they represent an opportunity to learn, compelling staff to reflect and discover the causes. This is a departure from the customary training strategy based on error avoidance, and it results in improved performance. In times of emergencies, e.g., Covid-19, cultivating a culture of learning and innovation is crucial for business resilience, particularly for small restaurants that have minimal means (Boccia & Cseh, 2021).

The paper augments the initial exploratory research on FPF by Mac Con Iomaire et al. (2021). Our final recommendation is to call for open communication about failure and a different mind-set toward FPF. As Cathal noted, learning from mistakes helps to avoid repeating them in the future. Likewise, George noted positively of the proactive effect of FPF incidents and staff, “We can make a mistake once, learn from it and move on.”

### **Limitations**

Certain limitations emerged during the conduct of this research. One of such limitations is the methodology utilized. Some researchers criticize the lack of rigor and application of phenomenology and qualitative research. Issues of bias, preconceptions, and the subjective researcher’s influence on the analysis of the data have been questioned, although Robinson et al. (2014, p. 69) argue that this can be counteracted by Denzin and Lincoln’s (2000, p. 19) quote that “[t]he age of value-free inquiry for the human disciplines is over.”

Another possible limitation is the cohort of interviewees. The research recruited senior chefs; young or early-career chefs’ views were not sought, and these should have an opinion. Although the study included chefs from urban and rural areas, working in restaurant and hotel kitchens, the research primarily represents the Republic of Ireland. The lived experiences of chefs in other countries or regions of the world may vary. Furthermore, the voices of other stakeholders, e.g., FOH, management, and owners, were not investigated. Generalization is not easily claimed as “. . . qualitative inquiry is too local and too case-specific for a researcher to assert transferability” (Saldaña, 2011, p. 112).

### **Future research**

However, this research opens paths for future research, for example, how the other stakeholders, for instance, FOH and management, perceive FPF and how they contribute to this. The role of suppliers in FPF offers another avenue

for research, which was outside the scope of this paper, but will form a separate paper. The applicability of EMT to hospitality and specifically in foodservice operations is another potential area. Another course would investigate soft skills and non-contact staff, especially chefs in traditional production areas, focusing on developing these for the kitchen crew. Research on emotion management in food service operations and how these affect the course of work is also deemed necessary.

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