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# Why do chefs stay? Using repertory grid technique to map chefs' desire to remain in their occupation and refine existing knowledge of retention in the commercial kitchen

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# Why do chefs stay?

# Using repertory grid technique to map chefs' desire to remain in their occupation and refine existing knowledge of retention in the commercial kitchen

by

**Michalis Kourtidis**

**PhD**

October 2022

# Why do chefs stay?

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**Michalis Kourtidis**

*A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the University's requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy*

**October 2022**

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Researching the life of chefs has really opened my appetite for more…

## Abstract

To date, the study of Chefs as an occupational group in high-intensity work environments has tended to focus on the nature and impact of the challenging work conditions of the commercial kitchen. This focus has promoted an understanding of both the physical and mental effects of operating in this environment and has been used to explain the high turnover among professional chefs. However, relatively little attention has been paid to the reverse side of this issue, namely, given the harsh work conditions, why many chefs choose to remain in the occupation. This study focuses on this issue by drawing on theories of job embeddedness (JE) and occupational embeddedness (OE) and questioning the influence of internal locus of control (LOC) on chefs' decision to stay in the job.

Through repertory grid interviews with 23 chefs of casual/upper casual and hotel restaurants in the United Kingdom, the study reveals a series of complex and personal reasons for their desire to remain in this career and in so doing, it extends our insight into chefs as an occupation, as well as theories which can be used to explain retention in high-intensity work contexts.

The above scope of the study asked for a constructivist research methodology following a qualitative research method that would reveal idiosyncratic ways of thinking towards employee retention. To that end, Personal Construct Theory (PCT) was adopted using the Repertory Grid Technique (RGT). That interviewing method offered an appropriate research platform to cognitively map chefs' desire to stay in the occupation. In an attempt to ensure the validity of the process, RGT was followed by eliciting the research participants' core constructs/ core values with the laddering-up process.

The analysis of the findings led to two distinct personal construct categories: superordinate and subordinate. The laddering-up process did not produce any different constructs but helped in the deeper interpretation of the cognitive mapping of chefs' retention. The results showed that chefs who stay in the occupation long term are firstly intrinsically driven and then extrinsically driven. The dynamics between those drivers indicated a single direction from the intrinsic to the extrinsic, where intrinsic drivers play a protagonist role in chefs' retention and are not dramatically influenced by the extrinsic ones. However, the extrinsic

drivers play the role of flexible regulators, which can shake the construct of retention in various directions but are not adequate enough to force it to collapse.

The above results contribute to the literature on chefs' occupation as they refine what is known about chefs' retention, not only turnover. Before this study no other research had explored the thinking process of chefs to stay on the job instead of drifting to other easier and more profitable careers. The study also expands on the existing knowledge about the ability of JE and OE to predict chefs' retention, firstly, by confirming that all domains of the two frameworks (fit, links, sacrifice) are met in chefs' retention; secondly, by adding internal LOC as an essential contributor to the literature of retention which gives further individual meaning to the dimensions of JE and OE. From a practical point of view, the research findings are also very timely in the post-brexit and post-covid era in hospitality when the shortage of chefs has reached high levels in the country. With the emphasis on the intrinsic drivers of chefs revealed in the study, the results open a discussion about the strategy of recruiting and selecting cooks that are investible because they have the potential to develop a long-lasting career in the commercial kitchen. Therefore, focusing on retention rather than turnover in the commercial kitchen industry looks more promising in the present period. The importance of this study, finally, goes beyond the chefs' literature as it paves the way for further research into retaining highly skilled and talented employees in occupational environments of high intensity.

## Table of Contents


Certificate of ethical approval ........ i
Acknowledgments ........ ii
Abstract ........ iii
Table of Contents ........ v
List of Figures ........ vii
List of Tables ........ viii
List of Diagrams........ ix
1. Introduction ........ 1
1.1 Problem statement ........ 1
1.2 Research aim ........ 4
1.3 Research objectives ........ 5
1.4 Rationale of the study ........ 5
1.5 Introduction to methodology ........ 6
1.6 Structure of the study ........ 7
2. Understanding chefs and their work environment ........ 9
2.1 Introduction ........ 9
2.2 Who is a Chef? ........ 10
2.3 Perspectives of self-perception of chefs ........ 16
2.3.1 Individual Perspective ........ 16
2.3.2 Societal Perspective ........ 19
2.4 The culture and environment of chefs: a highly stressful occupational setting in challenging glamour ........ 22
3 Perspectives of chefs' retention ........ 32
3.1 Introduction ........ 32
3.2 Known explanations for the retention of chefs ........ 32
3.3 Understanding employee turnover and retention ........ 36
3.3.1 Employee turnover ........ 37
3.3.2 Employee retention – Job embeddedness (JE) ........ 40
3.3.3 Locus of Control (LOC) ........ 45
3.4 Conceptual framework of the study ........ 49
3.5 Concluding remarks ........ 50
4 Methodology ........ 53
4.1 Introduction ........ 53
4.2 Ontological and Epistemological approaches of the study ........ 54
4.2.1 Ontology ........ 54
4.2.2 Epistemology ........ 54
4.3 Methodology ........ 57
4.4 Repertory Grid Technique (RGT) ........ 62
4.5 Application of RGT in the study ........ 68
4.6 Sampling ........ 72
4.7 Interview Design ........ 78
4.8 The process of analysis ........ 84
4.9 Ethical considerations ........ 88
4.10 Concluding remarks ........ 89
5 Analysis of data ........ 91

5.1 Introduction ........................................................................................ 91
5.2 Description of sample ........................................................................ 93
5.3 Becoming and remaining chefs – Analysis of elements ......................... 95
5.4 Analysis of constructs ........................................................................ 106
5.4.1 Cluster analysis of the constructs .................................... 107
5.4.2 Content analysis of the constructs .................................. 122
5.5 Core Constructs – Core Values: Laddering-up process ........................ 132
5.6 Summary ............................................................................................ 138
6 Discussion of the findings ............................................................................ 140
6.1 Research findings and job embeddedness ............................................ 141
6.1.1 Fit – Organisation ............................................................ 141
6.1.2 Links – Community .......................................................... 142
6.1.3 Sacrifice – Community ..................................................... 143
6.1.4 Fit – Community .............................................................. 144
6.1.5 Sacrifice – Organisation ................................................... 144
6.1.6 Links – Organisation ........................................................ 146
6.2 Research findings and occupational embeddedness ............................ 148
6.3 Research findings and internal locus of control .................................. 151
6.4 Chefs refine the understanding of retention in the commercial kitchen ............................................................................................... 155
6.5 New perspectives on the research findings ......................................... 160
7 Conclusions ................................................................................................. 171
6.1 Main points of the study ..................................................................... 171
6.2 Implications for the literature of chefs' retention ............................... 176
6.3 Implications of the study for the hospitality industry .......................... 180
6.4 Limitation of the work and implications for future research ............... 183
6.5 Concluding remarks ........................................................................... 186
List of references ........................................................................................... 187
Appendices .................................................................................................... 215
Appendix 1: Questions about 'What makes you stay in the chef's occupation'? ...................................................................................... 216
Appendix 2: Detailed analysis of the categorisation of personal constructs ........................................................................................... 218
Appendix 3: Dendrograms of FOCUS cluster analysis ............................. 224
Appendix 4: Calculation of saturation point of interviews ........................ 231
Appendix 5: Informed consent form ....................................................... 234
Appendix 6: Participant information sheet ............................................. 235
Appendix 7: Content Analysis of constructs – Core categorisation ........... 237
Appendix 8: Selective quotes from repertory grid interviews .................. 244
Appendix 9: Poster presented at the International Symposium 2022 of BAM HRM SIG ......................................................................................... 254

## List of Figures

Figure 1: Chef's definition

Figure 2: Job Embeddedness model, adapted from Mitchell et al (2001)

Figure 3: Employee retention through Locus of Control

Figure 4: Key constructs leading to retention of chefs

Figure 5: Conceptual framework of the study

Figure 6: Example of RGT

Figure 7: Laddering-up process

Figure 8: The interview process

Figure 9: Process of the data analysis

Figure 10: Interviewees' preference of the predetermined elements

Figure 11: The main elements of chefs' retention

Figure 12: Categorisation of constructs after cluster analysis

Figure 13: Core categorisation of constructs

Figure 14: Content Analysis of Constructs

Figure 15: Interrelation between superordinate categories of constructs and core constructs – values

Figure 16: Sources of the drivers of chefs' retention

Figure 17: Conceptual framework of chefs' retention

## List of Tables

Table 1: Sample description

Table 2: Creation of the elements by the interviewee

Table 3: Bank of elements

Table 4: Differences in the categorisation of elements and constructs by second analyst

Table 5: Participants' satisfaction from being chefs

Table 6: Elements that drive chefs in the occupation

Table 7: Elements that drive chefs out of the occupation

Table 8: Superordinate and subordinate categories of constructs

Table 9: Core constructs – Core values

Table 10a: Research findings against conceptual framework: Job Embeddedness

Table 10b: Research findings against conceptual framework: Occupational Embeddedness

Table 10c: Research findings against conceptual framework: Internal Locus of Control

## List of Diagrams (in appendix 3)

Diagram 1: FOCUS Cluster Analysis of Participant 1

Diagram 2: FOCUS Cluster Analysis of Participant 17

Diagram 3: FOCUS Cluster Analysis of Participant 4

Diagram 4: FOCUS Cluster Analysis of Participant 9

Diagram 5: FOCUS Cluster Analysis of Participant 10

Diagram 6: FOCUS Cluster Analysis of Participant 5

Diagram 7: FOCUS Cluster Analysis of Participant 14

Diagram 8: FOCUS Cluster Analysis of Participant 7

Diagram 9: FOCUS Cluster Analysis of Participant 6

Diagram 10: FOCUS Cluster Analysis of Participant 15

Diagram 11: FOCUS Cluster Analysis of Participant 13

Diagram 12: FOCUS Cluster Analysis of Participant 3

Diagram 13: FOCUS Cluster Analysis of Participant 8

Diagram 14: FOCUS Cluster Analysis of Participant 2

Diagram 15: FOCUS Cluster Analysis of Participant 19

Diagram 16: FOCUS Cluster Analysis of Participant 18

Diagram 17: FOCUS Cluster Analysis of Participant 22

Diagram 18: FOCUS Cluster Analysis of Participant 21

Diagram 19: FOCUS Cluster Analysis of Participant 11

# Chapter 1. Introduction

This chapter introduces the present condition of chefs' job market in the UK being affected by an increased shortage. The problem is attracting the attention of everyone in the commercial kitchen industry, hence this research makes a rigorous attempt to shed light on a perspective which emphasises the reasons chefs stay on the job.

Eating out in the UK has increased significantly in the last 15 years, and as a result, chefs in restaurants have also increased in numbers and have been in high demand (Lock 2021; ONS 2019). However, the shortage of chefs has also increased in the last decade and has raised concerns about the sustainability of the restaurant industry as we know it (People 1st 2017; Bosetti and Washington-Ihieme 2019). The eating out market reached £89.5 billion in 2018 (Lock 2022), which makes it a critical market for the national economy. This figure in the UK may have marked a decrease of approximately 10% (Euromonitor International 2021: 3) in the last few years (from 2015 to 2020). However, the industry's size remains considerable, and the need for more chefs and retention of the existing ones is essential for the survival of restaurants.

The lack of chefs has been noticed by researchers and the public. Chefs have become increasingly more popular to the public; their practices in the kitchen have entered almost every house through the numerous tv shows and cooking awards run by celebrity chefs, culinary films, online videos and books presenting recipes by famous or not-so-famous cooks and chefs. That publicity has brought the work of chefs closer to people's attention so that they would ask to see and experience more of it more often. Therefore, retaining chefs instead of losing them is in the interest of the public, the hospitality industry, and the national economy, hence a field to be explored and interpreted by the scholarly community.

## 1.1 Problem statement

Although the demand for chefs is high, the offer is low. It seems that there are not enough chefs to cover the vacancies opened for them (People 1st 2017), therefore retaining the active ones is essential for the industry. Chefs work in a very challenging occupational environment which forces many of them to live continuously on edge (Bosetti and Washington-Ihieme

2019). That is not a phenomenon which emerged recently because of two critical historical events of the last five years: (i) Brexit (a notable number of cooks and chefs come from European countries (KPMG 2017) and this number has shrunk after the 2016 referendum (Partridge and Partington 2021; Lewis 2018)) and (ii) the Covid19 pandemic (two long-lasting national lockdowns and several local ones forced restaurants to close and lead their staff to furlough) (Partridge and Partington 2021; Race 2021). That was something which had also been noted before and marked as alarming for the industry's sustainability. A significant percentage of chefs either leave the job or refrain from this career altogether, resulting in an increasing shortage of chefs; in the last few years, before the pandemic, 'People 1st' report (2017) found that the labour turnover of chefs had reached nearly 40%. Their research revealed an annual drop out of the career to the extent of 20%. So, the shortage of chefs has been considered critical for many years (Bosetti and Washington-Ihieme 2019).

High employee turnover rates are not unusual in the hospitality industry and is widely accepted as normal (Davidson, Timo and Wang 2010). However, reasons may vary from personal to institutional factors and from issues of the nature of the job to excessive workloads (Robinson and Barron 2007; Robinson and Beesley 2010; People 1st 2017; Young and Corsun 2010; Tongchaiprasit and Ariyabuddhiphings 2016; Kang, Twigg and Hertzman 2010; Cain, Busser and Kang 2018; Kitterlin, Moll and Moreno 2015; Giousmpasoglou, Brown and Cooper 2018; Giousmpasoglou, Marinakou and Cooper 2017).

Research projects on turnover in the past have tried to shed light on the reasons that chefs leave the occupation: these have been categorised in the challenging demands of the work itself, the physical work conditions in the kitchen, the frequent injuries caused by heat and sharp kitchen utensils, the disagreements between chefs and restaurant managers regarding the quality of supplies, and the request for working unsociable hours, which caused job dissatisfaction and intention to leave the occupation (Young and Corsun 2010). It has been argued that the hard, sometimes unjustified, work conditions, in general, is a dominant reason why chefs leave the occupation (People 1st 2017; Karatepe 2012; Robinson and Beesley 2010; Pratten and O'Leary 2007; Deery 2008). Also, the increased and prolonged periods of work-related stress due to the reasons mentioned above have been related to withdrawal from the profession of chefs (Cooper and Payne 1991; Tongchaiprasit and

Ariyabuddhiphongs 2016). According to Locke (1995) the stress experienced in the kitchen, which is affected by job satisfaction, and which affects the individual's mood, is also connected with personal cognition as it creates strong memories in people's brains which negatively filter any new information about the job; hence they are often led to decide to leave the occupation. A newer explanation of chefs' attrition has been the increasing deskilling and standardisation of cooking in the commercial kitchen, which transforms the chef's work from a creative to a repetitive administrative job and loses its excitement (Robinson and Barron 2007; Robinson and Beesley 2010).

Although the scholarly community has researched turnover in hospitality, not enough has been said about why most chefs decide to stay in the career. Many hospitality employees (Raybould and Wilkins 2006) and the majority of chefs in particular (People 1st 2017) decide to stay in their occupation long-term, enduring the difficulties of their job, showing engagement and running the extra mile as if this was normal in this occupation. Perhaps they see particular meaning in their job which keeps them in the chef career. Holbeche and Springett (2005) argued that people who have found personal meaning in their work tend to persist and show resilience. Those who see that meaning matching the meaning of their occupation as showcased by the organisation they serve tend to stay long-term. Additionally, employees who realise a strong purpose in their work are internally driven to offer their full self (Pink 2009). Therefore, there must be a reasonable explanation for the retention of chefs, which convinces them to continue working in the commercial kitchen regardless of how hard the job is. It remains to see if this is more internally than externally driven or an equally important combination of the two.

The scholarly community has explained employee retention mostly through the theoretical frameworks of Job Embeddedness (JE) (Mitchell et al. 2001) and Occupational Embeddedness (OE) (Feldman 2002; Ng and Feldman 2007). In JE an employee is likely to remain in their job if they feel strong connections with the elements that surround the job (links), are attached to the environment and characteristics of the job (fit), and finally are stuck in the job to the extent that they don't want to lose the benefits they have used to experience in it (sacrifice). These three dimensions have proven adequate to predict someone's willingness to stay in the job, while the lack of them has been related to leaving the job. In OE employees stay in the

same occupation as and when they recognise stability and security in what they do, so they consider the job investable for their future. Both constructs are considered key to predicting employee retention.

Several studies about employment attitudes of chefs with uncategorised findings about their retention showed that there are also reasons of personal importance to each individual that matter in their intention to stay or leave the occupation (Cox and Bennett 2016; Van Dick et al. 2004; Walker 2001; Holbeche 1998). Further than the two frameworks of JE and OE, it has been argued that personality characteristics influence employees to remain in their occupational roles or leave (Zimmerman 2008). The Locus of Control (LOC) in particular has been related with employee retention and turnover by several scholars (Kang, Twigg, and Hertzman 2010; Allen, Moffit and Weeks 2005; Griffeth and Hom 1988). In the case of chefs' retention, not adequate consideration has been given to the personal reasons of chefs that influence their choice to stay in their occupation, and the idiosyncratic perspective of their decisions has not been explored adequately enough up to now. Issues deriving from their confidence that they can successfully undertake any task (Sluss, Ashforth and Gibson 2012) and that it is in their own hands to remain chefs (internal LOC) have not been explored in relation to JE and OE. Looking into those personal ways that chefs construe their reality in the commercial kitchen which advances and sustains their desire to stay in their careers, would explain their retention further.

### 1.2 Research Aim

As argued earlier, the shortage of chefs is the central problem hospitality has been facing for many years, especially in the present post–Covid19 era. The lack of adequate staff in the commercial kitchen in the UK has been commented on repeatedly by restaurant practitioners and specialists of the Food and Beverage (F&B) and the culinary industry, in general, have argued about possible solutions to tackle the problem (Bosetti and Washington-Ihieme 2019). That phenomenon which is taking an upward trajectory in the last couple of years, has hit the hospitality industry significantly. The present study aims to look deeper into why chefs remain in the occupation – who are still the majority of the role occupants – instead of looking elsewhere to other careers that are perhaps more profitable and less challenging. So, this

research aims to refine the understanding of chefs' retention in their occupation, which furthers the already known theories that predict their desire to stay in their jobs.

### 1.3 Research objectives

To reach the aim of the study and provide a deeper understanding of the retention of chefs, this research follows a particular thought process, which would attempt to reveal:

- the evolution of chefs' desire to stay, if this desire evolves through time,
- the priorities chefs put in showing resilience against the forces that could drive them out of their occupation,
- the extent and quality that personal and intrinsic drivers play a role in chefs' desire to remain in their occupation long term,
- the cognitive maps that chefs use to decide to stay, making the tacit knowledge of chefs concerning their retention explicit.

### 1.4 Rationale of the study

In many cases research projects begin with a personal drive of the researcher to explain situations to which they have got involved at their career and generated many queries out of admiration, curiosity, or necessity (Collis and Hussey 2003). This study idea began with the researcher's personal query about chefs' retention. Alongside his academic profile, he has been an experienced consultant for over 20 years, consulting and training hospitality managers, observing the work of chefs for many years, and admiring their job in the commercial kitchens. Seeing them leaving the career in masses in the last few years, as mentioned earlier, triggered his curiosity to explain this phenomenon by reversing the focus from their turnover to their retention.

Some elements of the job must be so captivating that make chefs stay. If these elements are understood more clearly than what is known today, they may offer solutions to keep them in the occupation longer and tackle the current shortage of chefs in the country and the industry

in general. Emphasising retention instead of turnover offers a more positive and active platform to discuss the sustainability of chefs in hospitality. That has not been explored in the literature of hospitality adequately up to now and has raised the interest of a few other scholars recently (Arici et al. 2023; Yam 2018). Especially in the present working environment in which recurring lockdowns have troubled the hospitality industry significantly and chefs – similarly to many other hospitality occupational roles – could easily find reasons to change careers, focusing on the ones who stayed despite the adversaries of the era would give stronger evidence for what matters the most to them and keeps them in the occupation.

Also, from a practical point of view, the idiosyncratic nature of chefs' retention decisions recognises the need to distinguish intrinsic from extrinsic drivers to stay in the commercial kitchen. That distinction would help the industry in two directions: firstly, refine the selection criteria of chefs and filter out the ones who are needed to keep the industry running from the ones who are investable to contribute to the industry development; secondly, assist hospitality organisations in managing chefs by responding to their personal needs and priorities in order to sustain their business and increase their profits. Therefore, the rationale of the study, as explained above, is to satisfy the personal curiosity of the researcher, to cover the inadequate literature on chefs' retention and finally seek for ways to practically answer and tackle the problem of shortage of chefs in kitchens.

### 1.5 Introduction to methodology

Based on the rationale described earlier and responding to the research aims and objectives, this study is tasked to refine the existing understanding of why chefs remain in their occupation, by looking into the thinking process they employ to sustain their desire to keep working and managing commercial kitchens. That quest poses the need to consider the ways that chefs construe their reality in their workplace so that they develop their resilience to the hard-working conditions of the job. Therefore, Personal Construct Theory (PCT) and the Repertory Grids Technique (RGT) are used in the study to reveal the personal constructs that chefs create to help them articulate the meaning they give to their experience of being chefs.

This research tool is not new (Kelly 1955) in the fields of management, organisational psychology, organisational behaviour or marketing (Fransella, Jones and Watson 1988), but has been underutilised in the field of hospitality. It is a qualitative research method based on individual interviews and followed by a detailed analysis of the answers, characterised by strong emphasis on the participants' reflexivity. It helps the study reach the core drivers that govern chefs' retention and show the cognitive pathways that chefs follow to stay in the occupation long term. It also shows the source of those drivers and prioritises them based on their meaning to chefs' decisions to stay. RGT has not gained enough attention from the scholarly community in culinary studies and is one of the few in the field and the first to understand chefs' retention.

**1.6 Structure of the study**

The study begins with the presentation of the current state of shortage of chefs in the UK and the reasons for its recent increase. That situation which the restaurant industry suffers from shaped the research aims and objectives towards a deeper understanding of chefs' retention in the chef occupation despite the difficulties of the job. These are outlined and pave the way to an overview of the commercial kitchen environment in which chefs are asked to work. That is considered essential to understanding the challenging conditions under which they execute their job and the reactions expressed by them and the people around them, the main stakeholders. Then, studying the reasons that chefs stay on the job, the existing theoretical frameworks of JE and OE are reviewed concerning the field of hospitality and restaurants. Finally, that review evaluates how those frameworks of employee retention have been applied to the chef industry. Similarly, the meaning of internal LOC is reviewed, too, aiming to explore its liaison with the above frameworks and its interrelation with chefs' retention. The above will be the foundation of the study's conceptual framework of chefs' retention on which to base the following research.

The next stage explains the study's methodological approach to give credible answers to the research questions. The ontological and epistemological approach of the research, which follows, justifies the research methodology. Next, the PCT, adopted in the study, with the subsequent RGT are described and explained in detail. Examples of all phases of the research technique are given to make understanding its use more comprehensive. Finally, all steps of

the adopted research strategy are described and justified to show the followed rigorous research approach.

Findings are presented and analysed in gradual logical steps before reaching the answers to the research questions. They begin with the research participants' immediate answers to why they desire to remain in the chef career and why they do not leave. Next, chefs' personal constructs of their retention follow; they are thoroughly interpreted via the cluster analysis process and grouped into categories of shared meaning (content analysis). Finally, a separate section is included in the analysis of findings (laddering-up) to ensure the validity of the previous stages.

The research results are then discussed and interpreted based on the existing knowledge about chefs' retention as presented in the literature review. That discussion leads to a final mapping of the chefs' desire to stay in the commercial kitchen, highlighting the role of intrinsic and extrinsic drivers of retention that specifically apply to chefs' retention. That cognitive mapping refines understanding what the scholarly community knows about and the hospitality practice adopted in retaining chefs.

The study concludes with the final statements, which offer insights to academia and the industry to help hospitality stakeholders (academics and practitioners) tackle the issue of the shortage of chefs by interpreting the research findings on their retention.

# Chapter 2. Understanding chefs and their work environment

## 2.1 Introduction

In the last two decades, chefs' occupation has increasingly attracted scholarly attention, which reflects the growing public interest in the captivating world of the commercial kitchens. This attention has tended to focus on the difficult work conditions experienced by chefs to explain the numbers leaving the occupation. However, there has been less attention paid to retention issues, especially head chefs' perspectives on work: driven by how they see them fit in their aspirations, financial rewards, or as a response to an unexplained calling (Allen and Iomaire 2016). To explore the theoretical and conceptual underpinning of this study to understand and argue about the drivers that keep chefs in the job, this literature review is divided into several sections spread across two chapters: the present one concerning the identity of chefs and the culture of their workplace, and the next one, which reviews the existing knowledge about chefs' job retention. These two chapters are logically connected, interrelated, and draw a theoretical perspective of the research.

This chapter reviews the identity of chefs and the culture of the chef's occupation including competencies, qualifications, personal and occupational features and other requirements needed to make someone fit in this career. Following from that, the chapter critically scans the literature that describes the environment and culture of the commercial kitchen in which chefs operate, plus the work conditions that make the job challenging to work in and enjoyable to investigate.

In attempting to understand the reality of the particular occupational environment in which chefs operate and to give a round view of the field, academic and non-academic literature are reviewed. The analysis of the literature questions the high rates of turnover that are recorded in the commercial kitchen. Chefs who leave the commercial kitchen often move to other occupations unrelated to the culinary field. However, the majority of chefs do not leave but stay. Therefore, the chapter also questions why – given the challenging conditions experienced in their work environment – the majority of chefs do not leave the occupation.

## 2.2 Who is a chef?

'Chef' is an occupational title earned by the role occupants after demonstrating a set of capabilities and skills on the job that fits the description of the occupation. This is not always a clear exercise, though. The difficulty of deciding who earns this title resides in the fact that someone who manages a commercial kitchen can be named 'chef' by:

(a) simply having significant practical experience in commercial cooking, which they gained from the tradition of their ancestors, observation of their close relatives, or through apprenticeships shadowing experienced cooks for years;

(b) getting a vocational accreditation in culinary studies completed in a vocational school or college of further education which would also require some experience in a commercial kitchen;

(c) studying for a degree in culinary practice and management at a university level, where they would not only receive specific knowledge on food technology and creations but also management skills on how to run a kitchen and manage the 'kitchen brigade'.

The above alternatives have generally been agreed upon by most of the scholars who have investigated the chef's career (Allen and Iomaire 2016; Zopiatis 2010; Pratten 2003). Although all three options are met in the employment arena, there is some evidence from the research of Allen and Iomaire (2016) in the Republic of Ireland (35% more educated chefs in the last decade) and of Zopiatis (2010) in Cyprus for an upward trend of young chefs with higher education degrees. From the data recorded so far, this is more evident in European countries (Allen and Iomare 2016; Zopiatis 2010) and North America (Kang et al. 2010), but not in Australia (Raybould and Wilkins 2005). A requirement of the degree would also have to include some practical experience in a commercial kitchen, as Zopiatis (2010) argues, similarly to the other two categories, to minimise the perceived – but not necessarily actual – distance between what he calls 'industry' (internships) and 'academia'. In practice, as the Craft Guild of Chefs (2019) states, no significant distinction between the three categories of starting points mentioned above seems to exist among chefs. Recognition and respect for each other derive from characteristics of chefs other than their level of education, which are discussed below, with more emphasis placed on individual experience and ultimate performance.

Although there is a general agreement on the role description of a chef and what the job entails, chefs are approached from slightly distinctive perspectives in different countries. In Australia, chefs are defined very clearly; they become professionals when they turn into "commercial chefs" (Australian Institute of Technical Chefs 2018). In the Handbook of the Technical Chef, a Professional Chef is described as someone who combines two distinct attributes that blend to embody a genuine professional (Australian Institute of Technical Chefs 2018:7):

- "…extensive technical training in commercial cookery, broad experience in a commercial kitchen, under the supervision of a commercial chef, and with extensive commercial culinary experience."
- "…their philosophical view of their career, fitness in character, and an understanding of an ethical and moral responsibilities required of a professional cook and a passionate consciousness of the preparation and presentation of food"

According to the definition above, they need to combine hard and soft skills to be considered professional chefs. The two characteristics are not separated anywhere in the Handbook of the Technical Chef, illustrating a holistic view of the profession.

Technical Chef in Australia is a high recognition of someone's competence; they are defined as "a person who is educated and technically trained in commercial cookery, consolidated with practical commercial kitchen experiences and who compiles in practice with agreed professional standards and Codes of Practice" (ibid: 7).

The American O*net Center (2020), the occupational database of the US Department of Labour which analyses all job titles available in the world, puts a very technical emphasis on the definition of the chef's job. It outlines the main technical tasks of the role occupant in the commercial kitchen, coupled with some managerial skills of planning, pricing, ordering supplies and record keeping. It considers the occupation particularly promising in the future and is expected to grow rapidly ('Bright Outlook'). From the detailed analysis of tasks, skills, abilities, interests, work activities, work context, and work values of the occupational title that

O*net outlines, it is clear that chefs have a very versatile and highly challenging role. The top three values attributed to chefs are Independence, Recognition and Achievement. The needs related to those values, according to O*net, are firstly creativity, responsibility and autonomy; secondly, advancement, authority and social status and thirdly, ability utilisation. Therefore, what is highly valued in chefs is their opportunity to create willingly, making them more expressive and recognised for their achievements.

In the UK, chefs are not defined as clearly as in Australia, but similarly to the US. The UK government's service of national careers defines the occupation very broadly: "Head chefs oversee restaurants' staff, food and budgets" (National Careers 2020). For more detailed information, it directs visitors to the 'Hospitality Guild' which divides the occupation into three levels: chefs, senior chefs, and head chefs, and classifies them according to the level of management responsibilities they have over the kitchen brigade (Hospitality Guild 2020). Most other UK professional bodies of the industry define the chef based on a good experience in the commercial kitchen (The British Culinary Federation 2017; Craft Guild of Chefs 2019; The Cooks Company 2019). Therefore, experience is considered the key to belonging to the occupational community of chefs rather than official technical accreditations.

The job title of 'chef' sometimes appears as a profession, while sometimes it does not. Professional identity is a complex construct and difficult to define accurately. However, two perspectives have to be used for a complete understanding: a view of professional identity as a cognitive construct and a social construct (Kasperiuniene and Zydziunaite 2019). More specifically, chefs have to be looked at from both perspectives and ensure that:

(a) a certain degree of technical standards are met (cognitive construct); therefore, the individual behaves with professionalism, and
(b) adaptation to what is socially expected of them (social construct) is achieved.

In order to be considered a profession, both perspectives should exist in the chef's role. Possibly, the fact that literature distinguishes chefs the professionals and the 'domestic' or 'amateurs' (Gunders 2008; Bonner 2005) is founded on the partial consideration of the definition of chefs, as described previously, sometimes emphasising the uniformed technical knowledge in the culinary art and sometimes the recognisable occupational attitude of the

representative chef in the general population's mind. In the first instance, chefs should have the appropriate accredited education to ensure they possess the required skills to do the job (cognitive perspective). In the second instance, they should present an image and work behaviour expected of them by their peers, the culinary community, and the general audience (social perspective). Leeds-Hurwitz (2009) has argued that the socially defined construction of professional identity is of its most important elements but does not act alone. Chefs' identity is a complex phenomenon which, as the following paragraphs show, requires a deeper understanding of the individual and occupational culture of chefs to picture it.

In his research on chef's identity, Cooper (2012) has claimed that the kitchen environment and culture form chefs' identity as they dramatically influence who chefs feel they are and ultimately shape who they become. The culture of the professional kitchen has been vividly illustrated by chefs' autobiographies, the strongest of them being Bourdain's (2000) "Kitchen Confidential". In his novel, the chef's world is described as highly masculine, harsh, and maybe the last frontier of the meritocracy because the outcome judges everyone – you can't fake what you eat in the end. Therefore, from a pragmatic point of view, being male or female, young or old, experienced or inexperienced, the different occupational conditions of chefs depending on the accreditations and public recognition they earn, the quality of experience they offer to their customers, the number of customers they serve, the size of the kitchen brigade they run and the range of prices they give to their food creations, mean little compared to the final product they produce (Cooper 2012). The culture of the commercial kitchen has been named highly hierarchical, strict, with military compliance, and ethos of extreme behaviours (Bourdain 2000), shelter for the 'under-achievers' (White 1990) and the 'misfits' (Bourdain 2010). Many chefs initially entered the occupation as dishwashers and later as cooks without any proper managerial training which partly explains the coercive behaviours recorded in the kitchen (Cooper 2012). However, there is clear teamwork among chefs which governs every action and outcome in the chef's occupation. As Gill (1997) argues, if they fail, they fail together, that's why they are tough at work.

Also, chefs get distinct characteristics from the type of kitchen they work in: fine dining, casual/ upper casual dining, chain restaurants, hotel restaurants or other ad hoc

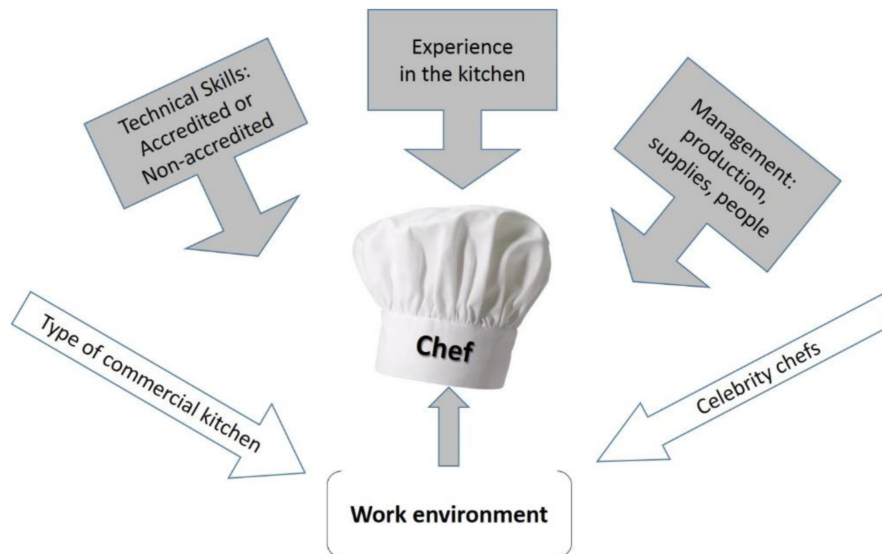
establishments (e.g. private events, catering, and institutional kitchen) as the culture in each of those kitchen categories differs, sometimes significantly. As Hendley (2017) argues, chefs' work complexity is perceived differently when they are Michelin-starred in a restaurant or a hotel or work as private chefs; their passion for food remains the same, but the conditions and requirements to perform alter significantly.

The above key characteristics of the kitchen's culture influence chef's identity (Cooper 2012) and are reviewed in more detail in the next section of the chapter. Also, the chefs' knowledge of food and cooking as well as kitchen management education add to how they perceive themselves in their occupation. A chef can get the title in the commercial kitchen either by having an adequate educational background or not; however, the definitions of chefs declare that they need to adhere to the rules of the kitchen and be able to manage food preparation and people. Suppose the official qualifications of chefs are not perceived as exclusive to the ones who call themselves professionals. In that case, the work and social environment of the commercial kitchen must be so influential that it defines chefs' attitudes and behaviours at work.

A category on its own in the chefs' identity discourse is the so-called 'celebrity chefs', who combine not only exceptionally good cooking abilities founded on long successful careers as chefs, awards earned, and recognition gained by their peers, but also competencies usually met in the image-making industry (films, advertising, PR, etc.). Public exposure then transforms a chef's image from a master of a kind among other masters, where they get limited presence by representatives of their occupational group, to a strong magnet which hunts for the approval of the masses in a much wider audience (Jenkins 2004). Celebrity chefs then set a distinct occupational culture and are no longer the technical experts alone; they realise the impact they have on their national or international audience and adapt their messages to their recipients' needs (Zopiatis and Melanthiou 2019; Henderson 2011) emphasising their authentic selves (Neuman, Gottzén and Fjellström 2019), on being representatives of local communities but for a global audience (Tominc 2014); on how sound 'teachers' they are (Lane and Fisher 2014); on their excessive masculinity (Steno and Friche 2015) or a versatile 'persona' like a homebody, home stylist, pin-up, chef-artisan, maverick, gastrosexual, and self-made man (Johnston, Rodney and Chong 2014).

Celebrity chefs have helped raise the profile of the chef's career in the commercial kitchen and, consequently, attract more people to the occupation (Giousmpasoglou, Brown, Cooper 2020). They have also offered the community of professional culinary experts an invaluable gift: they have become their true voice to a much wider audience, putting their long-neglected or undermined occupation (Hennessy 2000) on the map of the respected by the public, talented, challenging, influential occupations of the world. However, although they have helped advance the commercial kitchen's status, they are not enough to turn a vocational job into a profession alone. The distinction between chefs and other professions seems to lie in the nature of chef's knowledge (anyone without accreditation of culinary studies but with natural charisma, technical skills and experience in the kitchen could potentially become a chef) (Trubek 2000). Their influence on the kitchen environment and the chefs' identity is also re-approached in the following paragraphs.

The various approaches to the chefs' definitions in this section converge on the following points, as graphically described in figure 1. This figure is a realistic and inclusive picture of who chefs are today and is a guide for this study. A chef is a skilful, highly technical and creative worker who also has management responsibilities in the commercial kitchen, managing the production of food, supplies and human resources. Becoming a chef is an occupational title earned after having spent some years working in the commercial kitchen and developed the skills mentioned above; the number of years is not as important as the quality of this experience. The personal skill in food creation and the level of experience of a chef are the key elements that give them recognition in the occupational field, not the level of education that chefs have before entering the job; however, education is gradually becoming more respected in the field. Becoming known to the public is not an ultimate goal for chefs, however, chefs who have become widely known to the public have influenced the work environment of the occupation and also affected the direction of chefs' identity in the future.




*(Figure 1 Chef's definition)*

**2.3 Perspectives of self-perception of chefs**

Chefs, as in any occupation, do not live in a vacuum; they live and perform among peers and others who do not necessarily have complete technical knowledge of their labour. The interaction with all these stakeholders can be a rewarding experience, but sometimes can be very stressful, affecting their work and life behaviour. Understanding their role as chefs takes in consideration their personal beliefs or expectations in relation to their peers (the ones who represent the occupation) and at the same time the beliefs or expectations of others (the general public who express an opinion about their occupation) who may put pressure on them to fit in the picture drawn for them. This section reviews the two sources mentioned above which are considered pivotal for the formation of chefs' understanding of their occupational role: the individual and the societal perspective.

***2.3.1 Individual perspective***

Studies of chefs have shown that there are two interchangeable influences on how they understand who they are in their occupational role and form their occupational identity: internal ones (peers and others who belong in the community of chefs) and external ones (others who are deemed as non-chefs) (Jenkins 2004).

Firstly, the internal influence derived from other chefs is a reassurance that a chef belongs to the occupational community they look up to as equal to other members of that occupational group (Van Maanen and Barley 1984). Therefore, chefs develop intrinsic values formed by their interaction with other members of the specific occupational culture of the commercial kitchen that gives them the right to and confidence they need to behave as chefs and be accepted by other group members (Lee-Ross 2002). This is a socialisation process which helps the self-categorisation of chefs. It does not mean that being a member of a cohesive group, they lose their ability to perform uniquely and define themselves as specialists who distinguish from the rest. Self-categorisation is a process of constant meaning-making between the 'I' and the 'we' (Reynolds et al. 2010); therefore, dynamic interactionism brings out adaptive work attitudes and behaviours. This interactionism has been elaborated further by Martela and Pessi (2018). According to them, meaningful work is indeed an intrinsic process divided into two dimensions: (a) a 'broader purpose' which goes beyond the interests of the individual, and (b) 'self-realisation', which serves the needs of autonomy, authenticity and self-expression at work. This is how a role occupant immersed into the occupational culture of their career domain, like a chef, can effectively balance between the 'I' and the 'we'. Depending on the situation, chefs can be individually identified as professionals who operate in the kitchen in unique ways, showing high levels of professionalism. In contrast, in situations that require participants to fit in the norm clearly, they can perform as pure members of the occupational community they belong to.

This adaptation process is not passive but active; not static but dynamic. Chefs' identity is not relational only (Lepisto, Crosina, Pratt 2015). It results from a simultaneous and continuous interplay between the individual's desired work self and others' work selves in the same identity workspace (Bertolotti, Tagliaventi, Doci 2021). Therefore, chefs co-create their identity through time based on their understanding of their career's ecosystem (Baruch 2015) and, consequently, their intention to sustain that ecosystem by expressing their desires and others' representations within the available identity workspaces. This dynamic interaction allowed chefs to transform their workspaces flexibly during the recent pandemic when there was a request by the public for cooked food but with restaurants closed for long periods. Chefs' desire to sustain their identity, coupled with the collective behaviour of the community of chefs, led many of them to transform their workspace and deliver their food creations to

their customers (not guests anymore) either as takeaway restaurants or as charity work for the NHS, the homeless and the disabled (Parveen 2020) without losing their identity of chefs. That is good evidence of the survival instinct actively expressed by chefs in a competitive environment where individuals see their personal careers in relation to their clients' demands and the general public's impressions (Elbasha and Baruch 2022) as transformed and reshaped in time. So, actors and acting spaces interacted and sustained or transformed work identities. Bertolli et al. (2021) recently enriched the literature on identity workspaces by arguing that they, together with all their features and organisational processes, may be co-constructed as the people who act in those workspaces progress towards their desired work selves.

The example of how quickly and effectively chefs transformed their service during the pandemic into something adapted to the changing living conditions of the public indicates chefs' active involvement in designing their careers and adapting them as and when necessary. Chefs, in this instance, showed critical characteristics of a protean career (Hall 2004) proving that they are prompt to learn from the environment they work in and dare to change and adapt, but without sacrificing their career identity. Hall (2004) identified two features in protean careers: identity (self-awareness of who they are in the occupation they serve) and adaptability (by constant learning to learn) both of which are met in the chefs' attitudes described above.

A significant influence on the individual identity of chefs comes from celebrity chefs. As described earlier, they have tried to give a universal professional character to the occupation and, to some extent, achieved it through the wide use of the media (Giousmpasoglou, Brown and Cooper 2020). However, the game changer has been their distinctive personality on the screen and the commodity they have become because of their charismatic presentation as individuals (Henderson 2011). So, in their case, the professionalisation of chefs is limited to some individuals' ability to capture their audience's attention, not their technical skills or the taste and quality of their creations. After all, someone can only imagine the smell and taste of a dish depending on how convincingly the message has been served to them. Thus, celebrity chefs are not judged by the public by their actual performance in the kitchen but by their performance in the media; so the domain for considering them as professionals has

moved from the kitchen to the media. Admittedly, their exposure to the media has influenced both

(a) the individual aspirations of other chefs, seeking to gain publicity and recognition (Giousmpasoglou, Brown, Cooper 2020; Ng and Feldman 2014) and looking for authenticity to become self-defined celebrities (Tolson 2001) and
(b) the expectations of other stakeholders of the commercial kitchen who form the ecosystem of the chef's career, asking for faultless performance and exemplar dishes by chefs, as celebrity chefs who usually are highly esteemed in modern societies (Driessens 2013) would normally do.

The stakeholders of the commercial kitchen mentioned above form a more generic image of the occupation, which is reflected in the dominant identity of chefs. Following Trice's (1993) framework of occupational cultures, in which people's beliefs and behaviours tightly interact with the prevailing ideologies of their occupations, Cooper, Giousmpasoglou and Marinakou (2017) claim that the personal identity of chefs is entangled and kneaded with the occupational culture in which they live. That occupational culture does not only grow inside the boundaries of the chef's occupation but also inside and amongst the public, who have an opinion about how they want chefs to be. This is the 'outside world' of the chefs which also plays a significant role in shaping their identity (Kang et al. 2010; Palmer et al. 2010). The size of the general public with interest in the occupation of chefs is growing, making the effect it has on the identity that chefs believe they have or should have to respond to what their audience prefers even stronger.

### *2.3.2. Societal perspective*

The chefs' career ecosystem consists of chefs and non-chefs and their interaction with non-human elements (Baruch 2015). The society of the non-chefs includes customers (guests), journalists, food enthusiasts, assessment and accreditation organisations (for istance, Michelin-star, AGFG Chef Hat), and the public. In addition, as Bourdain (2000) described, an invisible influence on the occupational identity of chefs is the history – or myths – they have inherited from stories that draw a picture of chefs as being unique, creative, innovative, exquisite and admirable. That legacy that they carry along with their entitlement as chefs

creates an occupational culture which, if they want to be members of, they would have to develop those behaviours to make them fit in (Bloisi and Hoel 2008).

The occupational culture they try to fit in can be robust and, in fact, stronger than the organisational culture they work in (Barth 1969; Gomez-Mejia 1983). Gomez-Mejia's (1983) international study among 20 countries echoed the effect of the social processing of information model (Salancik and Pfeffer 1979) and found that occupational environments shape attitudes and values because they: "a) provide cues that individuals use to construct and interpret events; b) provide information about what a person's attitudes and opinions should be; c) provide direct construction of meaning through guides to socially acceptable beliefs, attitudes and acceptable reasons for actions; d) allow individuals to use their day-to-day behaviour to 'enact' or construct reality by cognitively evaluating the dimensions of their jobs or task environment" (Gomez-Mejia 1983: 707). Therefore, individuals perceive their occupational roles as a response to the societal framework they are part of, hence building attitudes and values appropriate to their occupational culture. The sharing of common values in the commercial kitchen connects occupational members and, in practice, allows chefs – even those unknown to each other who come from different restaurants – to work together in the same kitchen reasonably quickly. This feature of the commercial kitchen is similar to the happenings in a jazz band, where musicians accidentally meet together in the streets and start playing music as a group for the first time. Music players would enter the musical rhythm and tone of each other quite quickly because they all share an occupational culture of the jazz player, which is consisted of specific principles and ensuing behaviours that they are all aware of (Dennis 2015; Lewin 1998). Other factors of the location where the action takes place (identity workspace) – the synthesis of the team, the instruments involved, and the audience numbers- are of little importance to the adaptation of the skilful professional.

In both examples of the chefs and the jazz players, there is a standard connector that holds them together without prior preparation: artistic improvisation (Prouty 2013). The characteristics of artistic improvisation are following and breaking norms in synchronisation, composing an ad hoc new form of reality, regardless of risking the approval of the audience, assessors or participants (Deutsch 2018). Therefore, chefs' ability to understand, interpret, adapt and coordinate with each other without particular difficulties make high turnover rates

and frequent mobility in their occupational field easy, as the fear of struggling to settle in another similar workspace weakens. That has been explained by network analysis borrowed from Physics (Yuan 2019). According to that, the more relations an employee has with members of an organisation's core, the more likely they are to remain in that organisation. On the other hand, the fewer relations they have with the organisation's core but more with elements of their work that sit outside of the core, hence close to the organisation's periphery, the more likely they are to leave. In the case of chefs, the fact that they feel familiar with the occupational culture of the commercial kitchen and concentrate on applying the technical aspects of artistic improvisation may allow them to stay close to the periphery of their organisations and not develop strong networks with the core members. That is claimed (Vardaman, et al. 2015) as a good indicator of intention to leave their restaurant because they do not have anything to lose from going to another one of the same occupational cultures. This characteristic is endemic in the chef's occupational practice, and chefs' turnover seems to be an integral element of their occupational culture.

Following the above argument, the particular cooking practice in the commercial kitchen is a powerful medium that facilitates the quick adaptation of chefs to almost any kitchen setting (Cohen 1985). In addition, knowing the technical standards of the work is considered necessary as it ensures safety in the kitchen. However, some claim that creativity holds chefs together, hence being a connector that keeps them in the occupation, too (Tongchaiprasit and Ariyabuddhiphongs 2016; Robinson and Beesley 2010). The kitchen environment, in particular, as described earlier, builds a recognisable exclusive foundation that anyone who claims the role of the chef has to accept and operate in. Palmer, Cooper and Burns (2010) state that this characteristic of the close-knit occupational culture of chefs has been claimed to be very strong. The kind of support they see, even from former members of their kitchen brigades in times of crisis, is similar to what might be encountered in sports, musical or theatrical acts (ibid: 28-29). Consequently, chefs have a powerful sense of belonging in their domain, which clearly defines who they are, often both in their personal and career identities. Anything that sits in between that identity could shake them up considerably and raise personal ontological queries (who am I? where do I belong?) hence hitches with their social interactions, especially when they feel their identity is being criticised by outsiders (Bradley, Sparks, Weber 2015).

Very often, the public's opinion holds them accountable for the expected behaviours of chefs. Losing face in front of peers or customers by receiving negative evaluations of their work has proved very stressful (Hobfoll 1989). It leads chefs to anger and lack of self-efficacy, damage their personal and social relations with people they are acquainted with and creates thoughts of leaving the profession and the industry altogether (Bradley, Sparks, Weber 2016). They lose their job resources that could maintain their resilience against job demands and could lead to burnout which individuals would intuitively try to avoid (Bakker and Demerouti 2007). The ultimate effect of burnout is a lack of self-efficacy. Eventually, people are driven out of their occupations, believing they cannot sustain their roles (Maslach 1982). Therefore, the ties between chefs and the social forces they get from their external environment are pivotal, as the negative interrelation between them could drive the first party out of their occupation.

The arguments raised in the previous paragraphs of this section show many arguments about how chefs perceive themselves, their identity and identification with their occupation. However, their relationship with chefs' retention is unclear. This is because specific aspects of their identity and cognitive processes that lead those chefs who identify as representatives of the chef occupation to remain in their job and make a long career as chefs, are still blared or partially explained.

## 2.4. The Culture and Environment of chefs: a highly stressful occupational setting in challenging glamour

Operations, work processes and daily happenings in the commercial kitchen have recently attracted the attention of the scholar community. This section reviews the challenging and complex conditions under which chefs works. Recent research in the work environment of chefs revolves around the challenging working conditions they experience and the negative effects these have on their life. However, there is also evidence of other features of the job which paint a picture of chefs with brighter colours, illustrating a more positive side of their occupational role.

The media has presented a positive side of the world of chefs in the last decade or so. TV shows have strongly encouraged that positive feel through the presentation of a glamourous job environment, that many admire for the mesmerising food creations virtually served via the screen by chefs, for the fantastic skills and abilities that chefs possess and make wonders that are rarely found in others, for the acclaimed awards they receive because of the unparalleled dexterity they put on their dishes. For example, Heston Blumental's revolutionary work on the science of molecules in food creations and its application in pairing different ingredients in a dish gave him the OBE award by her Majesty the Queen (Dinner by Heston Blumenthal 2022) and illustrated a fascinating new world in cooking. Similarly, Quique Dacosta's recent Gold Medal for Merit in the Fine Arts 2022 for his local creations and artistic presentations of local Spanish seafood and rice (Dacosta 2022) has given a different perspective of cooking to food enthusiasts. Most of the above applies to the 'haute cuisine, the elite of the commercial culinary domain, which is met in fine dining (Burrow, Smith, Yiakinthou 2015). The picture projected to the general public is full of light, part of the star system, actors living luxurious lives, having 'friends' and recognition by famous figures from the entertainment industry, politics, business and other fields; this is the world of celebrities.

Celebrity chefs who have occupied significant parts of food shows ('Kitchen's Hell'; 'Master Chef'; 'Ramsey's Kitchen nightmares'; 'Jamie's 15-minute meals', to name a few) foster this positive image, making an impact on the public. With their broad exposure to their audience, they promote a professional profile that many people would envy, let alone those with a natural talent in cooking, who would easily be inspired and driven by the success of their chef role models (Giousmpasoglou, Brown, Cooper 2020).

However, it has been argued by many that this positive image is unrealistic and false (Giousmpasoglou, Brown, Cooper 2020; Mentinis 2017; Cooper 2012). That should not, however, be claimed that it is negatively intentional. That would have been the case if celebrity chefs of a staged reality and chefs of the real world were compared on the same premises. That is not true, however. Celebrity chefs have developed and invested in new skills (e.g. acting) that match the needs of the media, which are very different from those that chefs of the real world deploy at the restaurant serving real customers (Giousmpasoglou, Brown, Cooper 2020). Maybe that is why Cooper (2012) claims that many chefs try to show little

association with the behaviours and achievements of celebrity chefs. No one, though, should deny the influence of celebrity chefs on young cooks; they have inspired them, attracted them to the occupation, showed them alternative cooking techniques and encouraged a continuous inquiry into the recipes they know so that they steadily improve. Celebrity chefs in TV shows have given the impression that the chefs' life is paved with glamour, charm and wealth (Henderson 2011) sometimes heroism (Achatz and Kokonas 2012), which affects how young aspiring chefs think about their future occupational distinctiveness (Zopiatis and Melanthiou 2019; Lane and Fisher 2015). The dominant characteristic they portray is the emphasis on the artistic perspective of the job and the skills associated with being an artist (Mentinis 2017: 137). Those skills they demonstrate in their shows have made them role models in the eyes of many aspiring chefs who wish to follow a similar career path of recognition and exposure to the public. Nevertheless, that is a 'romanticised' view of reality, far from reality (Mentinis 2017).

The commercial kitchen is a field with strong dynamics among all kitchen actors. The chef has a central role among these players. As we have seen, Chefs are viewed as highly skilled specialists who combine a comprehensive set of competencies to respond to their demanding job. If they strive for a career in the field, chefs need to be knowledgeable, clean, perfectionists, commercially savvy, artists, managers, leaders, and focus on the right palette of taste (Cooper, Giousmpasoglou, Marinakou 2017; Allen and Iomaire 2017; Pratten 2003). Chefs are both scientists and artists (Zopiatis 2010). Their work is characterised by precision, standards and quality so that their final product is consistently safe and healthy for their customers. Chefs must follow detailed official guidelines religiously; violation of those rules may end up with costly penalties for the organisation and the individual chefs as described in the Food Safety Act 1990 and the new amendments on food allergens. The rules that chefs must abide by are extensive and very detailed (see 'General Food Law' in Food Safety Agency 2018), preventing fatal consequences. In order to meet those rules, chefs have to continuously monitor the performance of their cooks and their 'kitchen brigade' so that they apply standards which guarantee predictable, safe food for all.

The conditions in which chefs work in the commercial kitchen and the respective occupational culture they shape have been extensively analysed, especially during the last decade. Work

in confined spaces, under continuous heat, and in some places very high temperatures, fast-paced work for long hours, unsociable shifts, and strict regulations of food safety (Cooper, Giousmpasoglou, Marinakou 2017; Ariza-Montes et al. 2017; Lewis 2018; Rayner 2017) compose the physical setting of their work. That is also coupled with challenging psychological conditions that exist in the kitchen, which cause excessive emotional labour by chefs (Jung and Yoon 2014): banter and bullying, aggressiveness, swearing, alcohol and drug abuse, sexual harassment, high employee turnover, exhaustion, excessive stress and burn-out (Giousmpasoglou, Marinakou, Cooper 2018; Alexander, MacLaren, O'Gorman and Taheri 2012; Palmer, Cooper, Burns 2010; Bloisi and Hoel 2008; Haas 2005). This demanding role has been evidenced that it adds much stress to professional chefs, consequently producing negative outcomes for their careers and personal lives (Giousmpasoglou, Brown, Cooper 2018; Cooper, Giousmpasoglou, Marinakou 2017; Murray-Gibbons and Gibbons 2007). To highlight the unanimous opinion that being a chef is stressful, it has also been claimed by both academics (psychiatric assessment of 1000 young workers conducted by King's College London (cited in Kühn 2007)) and practitioners or food critics (Rayner 2017) that chefs are listed in the topmost stressful occupations in the world.

As if the existing challenges of the kitchen environment were not enough for chefs and their kitchen brigades, some restaurants have added additional pressure on them by applying an "open kitchen" design in their facilities (Palmer, Cooper and Burns 2010). This layout of the dining room, being next to the kitchen where food preparation is visible by customers, is meant to break the barriers between the kitchen brigade and the people who dine. Therefore, chefs and their teams are constantly the subjects of observation, commentary and judgment by both significant and insignificant others who quietly expect them to behave in definite ways – perhaps those ways that 'good' chefs should follow in the kitchen as they have watched them in the media.

In social behaviourism, the fact that significant and insignificant others make those quiet requests makes them 'generalised others'. According to Mead (1967:72), they have a big effect on individuals who are the object of their observation because "the attitude of the generalised other is the attitude of the whole community" and it reflects the collective wish of the many. When this wish is harsh and judgmental, chefs may feel additional pressure in

addition to the pressure they face from the technical challenges of their job (Robinson 2008). Exposed to criticism by others and often questioned about their technical ability is a stressful feeling, so strong that it partly shapes their occupational identity (Jenkins 2004). Being judged about their labour and cooking skill is added to the already challenging nature of their work that requires chefs to be knowledgeable specialists, managers, team leaders, excellent in interpersonal communication, curious researchers, artists, hard workers, work unsociable hours, business owners or employees, all of the above simultaneously (Murray-Gibbons and Gibbons 2007; Zopiatis 2010; Giousmpasoglou, Brown, Cooper 2018). The above means that whoever enters this occupational arena would have to be strong and resilient to tolerate the challenges they would face in the job. Haas (2013) illustrated the incredible level of resilience which chefs need to show very vividly in his research in one of America's top restaurants. In this study, he records chef and owner Tony Maws' claims, that a chef must be so sensitive to consider a failure of a single dish as a total disaster, but immediately after that feeling, pull himself together and make the next dish perfect again, as if nothing had happened earlier. That high resilience keeps the flow in the kitchen and guarantees the consistent quality of the food.

Chefs would have to identify their roles cognitively, deriving from the technical qualities they possess, and as a social construct, deriving from the public's opinion shaped by external sources (e.g. social media) (Cooper 2012). This is particularly evident in management, organisational studies, hospitality and tourism as academic subjects (Kasperiuniene and Zydziunaite 2019). Therefore, individual chefs face the challenge of balancing between being who they are and, at the same time, being whom the public wants them to be.

Comparing the two opposing sides of the literature, the one presenting the negative side of chefs and the one which puts forward the positive one, the former seems to prevail. For example, a growing literature makes alarming reference to the problem of substance abuse in the community of chefs (Giousmpasoglou, Brown, Cooper 2018; Hight and Park 2018; Pidd, Roche, Kostandinov 2014). Others comment on the aggressive behaviours emerging in the commercial kitchen (Meloury and Signal 2014) or bullying between hierarchical layers of the kitchen, experienced and younger or male and female chefs, which sometimes dominate the kitchen's atmosphere (Bloisi and Hoel 2008). That atmosphere, coupled with the demanding

physical conditions of the job (work in confined space for long and unsociable hours, under the heat) and the heavy workload (fast and uninterrupted pace environment), burns chefs out, leads them to stress and depression, and either shows people the way out of the occupation or helps them toughen up and show resilience in order to integrate into the occupational culture (Young and Corsun 2010; Shani and Pizam2009; Harris and Giuffrre 2015).

The review of the literature that explores the work conditions of chefs illustrates a very intense working life. They have been characterised as 'harsh' defined by heat in a confined space, stress from a continuous fast pace and long and unsociable work hours (Giousmpasoglou, Brown and Cooper 2018). Johns and Menzel (1999) have added another dimension to chefs' working conditions: abuse. They divide it into physical (work accidents in the kitchen) and verbal (yelling and bullying) abuse, which occurs mainly in high-end restaurants quite aggressively (Kang, Twigg, and Hertzman 2010; Bloisi and Hoel 2008).

Therefore, the reasonable question raised is why would anyone like to make a long-lasting career in an occupation mainly characterised by hard work conditions? Are there mechanisms or easy remedies to facilitate a more relaxed or bearable work in the commercial kitchen?

A critical characteristic of the commercial kitchen working environment is teamwork. It is a common assertion by experts in the chef community that teamwork is one of the most essential elements of their success which eases the demanding work of the commercial kitchen (Hill 2010; Edger and Hughes 2016). Chefs admit that their job cannot be completed, let alone reach the expected levels of high performance, without excellent team collaboration (Palmer, Cooper, Burns 2010). Because of the pivotal role of teamwork in the commercial kitchen, chefs invest a lot in selecting the team members they would like to work with. Having control over the team that works with a chef is claimed to be a strategic tool for success in the industry and a necessary ingredient of the artistic nature of the chef's occupation (Justiniano, Valls-Pascola and Chacon 2018).

As in every tightly interdependent team, teamwork in the commercial kitchen requires high trust among team members (Erdem and Ozen 2003). Consequently, the need for trust is a vital feature of the environment of the chef's job. A chef works with teams of different

specialisations which are interdependent and at the same time inseparable. The more interrelated the teams, the more significant trust is for team performance (De Jong, Dirks and Gillespie 2016). Naturally, knowing the team members well, instilling trust among members and sharing everyday experiences from the past is a safe predictor of better team performance as trust levels reach greater heights (Salas et al 2014). Especially for the commercial kitchen, there is evidence that the longer the 'brigade de cuisine' stays together with little changes in their structure, the higher the profitability of their organisation gets (Edger and Hughes 2016). Therefore, a head chef has to lead as an architect and inspire their team, hoping to retain them in their kitchen brigade. Consequently, kitchen members would not want to leave because they would develop affective behaviours alongside the cognitive ones and connect with the team more (Erdem and Ozen 2003). That further connection could benefit those working in that environment and make them happier, not necessarily because they seek to advance their careers (Balasz 2002).

The pressure they feel from wanting to advance their career is another element of chefs' occupational environment that stands out, which often leads to personal life sacrifices (Giousmpasoglou, Brown and Cooper 2018; Harris and Giuffre 2010). Successful chefs who have received the appreciation of significant others and probably gained awards for their skills and performance face the challenge of maintaining their high reputation and career position. As this can be a very competitive task, many professional chefs who excel in their work sacrifice their personal lives for their occupational ones (Ariza-Montes, Arjona-Fuentes, Han and Law 2018). For example, Harris and Giuffre (2010) argue that family crises are common among chefs. In their study, they looked at the status of female chefs in commercial kitchens. They found that although harassment and bullying in a male-dominated occupation are similar to other occupations, keeping a healthy work-life balance in a very hard-to-cope work environment for chefs takes stress to higher levels. Similarly, Giousmpasoglou, Brown and Cooper (2018) found that personal crises are widespread as consuming excessive volumes of alcohol daily and sometimes illicit drugs are claimed to be part of their occupational culture.

This part of the culture comes with a price. People addicted to alcohol show high levels of aggressiveness and impulsiveness, which may enhance the probability of suicidal behaviour (Eburne 2010), while acute consumption of alcohol is associated with suicide (Sher 2005). As

a result, many chefs are forced to leave their jobs due to their inability to continue work and respond to the same high job demands. The worst consequence of those stressful factors of their job is committing suicide. Often media covers the loss of acclaimed chefs and recognised celebrity chefs because they committed suicide, which makes the phenomenon widely known to the public. The number and the reputation of those who ended their lives is noteworthy (Wikipedia has devoted a separate page to them - "Category: Chefs who committed suicide"). In its latest record, the Organisation for National Statistics (ONS) does not clearly refer to suicides in the specific occupation. However, it possibly includes hospitality jobs, hence jobs in the commercial kitchen in the Care, Leisure and Service occupations (ONS 2017). Suicide levels in that category in 2015 were positioned above the national average by 9%. However, it is not possible to prove that suicides in the chefs' occupation are on the rise due to problems statisticians face with the coding stage of the process. Therefore, ONS has decided not to include specific occupations but only generic categories in its publications, as the Samaritans (2019) state in their national report.

As Eburne (2010:172) argues, wanting to stay at the top, stand out, break limits, be appreciated and rewarded, show yourself you can always do more, and "self-sacrifice to an abstract principle of culinary perfection" sometimes backfires and leads chefs to end their own life. Commenting on chef Loiseau's suicide (which shocked the culinary world in 2003), Chelminski (2005) argued that chefs dedicate their lives to a hubristic singularity of purpose, unable to carry a heavy weight of uncompromised competition with everyone, even their selves, on their shoulders. The hunt for the ultimate purpose is perfectly represented by chef Boulud's (2006:np) guide to the young chef:

> *"To become a chef, you must look inside yourself and find sacrifice because if you make it, then you will have the desire and endure the criticism".*

Hard labour and repetitive stress are the main reasons chefs lose control and want to harm themselves, even fatally, as an act of despair and mental exhaustion (Eburne 2010). That is also complemented by the excessive use of alcohol among chefs, as explained earlier.

Stress, however, does not only derive from the labour pressure they experience at work; various other sources of pressure and anxiety coming from all aspects of life add stress to individuals. A culture of bullying in the kitchen has been recorded as expected and part of the

professional kitchen environment (Giousmpasoglou, Brown and Cooper 2018; Alexander, MacLaren, O'Gorman and Taheri 2012; Palmer, Cooper and Burns 2010). That is even considered part of the socialisation of young chefs in the profession. As Johns and Menzel (1999) have claimed, someone's decision to make a career as a chef implies putting up with bullying or banter because this is typical commercial kitchen behaviour. Hence, they are expected to integrate the social environment of the field they serve fully and develop the necessary resilience to function effectively.

Resilience is a psychological construct that is very often used in the language of employee performance, implying their ability to tolerate the adversities of their work environment, manage to bypass them, and find the tenacity and strength to carry on with their work tasks effectively (Lupsa et al. 2020; Leipold and Greve 2009). Additionally, there has been a widespread impression nowadays that this is a virtue that everyone should learn to develop or we suffer from psychological pain (Saner 2020), adding more pressure on people to be resilient. This is particularly evident in highly stressed work environments, such as the commercial kitchen, where there is a continuous need to remain focused and succeed in the tasks in question despite the adversities faced regularly (Cleary et al 2018).

This resilience is ordinary in occupations of high stress. Similar attitudes have been recorded in the police force (Miller and Rayner 2012) and nursing (Payne, Jones and Haris 2012), which are occupations with high-stress levels and phenomena of bullying among peers. However, it has been acknowledged that this is something the new generation of chefs questions more than in the past, as they consider it to be a cause of excessive stress in the workplace (Cooper, Giousmpasoglou and Marinakou 2017). According to that finding, something is slowly changing in chefs' attitudes. Several restaurant owners and head chefs have lately confessed that they have started changing the culture of swearing and bullying in the kitchen because they find it very hard to attract millennials and young talents to work in the commercial kitchen (Horton 2018). The quality of demand could foster changes to happen in the future.

Chefs live in an already very stressful work environment. Having to continuously prove their skills and abilities to make an innovative, attractive and tasty dish in an effective and efficient routine is a tough mental job. It requires high levels of internal security and resilience to manage the stress from questioning their skills and not to develop anxiety and – if continued

for long – possibly depression. Anxiety and job security create a vicious circle for chefs; not being able to cope with this anxiety would ultimately affect their job security, which adds even more stress. Kang, Twigg, and Hertzman (2010) claimed that this is more obvious with individuals who feel that they have little control over things (external locus of control) and, for that reason, tend to blame others for the adversaries in their life.

On the contrary, when they believe they are in control of their life (internal locus of control), they show lower stress levels and lower intention to leave their company. The level of internal security is an important personal characteristic which has not been explored enough in the culinary industry. However, some evidence from research conducted in Taiwan shows that it affects chefs' intention to stay (Huang 2006). Aiming to understand what makes them stay in their occupation for long despite all the difficulties described and reviewed in this section, the element of internal security and self-sufficiency in making decisions is considered essential to refine what is already known about chefs' turnover and retention.

# Chapter 3. Perspectives of chefs' retention

## 3.1 Introduction

Understanding the culture of chefs and the commercial kitchen logically poses the question of chefs' turnover and retention, which is reviewed in this chapter. Given the attention to the increasing shortage of professionals entering the food industry lately or leaving early (People 1st 2107), organisations search for ways to tackle the phenomenon and retain staff to sustain their business. Therefore, understanding not only why chefs leave their occupation early but also what makes them remain in their job is equally important and the aim of this study, too.

The following sections review and organise the existing insights into the literature of chefs' turnover and retention, with an emphasis on the latter. The theoretical perspectives that have influenced this knowledge are explored. Therefore, this review sits under the umbrella of broader existing theories of employee retention (Job Embeddedness, Occupational Embeddedness, Locus of Control), which are evaluated in the context of the present study. After the analysis and evaluation of the research in the fields of employee turnover and retention -and chefs in particular- emerging gaps in the literature on retention in the chefs' careers are marked and research questions are raised, which this study answers. A logical sequence of arguments leads to a conceptual framework of the study aiming to refine the existing knowledge of the retention of chefs.

## 3.2 Known explanations for the retention of chefs

The attempts to explain chefs' retention primarily have been looked at through the prism of their turnover. As mentioned in the introduction of this study, some studies have answered the question of high turnover among chefs either referring to it directly (Robinson and Barron 2007; Robinson and Beesley 2010; People 1st 2017) or indirectly (Young and Corsun 2010; Tongchaiprasit and Ariyabuddhiphings 2016; Kang, Twigg and Hertzman 2010; Cain, Busser and Kang 2018; Kitterlin, Moll and Moreno 2015; Giousmpasoglou, Brown and Cooper 2018; Giousmpasoglou, Marinakou and Cooper 2017; Bloisi and Hoel 2008).

Firstly, these studies mainly highlight the challenging working conditions in the commercial kitchen as reasons for chefs' turnover. The issues raised in the above literature are usually extrinsic to the individuals. In total, they refer to the increasing deskilling and standardisation of the work, resulting in the absence of creativity in the job, health and safety concerns, limited support by managers and supervisors, ill work-life balance, widespread substance abuse in the kitchen, and a culture of aggressiveness and bullying in the kitchen brigade.

Looking into other occupations where professionals face similar challenges to those of chefs, some comparable findings are recorded. For example, in studies on the turnover of nurses (Tummers, Groeneveld and Lankhaar 2013) teachers (Struyve et al. 2016; Perrachione, Petersen and Rosser 2008) or police officers (AlHashmi, Jabeen, and Papastathopoulos 2019; Vuorensyrjä 2014) the stressful nature of work, intense work environment, unsociable and long working hours, organisational policy changes, and short-staffed operations are found to be recurrent reasons for professionals of those fields to leave their occupation. That is not surprising as the abovementioned factors are also commonly seen in the professional kitchen.

Secondly, other researchers argue about the importance of more intrinsic reasons that lead to chefs' turnover. They refer to personal qualities of chefs with a dark side, which often backfires, showing them the exit from the occupation, like increased competitive attitude and perfectionism (Ariza-Montes, Arjona-Fuentes, Han and Law 2018; Eburne 2010; Chelminski 2005).

Finally, others attribute chefs' turnover to dramatic changes in areas that are close to their hearts, like issues of family crisis (Harris and Giuffre 2010), which confirm Lee and Mitchell's (1994) perspective of the impact of a shock that may happen in the lives of employees that forces them to voluntary turnover.

There is limited research on why chefs desire to remain in their occupation (Yam, Raybould and Gordon 2018; Deery 2008; Pratten and O'Leary 2007; Pratten 2003). Yam et al. (2018) argued that studying turnover more than retention sounds like a paradox because understanding the retention of chefs may give more valuable lessons to strategic human resource management in the commercial kitchen. The need to investigate this field separately from employee turnover is justified by recognising that retention causes are not opposed to

the ones that foster turnover (Deery 2008). Continuing the research on turnover persistently as being the opposite of retention (Kim and Jogaratnam 2010) is a trend of the past which needs to reverse (Russel 2013). Similarly, George (2015) argues that the present creation of a skills gap in the labour market asks for a deeper investigation into the strategies and means that organisations could use to retain their valued employees, not only passively recording the reasons for leaving. Although he focuses on professional employees only, George implies that in the case of chefs, the emphasis should be placed on retaining chefs in their occupational role, not necessarily in the same company. Therefore, under the current conditions of the labour market in which the shortage of chefs in the UK is a reality (Bosetti and Washington-Ihieme 2019), it is essential to look more carefully at their career retention.

Several factors have been investigated which affect the retention of employees in hospitality. These are divided into two main categories: (a) those attributed to conditions provided to chefs by others and (b) those deriving from and residing individually in the actors in question.

Referring to the former category, one significant factor affecting restaurant employees' decision to stay in the industry is positive work-life balance, especially when work is seasonal (Deery 2008). That is translated into positive relations with family, healthy living, available time for personal life, and controllable work hours. Also, when chefs receive broader education on commercial skills, which they consider necessary for their development into their managerial role, it gives them the confidence to continue working as leaders in the commercial kitchen (Pratten 2003; Pratten and O'Leary 2007).

Expanding on the importance of leadership in the kitchen, Balasz (2002) provided evidence about the importance of leadership stability in encouraging chefs to stay in their jobs because they have a positive experience in the kitchen and maintain a joyful atmosphere at work. Furthermore, leaders are considered key to appreciating and compensating, challenging the skills of promising chefs, promoting them fairly as necessary, and showing understanding of their personal needs, making the job in the kitchen pleasing and attractive to them (Walker 2001). Naqvi and Bashir (2008) and Kyndt et al. (2009) also add to it the value of quality support through good supervision. The above factors are considered necessary to form part of the present research and examine the meaning chefs give to them for deciding to remain in their careers.

Referring to the latter category of factors, the degree of resilience that kitchen professionals show in the admittedly challenging work conditions they face is a more internally driven influence that has been researched. Increased resilience has proved a strong reason for the retention of chefs, while a lack of acceptance of the hardships at work drives them to the exit door (Boulud 2006; Johns and Menzel 1999). Furthermore, increased resilience is achieved easier when chefs identify themselves with their professional role and the organisation they work for (George 2015).

Additional intrinsic reasons for the retention of chefs have also been recorded. Duffy et al. (2018) and Allen and Iomaire (2016) for example underline the power of an unexplained force some chefs feel to serve the commercial kitchen. Others mention the generally believed importance of a successful career of someone's trusted friends, which might attract the attention of others to follow and stay in the same career (Nasyira, Othman, and Ghazali 2014). Finally, serving restaurant guests who increasingly have more knowledge about food and cooking and are more challenging frequently becomes a consistent desire, and has been found that it plays a role to following and staying in a job in the commercial kitchen (Robinson 2008; Cooper 2012).

Most of the studies mentioned above were qualitatively based: literature based (Deery 2008), a combination of interviews and document analysis (Pratten 2003), group interviews (Pratten and O'Leary 2007), in-depth interviews (Johns and Menzel 1999; Yam 2018), ethnographic (Balasz 2002), and biographic (Boulud 2006). The rest of the studies were either clearly quantitative (George 2015; Robinson et al. 2014) or leaned more towards quantitative research even if they adopted mixed methods (Kyndt et al. 2009). The pattern was that the latter research methods were chosen in the studies which aimed to verify the applicability of existing theories of retention, question their universal application or add any additional factors to them. In all other cases where empirical studies tried to understand distinct aspects of retention, qualitative research methods were selected.

In summary, the research conducted in the past shows that chefs are either driven to stay in the commercial kitchen long-term by external factors (positive working conditions and work atmosphere, opportunities to develop themselves commercially and managerially, stable leadership coupled with quality support) or internal factors (resilience and self-identification

with the principles and values of the organisation they work for and the requirements for consistent customer service, a strong intrinsic desire often unexplained, attraction to the career because of a role model in the kitchen). These factors are very inclusive and possibly integrate the reasons for chefs' retention. Therefore, there is no justification to look for additional reasons for retention (George 2015). However, these reasons do not explain how chefs are directed to them. In addition, the above studies have explored either the hospitality industry in general or all cooks and chefs without classification or distinction of their types and categories (for example, hotel restaurants, fine dining, upper casual restaurant, chain or independent restaurants, catering, etc.). However, that gives vague answers to why chefs stay in their occupation because each type of chef requires extra attention (Hendley 2017); therefore, a more focused study on why chefs retain their careers is required.

### 3.3 Understanding employee turnover and retention

Having reviewed the literature of chefs that illustrated why they stay in their occupation, despite challenging work conditions, this section critically goes over the broader academic literature on employee turnover and retention, which would shape the theoretical framework of this study.

Initially, most of the studies about retention at work revolved around employee turnover; since the preliminary work of March and Simon (1958) the focus was on explaining why people leave rather than stay. A lot later, Mitchell et al. (2001) and Lee et al. (2004) reversed the scholarly interest, starting with why employees stay and not leave. To do this, they introduced 'Job Embeddedness' (JE), a new model to explain employees' retention. At first, their understanding was that retention stands opposite to turnover; therefore, if conditions that foster turnover are removed, people would stay in their jobs. However, they proved that although interrelated in their studies, the two constructs can be mutually present, and one does not exclude the other necessarily. Because of that interrelation, the section reviews the employee turnover and retention literature but separates the reasons for each emergence when necessary.

### *3.3.1 Employee turnover*

Referring to turnover, what has attracted the interest of researchers mostly is 'voluntary turnover'. That occurs when employees leave a job as the result of a deliberate decision in order to look for another organisation, role, or occupation in general (Hom and Griffeth 1995; Campion 1991). Voluntary turnover has captured the attention of employers more because they feel they have less or no control over the situation; hence they want to predict it when approaching. In contrast, when they feel they have control of employee turnover, they refer to it as 'involuntary turnover', over which employees have less control.

On some occasions, as described below, it has proved difficult to distinguish between voluntary and involuntary turnover. This is because both theoretical and practical concerns take different shapes over time and alter the meaning of what is a deliberate action and what is not. For example, conditions of work, levels of interference of advanced technology in work operations, employment legislation or HR policies change over the years (Hom 2011) and may interpret the involuntary as voluntary and vice versa. Hom (2011) gives several examples to support his claims referring to each of the abovementioned categories of concerns. For instance, various openly available opportunities for people to work in multiple locations and for multiple employers simultaneously have blurred the boundaries between the two types of turnover. Additionally, HR administrators, in communication with employers, may often record attrition according to what suits the situation best; official records and results of exit interviews may show distorted data about what was voluntary and what involuntary decision to leave a company either to protect the employee or the employer (Griffeth and Hom 2001; Hom and Griffeth 1995; Campion 1991). Because of the unclear boundaries between the two terms, Maertz and Campion (1998) have proposed the use of the term 'voluntary turnover' for all reasons for turnover except those that refer to dismissals, layoffs, retirement (only when necessary because of age; in some countries, this may not always be obvious).

Research on employee turnover has gone through stages since the time it was first introduced by March and Simon (1958) and then elaborated by Mobley (1977) and Price (1977). The pioneers moved from theorising job satisfaction to monitoring and understanding people's psychological and sociological reasons before they finally decided to quit a job. A few years later, some scholars focused on organisational factors that may enforce turnover (Steers and

Mowday 1981), while others introduced the importance of personal characteristics, like locus of control (Griffeth and Hom 1988). It showed that employees have a range of ways to express their distance from their job, even if sometimes these may be considered irrational (e.g. zeroing their performance or finding other parallel jobs to invest in, but keeping the safety net of their main one) (Hulin, Roznowski and Hatchiya 1985).

The next generation of turnover theories saw the newly introduced 'unfolding model' of Lee and Mitchell (1994) being very popular among the scholarly community. According to the model, people decide to leave their job after they experience a shock in their life. That shock can be offered to the individual by planned, unplanned or expected, and it is as strong as being enough to show the employee the exit. Shocks act like events in organisational life that all individuals do not interpret in the same way because personal characteristics form different meanings to these events and affect their decisions to leave their jobs differently (Morgeson, Mitchell and Liu 2015). Lee et al. (2017) have reviewed the level of acceptance of the unfolding model in the scholarly community. Although its effectiveness has generally been agreed upon, there are still voices that argue that the model may be helpful but cannot be applied in all situations without the necessary adaptations (Shipp, Furst-Holloway, Harris and Rosen 2014).

The research on employee turnover in the hospitality industry has been confusing and fragmented. The emphasis in the studies of the industry has been on employees' behavioural intentions, not on the actual turnover. Park and Min (2020), in their meta-analysis of turnover in hospitality, claim that when turnover intention in the industry has been explored, it has primarily been related to one or very few selected antecedents. Also, it seems that many moderating variables influence the effect of those antecedents on turnover because, on some occasions, the same ones have been found to have both positive and negative effects (Cho, Johanson, Guchait 2009). Application of the same characteristics of turnover, which are identified in other industries and also in hospitality, is problematic; different sectors of the market show various characteristics that impact on the qualities of employee turnover, as Holtom, Mitchell, Lee and Eberly (2008) admit. For example, supervisors' support does not seem to affect employee turnover in other industries significantly. However, in hospitality, the lack of support by the immediate line managers was found critical for intentions to leave

(Park and Min 2020). Therefore, to understand the reasons behind employee turnover in the chef's occupation, it is essential to comprehend the context of the work in the commercial kitchen before making any overview of what matters and what does not in chefs' turnover. The present study considers the context of the chef's industry as key to interpreting the role occupants' reaction to their job retention. It is expected to help refine what is already known about it.

Like turnover, staying in a job in which someone has invested time, studies, and future expectations is attributed to a number of factors, including working conditions. These factors can be independent and unclustered or explained by theoretical frameworks and models. In general, as Armstrong and Taylor (2016: 253) outline, the company image, strategies of recruitment, selection and deployment, quality of leadership, learning opportunities provided to employees, performance recognition and rewards affect employees' decision to stay in a company or not. Strategies to motivate top performers and convince them to stay also contribute to their retention levels (Holbeche 1998). However, some argue that even the best strategies would not be sufficient enough to go against a strong culture of job mobility existing in the labour market in a particular period (Cappelli 2000). For example, the current decline of the high street retail sector may lead employees to different occupational routes regardless of multiple organisations' initiatives to retain them. These approaches derive from a rather managerial view of what is happening behind the scenes of people management which helps employees stay in their jobs. However, this does not explain what is happening in the individuals' attitudes to work and their personal values, which change and adapt during emerging environmental factors in different eras, for example the 'grate resignation' wave, which has been recognised in many industries in the western societies recently (Sheather and Slattery 2021). Individuals may act opposite to what anyone could imagine is rational thinking at a given time because of sudden shifts of priorities in their life. Therefore, equal attention must be paid to the personal views of the realities people face in their work environment alongside the managerial views of the same realities, hence looking at employee turnover and retention from a more integrated approach.

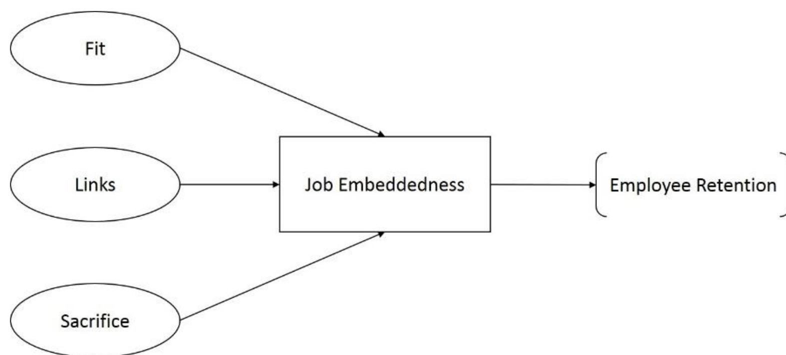
Irrespective of the type of industry, retention of employees has usually been researched about employee turnover and explained through the theoretical frameworks of social identity

and self-categorisation (Avanzi et al. 2014; Gümüş, Hamarat, Çolak and Duran 2012; Van Dick et al. 2004). In social identity theory, employees define part of their self-concept based on their understanding of and personal connection with the group they are members of, in this case, their work organisation. People add significance to the value and emotions of that membership, and according to the level of that significance, they identify with their organisation high or low (Tajfel 1978). It has been argued that employees decide to stay or leave their jobs or industry because of the strong or weak organisational identification they feel they have (Ashforth and Mael 1989). Their organisational identification is reflected in employees' job satisfaction and, consequently, affects their willingness to stay or intention to leave (Van Dick et al. 2004). So, if they feel they are not supported fairly by their organisation, their morale would drop and they would consider leaving.

In contrast, if they feel supported by their organisation according to expectations, they would tend to remain (Eder and Eisenberger 2008). Social identity and self-categorisation were necessary theoretical steps to move further than employee turnover and put retention under the microscope. It, therefore, paved the way for studies that explored how employees feel embedded in their jobs and are prevented from leaving.

### *3.3.2 Employee retention - Job embeddedness (JE)*

The most prominent theoretical framework explaining employee retention is JE, as Mitchell et al. (2001) developed. JE frames employees' level of connectedness, attachment, or stuckness in an occupation. It examines two dimensions that dominate work life: organisations (on-the-job) and community (off-the-job). According to the framework, an employee is more likely to stay in their job role if they feel that they are *linked* with several elements in the job and the community of the job, *fit* in their organisation and the community which surrounds the job and finally they have many things to *sacrifice* if they lose their present position in the job. The combination of the three conditions would indicate how strongly embedded or not a person is in their job (figure 2).




*(Figure 2 Job Embeddedness model, adapted from Mitchell et al (2001))*

Lee and Mitchell were initially experts in the research of employee turnover. In 1994, they established the theory of the "unfolding model", in which employees leave their work when they experience a significant shock that disrupts their stability and forces them out of their job (Lee and Mitchell 1994). The two scholars had already been recognised for their work on turnover when they thought they might give a different approach to their research if they changed the angle from which they looked at turnover. Therefore, they began the exploration of the topic from the perspective of why employees stay in their jobs, instead of leaving them. As a result, they introduced their model of JE.

Mitchell et al. (2001) found strong evidence that the more embedded people are in their jobs, the more likely they are to stay in that job. However, nowhere in the analysis of the model does Mitchell imply that if employees are weakly embedded in their job, they would voluntarily leave their posts (Mitchell et al. 2001). A broad set of contingent forces on the job or off the job could cause resignations. Similarly, Mitchell et al. (2001) argued that job embeddedness alone is not necessarily the only reason people remain. This lack of exclusivity in the explanation of retention does not undermine the significance of the model, which has proved reliable in predicting voluntary turnover and retention of employees either as a whole (Crossley, Bennett, Jex and Burnfield 2007; Holtom, Mitchell and Lee 2006; Holtom and Inderrieden 2006) or partly (Robinson et al. 2014).

What is unclear in Mitchell et al. (2001) theory of JE is the distinction between on-the-job embeddedness (OTJ) and organisational embeddedness. It seems they initially mixed them both to explain why employees stay and do not leave universally. However, someone might

make a calculative or affective decision to stay in their job because that particular job gives them meaning to their career identity and makes them successful in that career. However, the organisation they work for may not be satisfying enough; its values may not align with theirs. That might be enough to make them leave the organisation for a more promising one, where they would practice their expertise in the same or similar job role. Fieldman and Ng (2007) clarified the distinction separating OTJ and organisational embeddedness. They claimed that OTJ is usually stronger as it is an integral part of organisations; hence if someone leaves their job, they also leave their organisation and, similarly, if they stay.

Another characteristic of JE is the importance of time due to employees' anticipation of getting something in return for their decision to stay on the job. As Kiazad et al. (2015) argued, the element of anticipation is a common theme in employee retention. Employees who stay in their jobs long-term expect to get something in return from their organisation (e.g. power, promotion, etc.) or anticipate better career opportunities to appear in the future. In addition, people treat the present idiosyncratically in light of their past knowledge and experiences; they build different personal constructs on the same event due to their particular learnt use of wide-ranging constructs to evaluate the happenings of the world which refer to the past (Kelly 1955). In other words, people conceptualise everyday events based on those constructs that they have learnt to use in order to give meaning to the phenomena they live. Equally, employed people decide to stay in a job based on their prior experience of work and the past meaning they have given to the specific occupational role they serve; that explains the state of inertia or "stuckness" as Mitchel and Lee (2001) state in explaining the JE. Future and past are present in the theory of job embeddedness and retention.

In this study, the main concern is the decision of chefs to stay in their occupation, not the job or organisation. As mentioned in the introduction of the study, the records show that large numbers of chefs, trained or not, after their first few years of work in the commercial kitchen (first job), decide to change their careers to become something which has little connection with being a chef (Bosetti and Washington-Ihieme 2019: 31). Ng and Feldman (2007) captured the form of embeddedness, which referred to employees' career or occupation, and named it 'Occupational Embeddedness' (OE), which differed from OTJ or organisational embeddedness. That is not something that appeared for the first time in the literature; Neal

(1999) had claimed that the two constructs might complement each other but conceptually are not the same. For example, an embedded employee may decide to stay in the same occupation but change organisations, whereas they might decide to stay in the same organisation but change occupations. King, Burke and Pemberton (2005) also discussed OE in their work on career choices to frame future employee occupational success. However, Feldman (2002) took a step further and studied employed people, and he specified OE as a reason employees stick to their jobs for a long time. Long job retention could occur because staying in the occupation they know gives them more stability, hence security (Ng et al. 2006). OE is getting attention as a new form of embeddedness with distinctive characteristics.

In Ng and Feldman's terms, OE is "the totality of forces that keep people in their current occupations. These forces, once again, are fit, links, and sacrifice" (Ng and Feldman 2007:338). People may be attracted by the fact they feel they belong to (fit) the particular occupation (e.g. chefs), they enjoy being members of award schemes (links) which gives them recognition and kudos (e.g. Michelin stars), and they would lose significant parts of the investment they had made to become what they are (e.g. chefs) if they had to change occupation (sacrifice). Ng and Feldman furthered their argument by claiming that this is a new form of embeddedness, which explains high performance in organisations and differs from other similar theoretical constructs (Ng and Feldman 2009:867). Firstly, they distinguish OE from organisational and community forces of embeddedness. Secondly, they argue that OE may be related to but is much broader than occupational and organisational commitment (affective, normative, continuance). They also distinguish between OE and career entrenchment (Carson, Carson and Bedeian 1995). Based on Blau's (2001) argument that career entrenchment is mainly measuring continuance commitment, they claim that OE is broader as it also considers fit and links, not only the cost of leaving. There is widespread belief among the scholar community that JE is a predictor of employee retention in the job, organisation or occupation (Lee at al. 2017; Mitchell et al. 2001; Lee et al. 2004; Ng and Feldman 2007). Also, it is argued that occupational and organisational embeddedness contribute to higher performance comprised of Core Task Performance, Citizenship Behaviour (Lee et al. 2004), Creativity, and/or Counterproductive Behaviour (Ng and Feldman 2009).

In the close relationship between embeddedness and performance, the personal dispositions of people at work have a role to play. For example, Ng and Feldman (2007) explored the significance of trait positive and negative affect in the outcomes of embeddedness. They found that how joyful, energetic, sociable and lively someone is at work (trait positive affect) compared to how sluggish and drowsy (trait negative affect) they are (Watson 2000) has a moderating impact on their performance because of their embeddedness. That finding allows researchers to believe that there are fundamentals, personal to each individual, that also affect their occupational and organisational embeddedness.

Similarly, the impact of personal dispositions on employee retention was also considered in JE. When JE was introduced by Mitchell et al. (2001) it was an attempt to further attachment theories dominating the field up to that moment. According to attachment theories, people are influenced to leave a job either by ‘nonwork factors’ (Cohen 1995; Marshall, Chadwick, and Marshall 1992; Mobley 1982) (e.g. family attachments, work-life balance, hobbies, church) or ‘organisation-focused predictors’ (Cohen and Bailey 1997) (e.g. close group work in projects, unions) or other “constituent commitments” (Reichers 1985). In agreement with Hom and Griffeth (1995), Mitchell and his team's argument was that in the attempt to explain turnover and retention, little attention had been paid to the personal characteristics of employees in the literature (Mitchell et al 2001). In their approach to employee embeddedness, they explored employee retention from both affective and process perspectives, looking at both the emotional feelings of individuals toward their job or organisation and the factors that influence those feelings (Yam, Raybould and Gordon 2018: 449). They intended to provide a more holistic view of the construct where reasons, both internal and external to the individual, explain their decision to stay or leave their jobs. Therefore, employees' personal qualities are taken into consideration to understand the reasons they decide to stay as well as the elements that influence that disposition.

Despite the above intention, JE does not clearly address contingencies that derive from the personal qualities of the individuals. More specifically, ‘fit’ refers to the match between the person and the job (P-J fit) or the person and the organisation (P-O fit). In the hunt for ‘fitability’, employees would look for organisational values that match theirs. That is more apparent in the P-O fit literature, which emphasises the congruence between employees and

their organisation, which among others (e.g. employee engagement), leads people to stay in their jobs for a long time (Saks 2006). Similarly, Kahn (1990), in his monumental work on employee engagement, has stated that congruence of values between employees and employers causes greater engagement at work, and higher employee engagement negatively affects employee turnover (Memon et al 2018). Therefore, there is a shared view that individual values play an essential role in the decision of employees to stay or leave their jobs. 'Links' refer to the ability of people to connect with human and non-human elements of the job in (peers, colleagues) and around (community) of the job or organisation. 'Sacrifice' might only implicitly and partly refer to intrinsic reasons that employees would employ to decide to stay in their jobs, provided that the meaning given to the term is closer to affective rather than calculative. The understanding of the key role of the personal evaluation of the connection people have with their job and organisation generates the need to explore the personal dispositions of employees in determining their leave or stay in their occupation. The present study interprets the organisational integration with the personal cognitive retention process.

### *3.3.3 Locus of Control (LOC)*

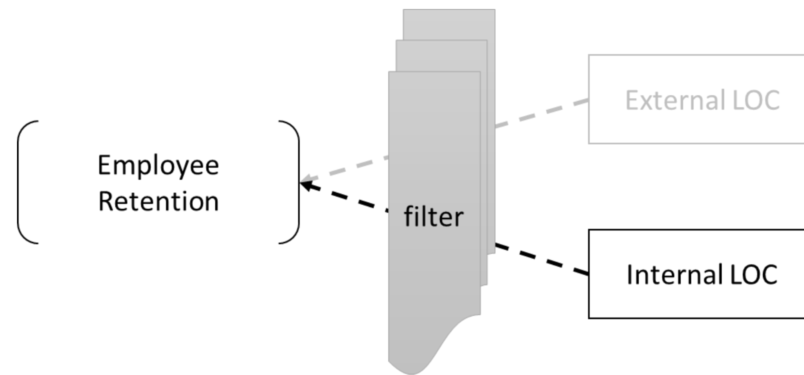
Further interest in personal characteristics that affect employees' decision to retain their jobs has been developed in the past (e.g. Big Five personality traits by Barrick and Mount (1991)). Zimmerman (2008), who argued that personality influences on turnover and retention had not been adequately investigated, conducted a meta-analysis on the impact of job performance on turnover to confirm close links between emotional stability with turnover intentions and conscientiousness and agreeableness with actual turnover. Therefore, he highlighted the contribution of personality traits to the theory of turnover.

A variable of personality, locus of control (LOC), has seen additional interest in employee turnover and retention. Rotter (1966), who first introduced LOC, defined it as people's belief that successes or failures result from either themselves or other forces that sit outside their control. Individuals who believe that results come from their personal effort, hence they are predominantly responsible for whichever direction things take, are called 'internals' or have internal LOC. Contrary to that, the ones who believe that what happens in their life - separate

parts of it or its entirety - is the outcome of mere luck, fate, peers, managers, the society in general, are called ‘externals’ or have external LOC. There are parts of life where people may show internal LOC and others where the same people may show external LOC. However, Marks (1998) has argued that in Western culture, the internals are generally considered more desirable because they usually come across as more successful than externals (Evans, Shapiro, and Lewis 1993; Renn and Vandenberg 1991).

Research on the construct has found positive relations between externals and job dissatisfaction leading to high-stress levels (Anderson 1977). The same results seem to be cross-culturally applied (Chen and Silverthorne 2008). The study of LOC with employee retention and turnover has attracted further attention among scholars because prolonged periods of lack of job satisfaction and stress at work are connected with employee turnover, as mentioned in the previous paragraph.

Several researchers have agreed generally, but not exclusively, that people who are more emotionally stable than others, who believe that their decisions are the product of themselves and not others, who take responsibility for their thoughts, choices and actions, therefore showing internal LOC, are more likely to remain in jobs for long (Huang 2006; Allen, Moffit and Weeks 2005; Kang, Twigg, and Hertzman 2010). In contrast, people who attribute personal judgments, adoptions of behaviours or wrongdoings to others (lack, fate, line-managers, etc.) hence showing external LOC, are more sensitive to turnover intentions which are materialised in actual turnover (Allen, Moffit and Weeks 2005). However, there is evidence that externals may also be led to job retention, but only when they are convinced (by their managers) that control over work life is achieved indirectly, through close mentorship (Yang, Guo, Wang and Li 2018), strong relations with their work groups, etc. (Ng and Butts 2009: 305). Hence they would value the efforts of others to control the situations that occur at work. For that reason, external LOC in figure 3 connects with employee retention under specific conditions (filters), as well as internal LOC does. However, according to the literature, this link is much weaker.

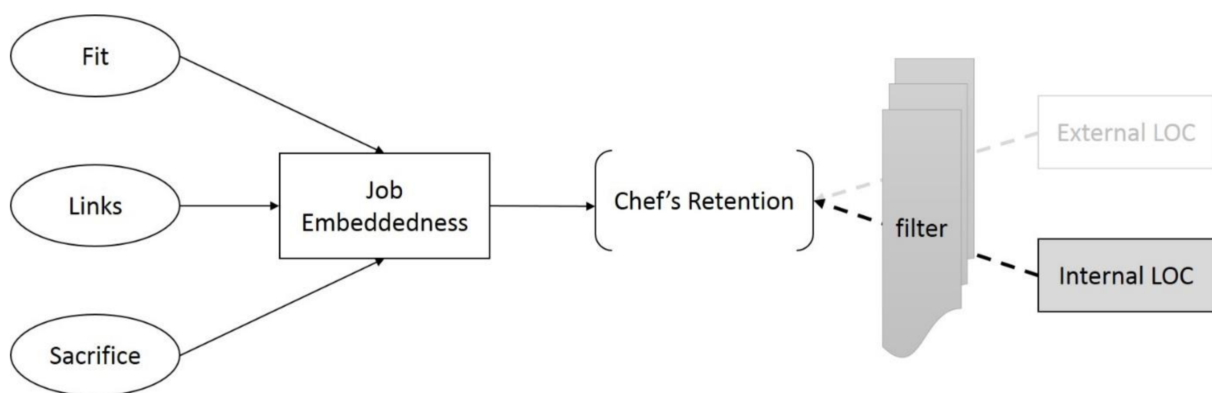



(Figure 3 Employee Retention through Locus of Control)

Griffeth, Hom and Gaertner (2000) elaborated the above arguments by stating that employees with high internal LOC are likelier to leave their jobs once they show intentions to leave because they feel more confident to experience the alternatives, even if these are unknown territories for them. In specific occupations which are characterised by stressful and particularly challenging work conditions in which they operate, like hospital employees, it has been found that individuals with external LOC are more likely to express intentions to quit and actually leave their occupation (Chiu, Chien, Lin, and Hsiao 2005). Contrary to the supporters of the clear links between LOC and turnover or retention, Rubenstein, Eberly, Lee and Mitchell (2018) looked at it from the perspective of turnover alone and claimed that LOC is weakly related to the construct. However, employee turnover is not the direct opposite of employee retention; therefore, their study can make no assumptions about its relations with retention.

Although researching LOC is not a reliable method to predict employee retention, its combination with other, more reliable methods could offer a deeper understanding of why employees stay in their occupations. However, there is some evidence of an interrelation between internal LOC and JE (Ng and Feldman 2011) and some recent indications that external LOC may also connect with JE under conditions (Petlokorpi et al. (2022). More specifically, Ng and Feldman (2011) have argued that individuals who are considered ‘internals’ seek more links in the organisation, which ties them in strongly, hence finding it more difficult to sacrifice the benefits they have gained while in their job. Also, Petlokorpi et al. (2022) claimed that externals under institutionalised socialisation tactics tend to partly (applied only to newcomers) remain in their jobs more than under individualised socialisation tactics. So, they showed that externals might also be directed to retention when links are

orchestrated by an organised effort from the institution, not themselves. Both JE and Internal LOC play an essential role in explaining employee retention, but from different perspectives; the impact they have on employees' decisions to stay rather than leave comes from different directions. JE considers both organisational and individual factors in predicting intentions to stay. Internal LOC focuses on the individual perspective against factors that may determine employees' decisions to stay. Therefore, both constructs are meant to provide a framework in which employee retention is understood in more depth. Figure 4 below depicts that in an attempt to adapt it to the occupational domain of chefs. The two constructs are positioned separately to represent the different perspectives from which they approach the retention of chefs, not underline their partial interrelation, as explained above.




*(Figure 4 Key constructs leading to retention of chefs)*

According to the framework above, JE lead to the understanding – or prediction, as Mitchell and Lee (2001) claim – of employee retention. All domains of JE (fit, links, sacrifice) need to exist to ensure retention. However, decisions to stay in the occupation involve a personal perception and interpretation of events that happen to the individual and mark something significant in their occupational experience. These events are either taken passively by the individual as being imposed on them, on which there is also little they can do, or are considered the result of their willpower and actions. Therefore, they are filtered through their LOC. Internal LOC, which is strongly related to employee retention, is considered a necessary additional element to the refinement of why employees who fit in the job, develop links with the job and do not want to sacrifice the benefits they receive from the job are more likely to sustain their occupational roles long term. The approach to chefs' retention from the

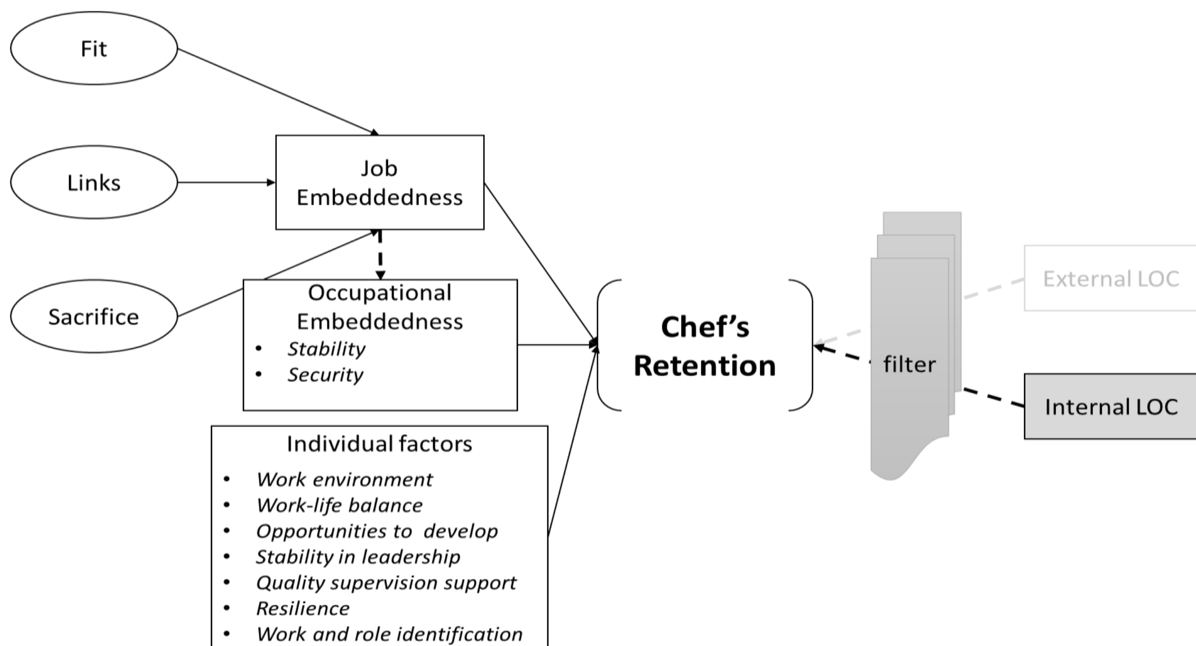
interaction of the above constructs shows new directions to the research on retention. It can offer a more rounded understanding of chefs' priorities to stay in their occupation.

All studies introducing and investigating the constructs of JE and OE – even the preceding construct of employee turnover and the unfolding model of Lee and Mitchell (1994) – were quantitative. Mitchell et al. (2001) fundamental study was based on two surveys of two different types of organisations (a grocery chain and a hospital) which shared similar turnover characteristics. The research on OE conducted mainly by Ng and Feldman (2009) and Ng and Butts (2009) were quantitative (surveys), with the exception of the initial research of Ng and Feldman (2007) which introduced the new concept of OE and designed a new framework; that was qualitative (literature based). The studies that Ng, Sorensen and Eby (2006), Griffeth, Hom and Gaertner (2000) and Ng and Feldman (2009) which established the relation of LOC and retention were quantitative, the first two being meta-analyses and the third a longitudinal study consisted of three survey phases. The introduction and establishment of a new theory of employee retention required vast sample for more generalised results, therefore the need for quantitative research. However, the design of a conceptual framework which would drive research to new pathways asked for a deeper understanding of existing findings and questioning of the current knowledge on the topics in question

**3.4 Conceptual framework of the study**

The existing literature that has explained chefs' retention up to now is depicted in the figure below (Figure 5). The three domains of JE – fit, links and sacrifice – should be one of the critical frameworks to predict their retention. Also, echoing Ng and Feldman's (2007) argument concerning the necessary interrelation between Je and OE, the figure connects the two constructs considering OE essential in explaining why chefs stay in the same occupation, not leaving for a different career. As analysed at the beginning of the chapter, additional findings have revealed different aspects of chefs' realities, both extrinsic and intrinsic, that help them remain as chefs for a long period. However, because chefs' retention is a complex matter, these parameters are not enough to interpret why some individuals may decide to leave the commercial kitchen even though they have worked there for many years. Their reality consists of a series of events that they either perceive passively or actively. When these events are filtered out through their internal LOC – the individual's disposition to take ownership of the

direction of their actions – then chefs tend to stay in the occupation too. Additionally, several individual factors have been found that contribute to their desire to remain in the job, the most frequently of which met in the literature being the quality of the work environment of the commercial kitchen, the level of work-life balance they secure, the stability of leadership, the level of resilience and others analysed in section 3.2 of the chapter.




(Figure 5 Conceptual framework of the study)

Therefore, the study's conceptual framework describes the interrelation of the above elements in refining the understanding of chefs' retention from a more holistic point of view. That interrelation raises the curiosity to explore the paths that a chef's mind follows in their decision to stay in the chef's occupation, which is what the present study is investigating.

### 3.5 Concluding remarks

Most studies on employee retention have referred to staying in the same organisation. Equally, most research around employee turnover has considered employees' decision to leave an organisation and move to another one in the same industry or field. Although the advocates of OE have noted it (Feldman 2002; Ng and Feldman 2007), little has been said about moving entirely out of an occupation. So far, the literature review has approached the issue of chefs' retention from the perspective of JE and OE, the Internal LOC, and separate

studies, which have revealed additional reasons chefs decide to stay in their occupations which are not necessarily classified under the theoretical frameworks above. Unfortunately, these studies do not give equal importance to extrinsic and intrinsic retention drivers; they are either fragmented or lean more towards the one or the other side.

Most importantly, these studies do not map the cognitive journey of the chefs who stay in their occupation long term. The present study looks for answers to why chefs decide to stay in this demanding job they serve in the commercial kitchen, even if they change organisations in the same field, regardless of many other peers choosing to abandon the chef's role entirely. It does not look for new factors to explain the phenomenon but intends to understand better what chefs mean when arguing in favour or against staying in their jobs and how they think when deciding to remain by following the cognitive patterns they employ, making what is tacit more explicit.

Job embeddedness explains a significant part of the picture of employee retention but not the whole. The emphasis is on issues that mainly lie outside the person (organisation or community based) and wherever they lie in the person ('Fit' in the organisation; 'Links' with the job community; 'Sacrifice' of the safety which derives from what is known) they are calculative or affective in nature. The theory does not explain the thinking process in an individual's mind, which justifies their decision to stay in their job; this is the outcome of a personal interpretation of what they observe in their everyday experience relevant to their work and how they construe their world. That is the main addition of the study to what is already known about the retention of chefs.

Embedded employees receive information and make decisions from the present conditions of work, the connections they have with peers and the community, and the future expectations they form from weighing alternatives they may find on their way. Personal qualities and values reside in the past and stabilise in the present. There is evidence that there is a temporal element in determining how much someone feels they fit in the occupation of their choice (Jansen and Shipp 2019). Issues that led them to choose their occupation, conditions that allow them to perform as expected, and prospects that show positive signs of their position in the future should further explain what is already known about chefs' readiness to stay in their occupation. Also, as per Allen, Moffit and Weeks (2005) views,

differences in the high or low LOC of chefs should influence their decisions to stay or leave their occupation. Hence, they also influence the structure of their cognitive maps and how they perceive, interpret and act on their intention to stay. Therefore, this study seeks to find patterns that chefs use to cognitively blend their beliefs and experiences from the past, present and future and decide to sustain their occupation for long.

Theories of the unfolded model, job embeddedness, or direction of the LOC give distinct meaning and significance to the effect of unexpected negative events (e.g. rejection of a career promotion) on an individual's decision to stay or leave an organisation. However, it has been recognised (Ghosh and Gurunathan 2015) that how those retention decisions evolve in people's minds is yet to be clarified. In their review on JE, Ghosh and Gurunathan suggest that new retention domains may be introduced by understanding how people are led to those thoughts before their decisions. To that end, tacit knowledge has to come to the fore; research has to help actors engage in introspection and reveal what is implicit, what has become an automated way of thinking, hence hard to identify with a first glance. Using dual cognitive processing, making the implicit explicit is a critical factor in solving cognitively complex problems (Evans 2008; Cronin 2004). The present study deals with the complex problem of chefs choosing to stay in their occupation despite conditions of work encouraging them to do the opposite. It explores chefs' mental maps to decide to remain rather than leave.

# Chapter 4. Methodology

## 4.1 Introduction

The difficulties that chefs face responding to their challenging work environment were critically presented and analysed in the literature review. The problem which has risen in the last few years is the shortage of chefs in the hospitality industry. Considering that the industry has grown significantly, it is important to understand the reasons for the shortage and how this can be addressed. Therefore, the scope of this study is to shed light on the phenomenon not by explaining why chefs leave the occupation but, in contrast, why they stay. The aim is to understand chefs' retention in their occupations better, expanding on already known theories that explain and predict retention.

To that end, the underlying thought processes of chefs who have remained in the commercial kitchen long term were investigated. This helped classify why chefs stay in their jobs and understand their constructs' patterns that could predict their willingness to remain. The intention was not to add new factors contributing to employee retention, as the literature is adequate. Instead, through the classification of the reasons chefs stay and the patterns of their constructs, existing frameworks of retention, like Job Embeddedness (JE) and Occupational Embeddedness (OE) in the specific context of the commercial kitchen, were further understood.

This chapter outlines and explains the methodological foundation of the study. It begins with the philosophical approach of the research, analysing its ontological and epistemological view, which justifies the study's methodology. Following that, particular emphasis is placed on selecting the appropriate research methods chosen and the reasons for that choice over others. A presentation of the research strategy follows. Issues and problems in designing and implementing the strategy are mentioned, coupled with the solutions found to bypass the hurdles. Next, a new section describes and analyses the ethical considerations of the study. Following the ethical considerations, the chapter describes the mode of execution of the primary research, the phases it followed, the milestones set, and the data analysis methods used. The chapter finishes with personal considerations and reflection of the researcher on the execution of the research project and during data collection. That was useful for making

the researcher aware of the challenges of moving the particular interview technique online without precedence.

## 4.2 Ontological and Epistemological approaches of the study

### *4.2.1 Ontology*

The study deals with the construct of employee retention, which is a complex social and personal construct. Therefore, reality cannot be perceived as firm, existing and unchanging over time or among different social settings and individuals. Rather the opposite; the reality, in this case, is the outcome of individual readings of happenings and observations, followed by the meaning given by the researcher. Reality is viewed as a fluid form of constructs that takes shape through the researcher's interpretation, which constantly evolves (Bryman 2016; Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2009) and is known as relativism.

Truth cannot be objective or undisputable by others. Therefore, the study is incorporated into subjectivism (Saunders, Thornhill and Lewis 2019; Bryman 2016). More specifically, its outcomes are the product of language, social and individual perceptions and explanation of events and perceptions of others. Hence, they have room for distinct interpretations by social actors. Moreover, these interpretations combine both social and individual makings of reality. Therefore the study balances nominalism/ relativism, where social reality is perceived as the product of individual interpretation of a given situation, hence relative (Glinka and Hensel 2018: 247), and social constructivism, where research is viewed as a process of invention compatible with current evidence to create publicly accepted understandings, hence a process of sensemaking (Bourne and Jankowicz 2018); on an individual basis there are multiple realities, whereas social actors (people) may agree on standard views of facets of reality too.

### *4.2.2 Epistemology*

The abovementioned ontological position of this study drives the researcher to specific epistemological directions; approaching this type of reality involves research actors (researcher and research participants) in an interplay of making sense of reality in a unique

way. The study is based on the belief that there must be a close interaction between the "knower" (or the researcher) and the "known" (or subjects) (Creswell 2013; Yilmaz 2013). To that end, the intention is not to test the existence of any known theory (JE or OE) but to construct a new contextual understanding of the chefs' retention literature in the commercial kitchen by looking at it from different – and various – perspectives than the ones which have already been explored. This consideration reflects social reality, as decontextualisation of meanings, according to Silverman (1998), does not understand the complexities of individual perceptions of reality, and the context of the commercial kitchen has many complexities, as reviewed already in the previous chapter. Therefore, this research is viewed from a constructivist approach. It is an empirical study of chefs in which critical theories of employee retention, JE and OE, are reviewed and applied.

A challenge for the study is to explain the research outcomes derived from the individual, the social or the natural world. Does this world pre-exist, or is it constructed by several players involved: the individual alone (perhaps cognitively as the developmental psychologist Piaget (1977) thought in his early views of constructivism) or social interactions? The scope of this study is to reveal the personal meaning that professional chefs make to explain their desire to stay in the chef's occupation, the impact that the public's thoughts have on their occupational role, and subsequently to research how this meaning affects their work and personal life. Therefore, it is reasoned important to preclude as many social preconceptions in the interaction between the researcher and research participants as possible. The close interaction between the researcher and research participants socially constructs reality. According to social constructivism, individuals jointly develop knowledge and understanding of the world (Amineh and Asl 2015) and actively create their own knowledge (Schreiber and Valle 2013). That is achieved by assuming that their experience fits in a specific model (mental model) of the social world that they think exists and decoding the language they use to interact with others (Leeds-Hurwitz 2009). Although social constructivism has advantages in giving meaning to reality (for instance, recognising the powerful dynamics of the interaction between members of a social group), a drawback has been recorded too. If someone intends to adopt a pure social constructivist approach, they would have to abandon the idea that there is a truth somewhere which reflects a realistic approach. As such, they must disregard this idea because it is not congruent with the belief of social constructivists that there is no

objective reality. According to them, reality ought to be the outcome of a specific group of people's collective interpretation of events or issues (Krahenbuhl 2016). However, it has been argued that this is impossible because people's interpretations (of a specific group of people) cannot be far off what is socially believed and approved (Silverman 1998; von Glaserfeld 1995). This research is considered a significant factor in examining a deeper understanding of the impact of social norms on people's specific individual beliefs. Suppose von Glaserfeld's (1995) and Silverman's (1998) argument described above is agreed upon. In that case, it may be accepted that both actors carry social preconceptions in this research project (researcher and research participants). The study tries to eliminate any possible influence the researcher might have on the research participants' views. Therefore, the approach leans toward personal constructivism and, more specifically, constructive alternativism (Kelly 1955:3).

> *"…there are always some alternative constructions available to choose among in dealing with the world. No one needs to paint himself into a corner; no one needs to be completely hemmed in by circumstances; no one needs to be the victim of his biography. We call this philosophical position constructive alternativism". (Kelly 1955:11)*

The main principle of this epistemological approach is that reality reveals itself indirectly and is subjected to as many constructions as we can invent (Bradshaw et al. 1993). It may change from person to person, as in the same person, if and when the context of their experience changes (Adams-Webber & Mancuso 1983). In Kelly's words:

> *"The universe is real; it is happening all the time; it is integral; and it is open to piecemeal interpretation. Different men [sic] construe it in different ways. Since it owes no prior allegiance to any one man's construction system, it is always open to reconstruction. Some of the alternative ways of construing are better adapted to man's purposes than are others. Thus, man comes to understand his world through an infinite series of successive approximations. Since man is always faced with constructive alternatives, which he may explore if he wishes, he needs not continue indefinitely to be the absolute victim either of his past history or of his present circumstances" (Kelly 1955:30).*

In Kelly's approach, the research unit is the daily event in which individuals give various interpretations and may understand it differently than what is socially known or approved. Individuals conceptualise aspects of everyday events (elements) without the interference of others. The outcome remains subjective, but the conceptualisation of events is less biased by external influences making its nature transformative (Creswell 2013).

The study employs the involvement of research participants in the research process to extract data; therefore the researcher follows an emic epistemological approach (Morris et al. 1999). This involvement requires a highly contextual view of the field of research in which the researcher also plays a central role, despite their efforts to remain impartial. There are several arguments which claim that a researcher who gets involved directly with the research participants cannot live in a vacuum; they affect others whom they interact with, as well as being affected by them (Altinay, Paraskevas and Jung 2015; Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2009; Silverman 1998). To handle this limitation, data collection is achieved through the use of a method (technique) based on personal constructivism, as explained above, which is described in further detail in the following paragraphs. In addition, data was cross analysed with the researcher's reactions to the research process using self-reflective methods such as keeping a logbook and a supplementary recheck of the data analysis by an independent, neutral study analyst who examined data from their own point of view separately from the researcher. The latter allowed the researcher to rationalise his analysis further and minimise the effect of the interaction with the research participants on his judgment. This practice is explained in more detail in the following paragraphs.

### *4.3 Methodology*

The research follows an inductive methodology reflecting logically the ontological and epistemological approach described previously (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2009). Based on constructivism, the research technique selected and described later is the Repertory Grid (RGT), which derives from the Personal Construct Theory (PCT). According to PCT, people construe their world and revise this construction continuously in light of their personal experience (Kelly 1955). The research technique (RGT) attached to the theory is designed to frame the world's sensemaking through the research participant's eyes. It prohibits the researcher from occupying any more privileged position in understanding their reality (Bourne and Jankowicz 2018: 135).

Most of the studies on the retention of chefs mentioned in the previous chapter (section 3.2) were qualitatively based: literature based (Deery 2008), a combination of interviews and document analysis (Pratten 2003), group interviews (Pratten and O'Leary 2007), in-depth

interviews (Johns and Menzel 1999; Yam 2018), ethnographic (Balasz 2002), and biographic (Boulud 2006). The rest of the studies were either clearly quantitative (George 2015; Robinson et al. 2014) or leaned more towards quantitative research even if they adopted mixed methods (Kyndt et al. 2009). The pattern was that the latter research methods were chosen in those studies that aimed to verify the applicability of existing theories of retention, question their universal application or add any additional factors to them. In all other cases where empirical studies tried to understand distinct aspects of retention, qualitative research methods were selected.

This study explores a particular occupational environment, the commercial kitchen, and seeks further understanding of why chefs stay in their jobs. The inductive approach to the study offered a couple of other methodological options than the one selected in the end: ethnography and grounded theory. Both are considered phenomenological approaches. The choice of PCT adopted in this study could be categorised as phenomenological, too. However, it shows some distinct characteristics. Both ethnography and grounded theory, initially considered for the research methodology, were rejected because of the importance they both put on time.

More specifically, ethnography requires the researcher to explore a particular population's culture and interpret their values and beliefs in particular contexts (Richards and Morse 2007). This task requires research immersion (a) in the field as a participant or non-participant observer (to any degree) (Wolcott 1990) and (b) through time to capture variations and changes in behaviours that reflect values and beliefs in different moments of the actors' lives (Bryman 2016). Although this study explores a particular population and the meaning its members give to a situation (retention in the present scenario), conducting research at the premises of the participants (restaurants) was particularly difficult, if not impossible, at a time of recurring national lockdowns due to the covid-19 pandemic. Also, prolonging the investigation for an extended period was neither in scope nor feasible. In addition, adopting ethnography in this study would limit the number of premises that could be used for the research needs, hence the potential to reach multiple chefs from various restaurants in the country and collect the responses of many representatives of the particular population.

Similarly, grounded theory examines the foundations for creating a new theory of a specific field, which can occur after data collection over more extended periods (Creswell 2013). "Grounded theory is a way of thinking about data – processes of conceptualisation – of theorising from data, so that the end result is a theory that the scientist produces from data collected by interviewing and observing everyday life" (Morse et al. 2016: 18). That requires the researcher to be neutral to the content of the research and act as a newcomer, however in this study, the researcher had knowledge of the chef's industry which inevitably influenced the research design; therefore, grounded theory was not appropriate. According to Länsisalmi, Peiró and Kivimäki (2004: 242), the aim of grounded theory in organisational studies is either to generate new hypotheses around a theme in question or to reveal social processes producing a specific phenomenon. Although the former may sound very close to the selected methodology of the present study, the grounded theory does not aim to reveal patterns of participants' cognitive processes that extend the understanding of existing theories in a research field. Therefore, for the reasons mentioned above, grounded theory was not within the scope of the study.

Kelly, the introducer of PCT, opened a debate with other scholars where he claimed that his theory goes beyond the classic phenomenological approaches; it leans more toward neo-phenomenology (Kelly 1955:380) and self-concept theory (ibid:28). However, Adams-Webber and Mancuso (1983) argued that PCT is more phenomenological than generally believed. From either perspective, neo-phenomenological or phenomenological, the research method that serves PCT's purpose must be qualitative.

Usually, inductive research approaches justify qualitative research methods. That is not to say that qualitative methods are superior to quantitative ones. This debate should be based on the appropriateness of the correct method in light of the research question asked. The dichotomy between the two poles, quantitative versus qualitative, created by scholars is false, as Walsh (2011) states. Similarly, Silverman (1998) argues that there is no actual meaning in contrast between the normative principles of subjective (qualitative) versus objective (quantitative) research methods because interpretivism and the subjectivist pursuit of individual meaning are balanced (Silverman 1998:9). They often co-exist with core principles of the so-called 'science', like the reliability of data (ibid:18). There are many

‘qualitative’ approaches which use quantification of their findings and similarly ‘quantitative’ studies which make qualitative and highly interpretative judgements (though often unacknowledged) (Walsh 2011:10). Similarly, Guba and Lincoln (2005), both advocates of interpretivism, support the inclusive use of research methods, as a pragmatic reflection on the situational research needs, without sacrificing the epistemic clarity of the research. Therefore, the argument should be removed from that basis of “who is the best; right or wrong”, which only proves intense debates about ideology (Holloway 2008) and instead, they should be repositioned to academic rigours.

Following the main points of this debate between quantitative and qualitative research methods, various methods were considered which could fit the scope, aims and research questions of this study. RGT was chosen because it allows the participants to set the situation in which they would be interviewed (the elements) and gives them complete control of the direction of their answers. That is achieved through a structured process that lets them reflect on their responses and enrich the interpretation of the constructs they created (Jankowicz 2004). This characteristic adds significant value to the features of in-depth interviews. In particular, the study requires an investigation of chef’s retention from multiple perspectives in order to allow a better insight into what is already known about the topic in question; to explore how job embeddedness and occupational embeddedness explain retention in the context of the commercial kitchen; to reflect the unique individual perception of chefs regarding what keeps them in their job (idiosyncratic view) on the existing foundation of employee retention; to map their thinking patterns in their decisions to stay; and ultimately, to refine our understanding of chefs’ retention through time. For these reasons, RGT was preferable for this study.

In in-depth interviews, the researcher often has power over the interviewee, who feels obliged to follow a particular framework of thought used by the interviewer (Allmark et al. 2009); thus, the research participants’ construction of their own reality is often influenced by the above condition. For example, when the interviewees are asked to elaborate on their answers during the interview, they need to interpret the particular experience they reflect on and perceive it under the influence of the researcher's interpretation and understanding of that response. The researcher is not a neutral participant in the interview process; they

understand the interviewee's answers through their personal filters and ask the interviewee for clarification. Consequently, the interview would not allow the interviewee to be completely unconstrained from any imposition of the researcher's understanding of their views. The researcher inevitably carries their own opinions about the topic in question and is influenced by them when they choose where to direct the interview discussion (Bryman 2016).

Reflexivity in qualitative studies is an integral part of the credible results they produce (Symon and Cassell 2004). In this study, the interviewer had good knowledge of the field as he had worked with chefs as an HR consultant for more than ten years. Therefore, he was well aware of the challenges in their work environment, although he had no first-hand experience as a cook. This study condition required self-reflection on the role he might have later played in interpreting the results in a more familiar zone. Following the epistemological approach of the study, analysed earlier, the research results were the outcome of rhetoric founded on the personal constructs of the research participants. They cannot be considered the outcome of a statistical or mathematical formula when reflexivity would play a minimal role. The risk that was considered in the design of the research where the researcher might create a particular version of reality dictated by his assumptions and miss other critical perspectives of the interviewees (King 2005). RGT engenders reflexivity (Cassell and Walsh 2005); therefore, the interviewer was asking the interviewees to confirm (a) his interpretation of their constructs before these were entered into the grid, (b) the meaning of the identified patterns of construct evaluation after the grid was completed, and finally (c) the accuracy of the elicited core construct/ core value of the participant. These stages of the interview process minimised the influence of the knowledgeable researcher's preconceptions about the topic in question. Also, the fact that the interviews took place electronically facilitated simultaneous reflexivity of the interviewer (and the interviewee) because, as Joinson (2001) argues, when interviews occur electronically, they allow more explicit expressions and reactions of the dyadic relation between interviewer – interviewee, which are easily visible. Additionally, they provide the time and space to reflect on them faster.

By using RGT in this study, interviewees had the autonomy to express themselves similarly to the experience they would have in an in-depth interview. In addition, RGT followed a

structure which allowed the interviewees to reflect on their answers. That process added value to the research findings because the participants looked at their answers in relation to multiple other answers they had given and specified what they initially meant. When this feature of the interview is missing, the researcher needs to make more contextual interpretations of the answers to understand the personal meaning participants give to those answers. That need has been argued by Bretz, Rynes and Gerhart (1993), who claimed that when participants have to recall past criteria to justify their own decision-making from abstract situations, they often find it difficult. Therefore, the use of RGT in this research made it easier for them by providing the participants with an effective structure to reflect on the explanations they gave for their career retention and clarify the constructs they created that fit the study's purpose.

RGT was selected as a research method which has its foundations in qualitative research (PCT) but also offers a structured way to support findings with quantified data analysis. For that reason, although it is generally accepted as a qualitative method, it has also been argued by some that this technique is one of the first mixed methods approaches in psychology (Winter 2015). The technique is described in detail and analysed for its suitability for the study in the following two paragraphs.

### 4.4 Repertory Grid Technique (RGT)

RGT is based on PCT and knowledge acquisition (Kelly 1955; Ford and Bradshaw 1993). It is a qualitative research method which reflects an individually constructed reality of the world (Moon et al. 2017). Also, it is most appropriate for addressing complex and implicit topics where it is hard for people to justify and express their position clearly (Rojon et al 2018). RGT aims to discover the system of beliefs, thoughts and reasoning procedures that explain how individuals construct their reality (Winter 1992). It has been used in clinical psychology, environmental studies, education, nursing, and organisational psychology (Curtis et al. 2008).

Central to RGT is the idea that people are not passive recipients of the world but form personal meanings of aspects of their world, which influence their attitudes and behaviours

in life. Based on PCT, these meanings pass through individual processes which are *"psychologically channelised by the ways in which [the person] anticipates events"* (Fransella 2005:67). RGT is a research tool which takes a detailed picture of the representation of someone's construct system (Caputi 2016). According to Kelly (1995) people make meanings of the world separately, and there are no two people who construct the world in the same way. In that sense, there is no right or wrong meaning; the individual, therefore, is the creator of meaning (Banister et al. 1994) without the intervention of a third party.

RGTs may have variations, but all share four necessary stages: selection of elements, elicitation of constructs, comparison of elements, and analysis. Elements are *"the things or events which are abstracted by a construct"* (Kelly 1955: 137). More specifically, *"an element is an example of, exemplar of, instance of, sampling of, or occurrence within, a particular topic"* (Jankowicz 2004: 13). Therefore, the research process begins with setting a list of elements which are then presented to the participant. The elements can be generated in various ways, which are outlined below. They must be homogeneous (of the same type: names, things, situations) and closely related to the research subject. They are either the researcher's choice out of a selection of suitable words, phrases, and behaviours that are closely related to the topic in question or the research participant alone who answers a set of questions related to the subject in question.

In some cases, they can be produced from a combination of the above (Stewart and Stewart 1981). Kelly believes that personal constructs are "bipolar" in the sense that elements of the world are classified as good or bad, small or big, attractive or unattractive, etc. Therefore, Kelly claims that personal constructs must be checked for similarities and differences. Elements are selected in turns, usually in sets of three, using the triadic opposite method (Epting, Suchman and Nickeson 1971) until all significant triads are completed. Then, the participant is asked to think of ways that the two units of a pair of those elements are similar to each other and, at the same time, different from the third one. This exercise is repeated with the rest of the elements. The expressed reasons for similarities and differences consist of the personal constructs produced by the individual without the researcher's intervention; this is how constructs are elicited (see Figure 6 below).

Constructs are the next step of elements because they explain them further, giving them personal meaning. They are defined as the basic unit of description and analysis. People construe things through constructs. That is how they make sense of anything and find meaning in it (Jankowicz 2004: 10). They are marked on opposite sides (left and right) on the grid, and participants are asked to evaluate them in relation to each one of the elements. The number of occurrences of each one of them is placed under each of the elements. Some variations use a Likert scale (usually, but not exclusively, from 1 to 5) to evaluate the intensity of the participant's preference. After the grid is complete with the participant's answers, the researcher looks for any common patterns in the answers presented in the grid, interprets those patterns and makes further meaning to the constructs (Jankowicz 2004; Fransella 2005; Fransella, Bell and Bannister 2004). A representative example of the RGT is described in figure 6, an extract from the pilot study conducted for the present research (details of the process are given in the research design section later).

| Constructs | Elements | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Emerged (0)* *1* | By “mistake”, fascinated by what was going on in the kitchen | Family artistic (model making, cook, etc) | Leaving my legacy behind | Have a trained kitchen brigade | Low pay and long hours | Owners of the business have unreasonable demands (quality – costs) | Share my knowledge with younger chefs and becoming their father figure, mentor | Love the challenge of servicing customers | Lack of training, many chefs too quickly | *Implicit (X)* *5* |
| Way of expressing artistic ability - family encouragement | O (1) | O (1) | O (1) | X (3) | X (3) | X (3) | X (5) | O (3) | O (3) | Already achieved high |
| Chefs are being paid better today | O (1) | O (1) | O (3) | O (1) | X (5) | X (5) | 0 (1) | O (1) | X (5) | Pressure from the owners to achieve unrealistic things |
| Service is exciting and dynamic | O (1) | O (1) | O (1) | O (1) | X (5) | X (5) | O (1) | O (1) | X (5) | Without training there is no service |
| High end food come out of high training | O (1) | O (1) | X (5) | X (5) | X (5) | X (5) | O (1) | O (1) | X (5) | Without discipline you won't get high end food |
| Pleasing people (being artistic), making them happy | O (1) | O (1) | X (5) | X (5) | O (1) | O (1) | X (5) | O (1) | X (5) | Not here for our egos |
| Quick results | X (5) | X (5) | X (5) | X (5) | O (1) | O (1) | X (5) | X (5) | O (1) | Believing in what you do and living it |
| Lack of qualification | X (5) | X (5) | X (5) | X (5) | O (1) | O (1) | X (5) | X (5) | O (1) | Skill and Passion - Desire |
| Mentoring others to teach others from experience | O (1) | O (1) | O (1) | O (1) | X (5) | X (5) | O (1) | O (1) | X (5) | Do your job - get on with it |

*(Figure 6 - Example of RGT)*

The elements were created jointly by both the researcher and the research participants, but the majority (6 out of 9) were the interviewee's choice. The participants were asked to answer a set of 6 questions before the main interview process, as will be explained later in the chapter by describing the research strategy. That is a variation of the possible existing ways of deciding the elements of a study, as mentioned earlier; the interviewer may also be the one who decides on the elements and provides them to the interviewee, or the interviewee is the only one who decides on them. The final choice depends on the scope of the study.

Mazhindu (1992) raised a concern regarding the source of elements and constructs, claiming that in some research conditions (for example, small age groups, low education, little understanding of the language) the participants may find the generation of 'the right kind' of constructs challenging, which might encourage the interviewer to 'lead' the interviewee in times of absence of ideas (Fransella, Bell and Banister 2004). Therefore, RGT is a complex and multi-layered interview method which inevitably requires a knowledgeable and skilful interviewer to use it successfully. To manage that possibility, researchers may use a combination of elicitation and provision of elements as necessary (ibid). This study reflected on that criticism. The intention was to let the participant chef express their opinion on what they think matters that keeps them in or leads them out of their occupation. For that reason, they were let to decide on the majority of the elements on which the interview was based. In addition, the study aimed to refine what is already known about retention in the workplace. Therefore, it was considered necessary that a small number of elements derived from existing theoretical frameworks of employee retention, a list of 11 pre-determined 'bank' elements, be carefully selected by the researcher. However, the research participant was asked to make their own selection (only 3) of the ones that they thought were most important to them and representative of their experience.

As mentioned earlier, the triadic method of construct elicitation was used. The elicited constructs were placed in the grid's two columns at the left and right as opposite poles: 'emerged' and 'implicit' (Fransella, Bell and Bannister 2004). Then, the interviewee was asked to evaluate the pair against each element and mark their answer with '0' if it 'emerged' or 'X' if 'implicit'. The research participant scored these preferences using a Likert scale to receive even richer information about the intensity of the answers. After the grid was completed, the

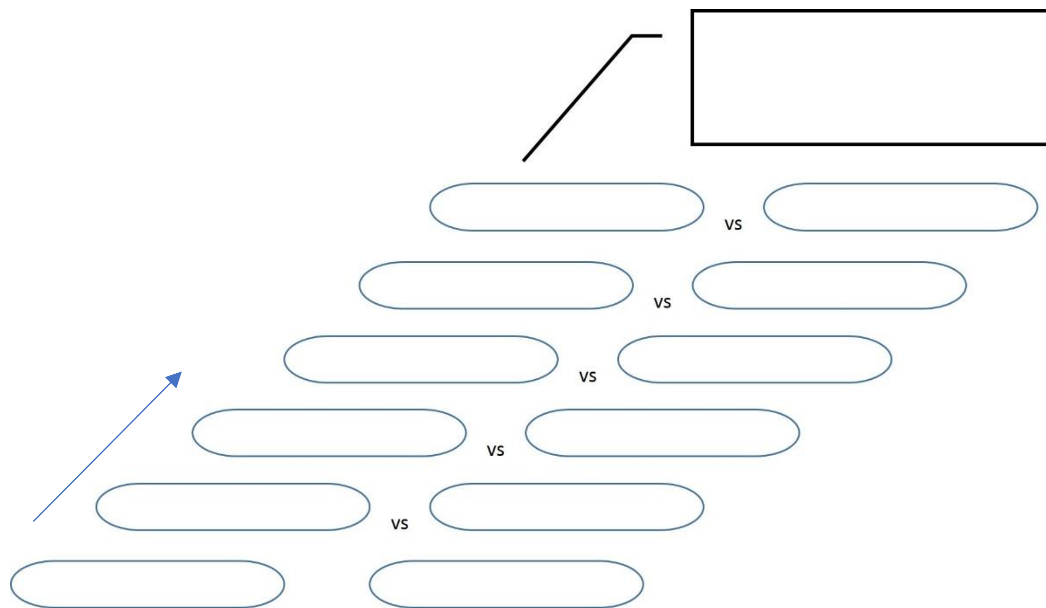
researcher identified patterns of answers given by the interviewee (e.g. highlighted rows in the example of figure 6: 'Chefs are being paid better today – Pressure from the owners to achieve unrealistic things'; 'Service is exciting and dynamic - Without training, there is no service'; and 'Mentoring others to teach others from experience - Do your job - get on with it' follow the same pattern. In addition, this pattern leans to the emerged side).

The elicited constructs were then grouped into categories of shared meanings based on their identified interrelations with each other. Firstly, the interrelation of constructs was achieved with cluster analysis. This study used the FOCUS cluster analysis (Thomas and Shaw 1978). The FOCUS system has been one of the earliest attempts to cluster grid information developed by Thomas and Shaw (1978) and was incorporated in grid-specific computer programs as the RepPlus V1.1 software used for the needs of the present analysis. In this method, elements and constructs are clustered in an integrated grid, allowing the analyst to ensure the precise meaning of the constructs. Although Hartigan (1975) claimed that he devised an algorithm to simultaneously cluster elements and constructs, the validity of the calculation was debatable because the individually set threshold determines it by the user-supplier (Fransella, Bell, Bannister 2004).

The categorisation of constructs could be done in various ways, ultimately creating a set of subordinate and superordinate constructs; the most common in qualitative research is content analysis. The content analysis acknowledges the hierarchical nature of these meaning systems (Miles, Huberman and Saldana 2014; Neimeyer, Anderson and Stockton 2001) and as Kelly (1995) argued, some of the constructions of meanings appear more stable rather than others. Therefore, they signify their position at the core of the meaning system. The constructs that sit at the core are called superordinate constructs (Mahoney (1991) calls them 'core organising principles'), and the ones that sit at the periphery, embracing the core and being more fluid, are called subordinate constructs (Neimeyer, Anderson and Stockton 2001). For some scholars (e.g. Burr, King and Heckmann 2022), content analysis of constructs is close to the traditional thematic analysis used in conventional interviews. They believe that the researcher makes a judgment of the common themes repeated in the interviewees' statements and groups them together under specific headings as they reason most appropriate.

The content analysis of constructs has been claimed by Jankowicz (2004) that is the only feasible way to aggregate the information collected in previous stages. As recorded in the grids and specified in the clustering process, this analysis is achieved by collecting and categorising the meanings attributed to the elicited constructs. For the analysis of the constructs, the study had to bypass a practical challenge: compare multiple grids in which all individual constructs are different while, at the same time, only a few elements are common. That is often met in cases where the researcher wants to give more freedom to the participants to select their elements on their own and offer a deeper understanding of the construing of their reality (Burr, King and Heckmann 2022; Burr and King 2019; Stewart and Stewart 1981). However, Fransella, Bell and Bannister (2004) and Jankowicz (2004) believe this is a challenging task as it requires additional critical interpretation of the participants' answers to create common categories of constructs.

The content analysis concluded with a set of superordinate and subordinate constructs. An approved method to ensure the reliability of elicited superordinate constructs is by revealing the core constructs of the research participant, hence their core values (Steward and Stewart 1981; Jankowicz 2004). This stage is facilitated by a laddering-up process adopted in the study to confirm further the reliability of the content analysis (Neimeyer, Anderson and Stockton 2001). In this process, the strongest patterns of answers observed in the repertory grid are selected and moved into laddering-up; the interviewee is asked to elicit new constructs out of the designated strongest pairs of constructs identified earlier (figure 7). For example, they are asked questions like "why do you prefer the one pole over the other?" and these continue with each newly generated pair of opposite poles until no new construct emerges. That is considered the core construct, which reveals the core value of the interviewee. The purpose of revealing the participants' core constructs or core values is not to ignore or degrade the importance of the rest of the constructs (they are acknowledged and taken into consideration) but to prioritise what matters to them most (Jankowicz 2004).




(Figure 7 – Laddering-up process)

Analysing an individual grid's accumulated data is straightforward, although it requires time. To analyse multiple grids - a more complex task because of the rich data collected - software is used, specifically designed to identify patterns of answers, group the answers of all participants and graphically represent the findings (e.g. in dendrograms similar to taxonomic trees, Cartesian planes, etc.) depending on the study's purpose. The outcome of the analysis is to define the cognitive journey of the participants' thinking on the matter in question in a consistent and rigorous way. That is interpreted as a concept map (Lawson 1997) which shows the relations between the constructs that help individuals make sense of their everyday experiences. This experience is not a matter of memory but of organising that memory in meaningful classifications. That helps people predict, prepare and adapt to future events, which never recur as precisely the same, but as instances of classes or categories (Estes 1996).

### 4.5 Application of RGT in the study

RGT is a method which has been used, although not very frequently, in business and organisation studies (Cassell and Symon 2004; Stewart and Stewart 1981) for many years. In the past, it has also been applied in studies with a partly related purpose to the present research: Person-Job (P-J) and Person-Organisation (P-O) fit perceptions among recruiters

(Kristof-Brown 2000). In that study, Kristof-Brown wanted to ensure that the types of fit (P-J and P-O) that are perceived as distinct by recruiters and in action are treated as such or in an interrelated combination of both. Using RGT, she investigated the candidates' characteristics that recruiters consider essential to determine their P-J fit (knowledge – skills – abilities) and P-O fit (values and personality) and then examined what they do in practice. This type of research provided "compelling evidence" that in reality recruiters make decisions about P-O fit at the early interview stages, even when their tasks are to focus on the candidates' KSAs, hence their P-J fit. Therefore, RGT helped the researcher to bring the recruiters' implicit perceptions to the fore.

The applications of RGT in culinary research mainly refer to marketing and the understanding of consumer behaviour in making personal food preferences explicit (Gains 1994; Thomson and McEwan 1988; Mak, Lumbers, Eves, and Chang 2013). Similarly, this technique has also been used in the field of tourism to reveal travellers' personal images of touristic destinations (Pike and Kotsi 2016; Coshall 2016; Embacher and Buttle 1989). Therefore, the main uses of RGT in hospitality and tourism have been the exploration of personal values in order to reveal reasons that individuals prefer products or services (Glavas, Pike and Mathews 2014). The method has the benefit that it sheds light to the implicit knowledge and makes it explicit. RGT serves the purpose of this study on the retention of chefs because it deepens the understanding of how people construe their reality through everyday critical events and unfolds the conceptual maps they form as they interpret those events. Employee retention is a construct that individuals interpret personally in distinctive ways. However, these personal interpretations reflect the influence of collective opinions too. Therefore, the research needs the tools to classify individuals' meanings to specific incidents and distinguish their personal from their socially influenced beliefs. RGT is an effective tool to deliver on that need.

Personal constructs are not overt and need deeper investigation to make the implicit explicit. This study's research question prompts a broad understanding of what makes chefs remain in their roles. It does not seek to confirm the existence of any preconceived factors of chefs' retention. Instead, the participants need to explore the system of meanings they give to their occupational roles and consider their career decisions. A reflective account of participants' responses in RGT is deeply embedded into the method; hence, it fills this gap between what

is overt and what is covert by helping the researcher make the tacit explicit (Jankowicz 2004) and therefore reveal the unspoken. Consequently, RGT is an integrative and inductive research approach that fits the aim of this research project to analyse what drives chefs to remain in their occupation critically.

RGT is classified as a structured interview due to its tightly organised process (Cassell and Symon 2004). That process meets the needs of the study because, as explained earlier, it allows the chef participants to have control of the elements of the interview and reflect on their responses; that RGT process helps them refine what they understand of the elicited constructs in a structured and consistent way (Jankowicz 2004). An in-depth interview, without this technique, would also prompt the respondents to express their thoughts on the topic in question and, through close interaction with the researcher, expand on their perspectives. That process would be based on the extent to which the interviewer understands and interprets those perspectives. In-depth interview can provide rich data, but it is entirely exploratory and emergent (Saunders, Thornhill and Lewis 2019:438). RGT would additionally allow respondents to question the suitability of their answers and reflect on them concerning (a) other elements of the interview and (b) the level of ownership they show of each one of those answers. RGT's feature of reflexivity allows the above to occur in a structured manner. Additionally, this interview technique, instead of only surfacing the interpretations that interviewees make for the topic in question, classifies them in a way to predict future attitudes in the same or similar context (Kelly 1955; Gao, Jiang, Xie and Cheng 2021). RGT traces specific contextual frameworks in which multiple constructs are compared and helps interviewees make sense of their current and future experiences (Fransella 2005; Jankowicz 2004).

Another area where RGT is suited to this particular area of research is the element of time; they both perceive it similarly. More specifically, deriving from PCT, RGT is an idiographic method (Runyan 1988), which suits those types of research where individuals affect the expression of a social construct (Sammut and Gaskell 2012; Freda 2008). For example, the study questions the retention of chefs; therefore, drawing from the understanding of past experience, it projects the behaviour of chefs into the future regarding staying in or leaving their jobs. Similarly, RGT is based on the belief that personal constructs depend on people's

anticipation of the future and the possibility that the researcher predicts future individual behaviour:

> "*Anticipation is both the push and pull of the psychology of personal construct"* (Kelly 1955:49).

The element of anticipation, as analysed in the literature review, is a recurring theme in theories of employee retention, such as JE. In terms of the future, employees who remain in their jobs expect something in return for their stay (Kiazad et al. 2015), which affects their work behaviour and withdrawal cognitions (Aquino, Griffeth, Allen, and Hom 1997). In terms of the past, they make sense of everyday events through the individual mechanisms they have learnt to put into action to evaluate the world's happenings (Kelly 1955). In these terms, future and past coexist in JE and retention, which is also a key characteristic of RGT.

RGT builds on the foundations of qualitative methods but keeps the balance between quantitative and qualitative principles, with the former to test theory (personally constructed) and the latter to create theory. Holtom et al. (2008) believe that the field of employee retention is more holistically researched with qualitative methods, partly because of the contextual influences on turnover and retention and the complexities of the alternatives of the market regardless of the job holder's job satisfaction, commitment, involvement, support, etc. or lack of (ibid: 250-251). They also add that grasping the individual moments of the research participants in longitudinal studies would add further credibility to qualitative findings because they acknowledged the temporal elements in the individual's decisions to seek another job. That would require an in-depth understanding of the participant's experiences to explore "how the turnover decision exactly proceeds and what considerations take precedence at what times" (ibid: 258). Jiang, et al. (2012), in their meta-analytic investigation of JE, argue that they do not see the point of finding one more theory to explain employee retention and turnover. Instead, it is more important to understand how JE is linked with, causes or explains other constructs (e.g. turnover). That implies either meta-analytic studies or studies that map how individuals cognitively process their decisions to stay or leave their occupation. The latter, which has not often been used in studies of chefs' retention up to now, allows researchers to identify conceptual maps of the research participants and predict future actions. It identifies and justifies the structured journey of their thoughts that

lead them to their anticipated decision. Therefore, RGT is a suitable tool which covers a procedural need to research and understand the field of employee retention deeper.

**4.6 Sampling**

There is no reliable record to describe the number of chefs in the United Kingdom besides the data presented by the Office for National Statistics (ONS). Therefore, it was impossible to draw a valid list of chefs in the UK for the study. The latest record was published in 2019, accounting for collected data from 2009 until 2017. Following 2019, the industry entered an unprecedented turbulent period, the COVID-19 pandemic, during which the commercial kitchen went through dramatic changes (recurring lockdowns, extended furloughed kitchen personnel, expansion of the takeaway industry and home deliveries, etc.), which affected the numbers of cooks and chefs significantly. After the market environment becomes stable again, ONS may conduct and publish updated records of the number of chefs in the country. Therefore, the available list is limited and cannot guarantee high reliability (ONS 2019). According to its latest account, there were 159,000 chefs in the UK in 2017. Also, other organisational bodies which support and promote the chef's occupation (Michelin Guide, British Culinary Federation (BCF), Craft Guild of Chefs, UKHospitality, and the Association of Pastry Chefs) are fragmented, partial and not reliably inclusive.

Consequently, other means of collecting and sorting the sample of participants who fit the study requirements were required. That included the researcher's personal network developed during many years of involvement in training chefs and over 15 years as an international HRM consultant in hotels and restaurants. In addition, a detailed search for chefs' Linkedin and Twitter accounts that suited the study's criteria, word of mouth and the use of people of influence in hospitality, including university schools of hospitality in London and Birmingham, were also used.

The study aimed at particular groups of chefs. Based on the definitions of chefs given in the literature review and adopted by the study, the research sample consists of commercial kitchen employees titled chefs (head chefs, executive chefs, chefs, sous chefs, senior chefs, demi chefs, pastry chefs) with an experience of over ten years in the commercial kitchen,

irrespective of gender, educational background, and ethnic origins. They worked in casual/ upper casual restaurants and hotel restaurants in the geographical locations of the Midlands, London and the South of England for reasons of convenience and concentration of the majority of the chefs' jobs in the country (approximately 25% in London and the Midlands being the biggest employer of chefs outside London) (ONS 2019). However, it is acknowledged that chefs are highly mobile, and it is prevalent to see someone who has worked in various places nationwide and abroad; therefore, this criterion was not considered critical for the sample.

If all categories of the chef's occupation should be represented in the present study, fine dining, casual dining, chain restaurants, hotel restaurants and catering should have been referenced. However, the present sample is limited to two categories: casual/ upper casual restaurants and hotel restaurants. The reason for this selection is that the research puts the emphasis (a) on those chefs who feel they maintain a good level of ownership in the innovative creation of their dishes, so they play a big part in the delivery of authentic gastronomy and (b) on categories where large numbers of chefs are employed. To that end, sampling ruled out fine dining restaurants because the number of chefs working in 'haute cuisine' is limited. Similarly, chain restaurants (including 'ghost kitchens' (Ashton, Tuomi and Backman 2022) that have recently appeared in the industry) and catering were excluded from the sample because food and cooking in these categories are highly automated and repetitive, and chefs do not tend to feel they actively contribute to the food creations, nor do they feel they are being creative in their role (Robinson and Barron 2007).

The sample size of this study began with a horizon of twenty participants. Although this target cannot be absolute, it derived from claims of past RGT uses in business and organisational studies (Ginsberg 1989; Dunn, Cahill, Dukes and Ginsberg 1986), where a number between fifteen and twenty-five participants were claimed to reveal sufficient constructs to reach "the universe of meaning" of the research topic in question (Tan and Hunter 2002). Furthermore, Dunn et al. (1986) research to identify cognitive models of leaders in business settings proved that all constructs had emerged by the tenth interview and the remaining seven that they undertook replicated what had already been recorded. Finally, 23 chefs were interviewed in this study.

The size of the research sample is guided by the study's argument that it does not aim to identify and compare factors that contribute to the emergence of a situation (occupational retention of chefs) but to explore the concept maps of the participants who decide to stay in their jobs. That is a complex and highly idiographic approach in which each participant gives meaning to the predominantly self-elicited elements of their stay. Therefore, this study began with the intention to reach the abovementioned threshold and, by reassessing the state of findings at that point, continue with new participants until no new constructs emerge from the interviews. The situation where enough concepts, categories of data or dimensions of a research topic have been identified is called theoretical saturation, a common practice in qualitative research (Glaser and Strauss 1967). Recent developments have seen new methods to calculate saturation points with relative accuracy (Guest, Namey and Chen 2020). More specifically, the research adopted the recent method of Guest et al. (2020), who calculated the saturation point of the repertory grid interviews according to the *base size* (number of elements produced in the first run to consist of the base of the exercise), the *run length* (number of interviews to be examined in each round) and the *new information threshold* (the accepted number of new elements produced after each round). The method was effectively applied in this study and described below.

Two exercises were tried to assess the saturation of interview numbers: one modest and one more demanding. Initially, they considered the number of elements expressed by research participants because the study asked participants to create the elements of the RGT and not the researcher. Therefore, the elements were the critical information of the interviews to determine their appropriate numbers for the study. In the first exercise, the starting point was chosen to be four interviews (see appendix 1); the base size of elements was 24, the run length was set at two interviews each time, and the new information threshold was determined at ≤4%. The results showed that the research reached its saturation point at the 12th interview. In the second exercise, the starting point was set to be six interviews, therefore becoming more demanding. The base size of elements was then found to be 29, the run length was set at three interviews each time, and the new information threshold was determined at ≤0%. This time, the results showed that the saturation point was the 17th interview. These results gave a good safety net to the study, which continued until it reached

23 interviews in total, ensuring that the sample was appropriate for the study and that no other elements were introduced.

RGT, which was adopted in the study, takes the participant's opinions deeper into their perceived meanings of daily or significant events (elements) of a topic in question. Therefore, research findings gain credibility from the depth and quality of analysis of data collected by the suitable sample, not from the number of participants (Jankowicz 2004).

The majority of the research participants consisted of male chefs, reflecting the male domination of the occupation. According to the national statistics, only 11-13% of chefs are female (ONS 2019) and in most cases, are pastry chefs.

All research participants in this study were experienced chefs who work in the UK. Deriving from the findings of the main report on the chefs' shortage (People 1st 2017) and the official governmental data (ONS 2019), experienced chefs in the study are the ones who have spent significant time in the occupation, enough to promote them to such roles where they share both special technical skills and managerial responsibilities in the commercial kitchen (head chefs, chefs, executive chefs, sous chefs, pastry chefs). Typically, this requires the person to have spent a significant number of years in the commercial kitchen as it has been found that they are more positively related to job retention (Holtom et al 2008). Employees who have stayed for an adequate period on the job (no specific benchmark exists, although some scholars (Lysova, Fletcher and Baroudi 2022) have assumed that ten years of service is adequate to understand the meaning of their job and develop more consistent work behaviours) tend to stay for long rather than leave (Mitchel et al 2001; Abelson 1987). Therefore, the selected interviewees had over ten years of experience and were matched with the research purpose, which intended to interview chefs with significant experience in the job. The sample filtered out chefs at the beginning of their careers and selected only the ones who had spent more than ten years in their roles. That was consistent with the findings of People 1st report (2017), according to which a large proportion of chefs (between 20% and 40%) leave their occupation after having spent the first period of on-the-job training in the commercial kitchen (Giousmpasoglou, Brown and Cooper 2020; Zopiatis and Melanthiou 2019).

According to the ONS's latest published data (2019), only 19.5% of the total population of chefs in the UK had a degree of any kind in 2017, while 12% had no qualifications at all. Between these two opposite poles, job occupants possess GCSEs, A-levels, or other various qualifications. However, during the last ten years, the record shows an upsurge of chefs with higher education degrees or equivalent (over 100% increase). That has been recorded in other countries, too (e.g. Ireland), indicating a trend towards more educated people leading the commercial kitchen recently (Allen and Mac Con Iomaire 2016). However, it did not imply that a barrier has been raised to other chefs with no degree; on the contrary, degree-educated chefs are still the minority. For the above reasons, the sample of the study tried to include participants who possess a variety of qualifications, academic and non-academic (practical).

More specifically, details of the research participants are described in the following table 1:

| | **Age group** | **Gender** | **Job role** | **Years of Experience** | **Category (star rating)** | **Size of restaurant (in seats)** | **Education** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| P1 | >50 | Male | Chef/ Owner | 20 | Casual/ Upper Casual | 120-130 | College – Catering & Hotel Management |
| P2 | 40-49 | Male | Chef/ Owner | 21 | Casual/ Upper Casual | 62-160 | University – Culinary studies & Hotel Management |
| P3 | >50 | Male | Head Chef | 30 | Casual/ Upper Casual | 70 | College – Food Technology |
| P4 | 40-49 | Male | Exec Chef | 23 | Hotel (4-star) | 120 | University – Hospitality Management & Catering |
| P5 | 40-49 | Male | Chef | 18 | Hotel (4-star) | 80 | College – Catering |
| P6 | >50 | Male | Chef Direct or | 30 | Casual/ Upper Casual & Hotel (5 & 4-star) | 60-300 | NVQ – Advanced Pastry |
| P7 | 30-39 | Male | Chef Direct or | 23 | Casual/ Upper Casual & Hotel (4-star) | 70-120 | Apprentice/ NVQ – Food preparation & Cooking |
| P8 | 40-49 | Male | Chef Direct or | 18 | Casual/ Upper Casual & Hotel (4-star) | 90-1000 | HE – Multisite Leadership & Management |
| P9 | >50 | Female | Head Chef | 20 | Casual/ Upper Casual | 135-150 | University – Law / NVQ – Special recipes & techniques |
| P10 | 40-49 | Male | Head Chef | 18 | Hotel (4-star) | 50-100 | College – Food Science & Technology and Culinary Arts |
| P11 | 30-39 | Male | Sous Chef | 12 | Hotel (4-star) | 110 | College – Chef/ Culinary Studies |
| P12 | 25-29 | Male | Sous Chef | 10 | Casual/ Upper Casual | 150 | Apprenticeship in Cookery |

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| P13 | 40-49 | Male | Executive Chef | 24 | Hotel (4-star) | 70 | Apprenticeship in Cookery (NVQ L3) |
| P14 | 30-39 | Male | Chef Director | 25 | Casual/ Upper Casual & Hotel (4-star) | 50-110 | College in Hotel Management |
| P15 | 30-39 | Male | Head Chef | 24 | Casual/ Upper Casual | 40-100 | Apprenticeship in Hotels & Catering (NVQ L2 & 3) |
| P16 | 30-39 | Male | Group Head Chef | 22 | Hotel (5-star) | 40 | Apprenticeship in Cookery (NVQ) |
| P17 | 30-39 | Female | Development Chef | 16 | Casual/ Upper Casual | 250 sites | NVQ L3 in Hospitality & Catering |
| P18 | 40-49 | Male | Director of Culinary | 25 | Hotel (4-star) | 80-110 | NVQ L3 in Hospitality & Catering |
| P19 | 30-39 | Female | Director of Culinary | 20 | Casual/ Upper Casual | 60-180 | Apprenticeship in Food Trade |
| P20 | 40-49 | Male | Sous Chef | 10 | Casual/ Upper Casual | 130 | College in Photography - Culinary Art and Chef training |
| P21 | 40-49 | Male | Head Chef | 24 | Casual/ Upper Casual | 32 | HE in Hotel & Catering Management |
| P22 | 40-49 | Female | Executive Chef for specialist support | 18 | Hotel (4-star) | 50-200 | HE in Languages & Vocational Qualification in Fine Dining |
| P23 | 40-49 | Male | Head Chef | 25 | Casual/ Upper Casual | 80 | College in Construction & Apprenticeship in Cooking |

*(Table 1: Sample Description)*

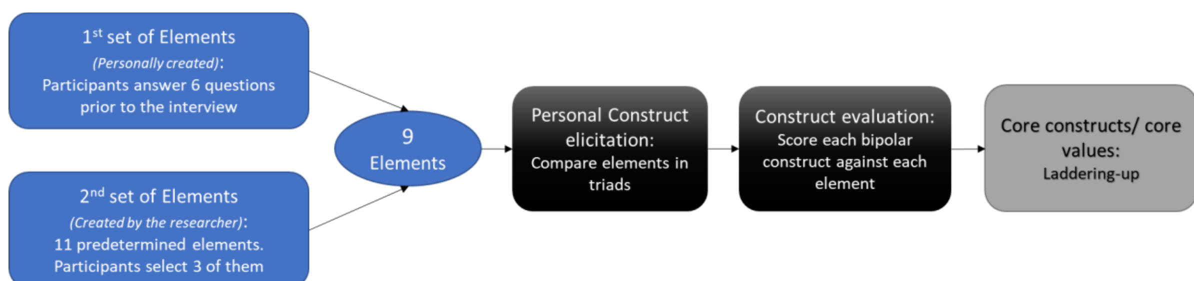
Research participants were asked for their consent to participate in the study, and interviews were initially arranged in their place of work or other neutral places (nearby hotels) in case restaurants were very busy. However, the country entered a national lockdown due to the coronavirus spike soon after the data collection when the pilot study started. Therefore, the plan was adjusted accordingly. Since no travelling and physical interaction were permitted in the country, interviews were conducted online via Zoom or MsTeams (see below for a more detailed discussion of this impact on the research).

The above restrictions to collect a reliable record of chefs and the filters used for selecting the appropriate participants allow the use of a non-probability sample. In particular, the pilot study was conducted with 'convenience' sampling, and the main study was purposive ('homogeneous' and 'typical case') and volunteer ('self-selection' and 'snowball') sampling (Saunders, Thornhill and Lewis 2019:297).

The selected research method stemming from PCT faces a dilemma: does it follow sampling theory of any kind or concept formation (Kelly 1955)? George Kelly classified sampling theory mainly under quantitative methods, but PCT derives from qualitative ones. Therefore, a researcher who applies personal construct research practice should not request probability sampling; non-probability sampling is more relevant as there is no attempt to confirm a set hypothesis in this research methodology. If the research aim were to confirm the applicability of JE and OE in the context of the chef industry, then probability sampling would have been the most suitable method to use. However, the aim was broader than the above, to refine the understanding of chefs' retention by using existing theoretical frameworks and other relative studies that concluded unclassified findings about their retention.

## 4.7 Interview design

The interviews of the study followed a procedure which carefully reflected the needs of RGT to create the right elements of the research interviews, elicit the personal constructs and proceed to the generation of core constructs/ core values of the participants. That process is visually represented in figure 8.




*(Figure 8 The interview process)*

To ensure that the implementation of the research method adopted is comprehensive and appropriately accepted by the interviewees, the collection of data process started with a small-scale pilot study consisting of two research participants. The purpose was to test participants' understanding of the RGT and feedback on any points of concern, misunderstandings and challenging parts of the interview process. The pilot phase proved a necessary part of the process. It helped:

(a) regulate the timings of the interview appropriately from over an hour to just under one hour,

(b) illustrate a couple of practicalities in the patterns of optimum selection of the cards of elements in trios and recording the constructs on the grid,

(c) clarify one of the questions used to elicit the preferred elements so that the interviewees generated no queries about its exact meaning,

(d) adapt a couple of the pre-determined 'bank' elements so that they do not overlap other elements frequently raised by the participants, and finally

(e) give the researcher some insights about using the most appropriate language to describe the interview process to be as transparent as possible to chefs.

Before the beginning of the main phase of the primary research with the use of RGT, and after incorporating the adaptations of the pilot phase, a new situation emerged: the COVID-19 pandemic which forced restaurants to stop operations three times nationwide (with many local variations of the lockdowns) for nearly two years. This new life and work conditions imposed on people enforced significant changes to the delivery of the selected research method. However, these changes did not affect the interviews' structure, process or core content. Two of the interviews (pilot) were taken in the pre-COVID19 period, therefore, carried out face-to-face at the professional premises of the interviewees. Unfortunately, after national lockdown restrictions in March 2020 the plans had to change and adapt to the new situation. Since travelling around the country was not allowed, physical contact with interviewees was not possible, so the interview process moved online. One more pilot

interview was conducted online to test the applicability of this move from physical to online delivery.

Other researchers had not tried the online transition of RGT in the past. Therefore, there was caution about its online practicality and the level of acceptance by the research participants. Since the beginning of the pandemic, other researchers who were also in the middle of using RGT for their studies found themselves in the same situation and faced the need to try the interview technique online without any record of applicability (Yamnitsky and Jankowicz 2020). The application proved challenging but successful and set the example for future applications by other researchers too. All the rest of the interviews were conducted via an interactive platform of video communication, either Zoom or MS Teams, depending on the participants' preference and familiarity with either. The use of such platforms was necessary as the interviewer had to consecutively share three screens with the interviewees, allowing them to

(a) visually work on the virtual cards containing the elements that they had to comment on;

(b) rate their generated personal constructs against each one of the elements; and

(c) see the laddering process of exploring their core construct/ core value for their retention in the chef's occupation.

In most cases, the participants used their laptops, except in two cases when a mobile device with a large screen was used. The process is illustrated in detail in the following paragraphs.

After the interviewee was informed about the research subject and agreed via email, LinkedIn or Twitter message to participate in the study, they signed the participant's consent form and emailed it to the researcher. The next stage was to create the interview elements that the interviewees would have to consider to construe the reality of their occupation. As explained earlier, the study employed the option of joint creation of the elements between the researcher and the participant (Stewart and Stewart 1981), emphasising the participant's view more. This decision has many advantages, as Stewart and Stewart (1981) argue: participants feel a higher degree of ownership, which makes them more willing to participate in the interview process. In addition, the researcher collects meaningful data from the

responses of all participants collectively and makes further interpretations as to what elements about the nature of their job are more meaningful than others, a process that has a research value on its own. However, allowing participants to choose the elements of the RG in its entirety would be a risky practice as the unique selection of elements among all participants of the research would make the creation of patterns and their analysis by the researcher more complex. The interviewee had to answer six questions (table 2) before the interview process to reveal critical situations of their career choice, which led them to become chefs at the beginning of their career, retain them in the job now, and potentially keep them in the occupation for longer. Therefore, the questions referred to the past, present and future of their commercial kitchen career, reflecting the temporal nature of fitting into a job (Jansen and Shipp 2019). That happened before the beginning of the interview, so they formed the foundation of the RG interview. It is important to note that the element questions were presented in pairs of opposites to balance the quality of elements between what keeps chefs on the job and what drives them out of the job.

| | |
|---|---|
| 1. | Can you think of a couple of conditions that drove you into the chef's profession? |
| 2. | Can you think of a couple of conditions that could have driven you out of the chef's profession? |
| 3. | What is it that you like most in your job as a chef? |
| 4. | What is it that you don't like at all (or the most) in your job as a chef? |
| 5. | What would make your job ideal in the future? |
| 6. | What would make your job unattractive hence wanting to leave in the future? |

*(Table 2 – Creation of the elements by the interviewee)*

Following the initial questions, which led to the created-by-the-interviewee elements of the RG interview, the researcher added the rest of the elements (three) to complete the expected number of nine elements overall. Fransella, Bell and Bannister (2004) argued that nine is the optimum number of elements because it allows them to divide in trios and efficiently work out the polarised constructs. The critical analysis of the literature, coupled with the personal knowledge and experience the researcher has in the hospitality industry, contributed to the

creation of a set of elements that the researcher banked and used in the interviews, adapting to each case separately. These elements were elicited from three main fields: (i) the uncategorised literature on chefs' retention, (ii) the model of JE (Mitchel et al. 2001; Lee et al. 2004 ) and OE (Ng and Feldman 2007; Adams, Webster and Buyarski 2010) which explains employee retention in organisational settings, and (iii) the theory of internal locus of control (Rotter 1966; Galvin, Randel, Collins and Johnson 2018). It is important to note that those elements were adapted to the context of the study and were not direct statements taken from the theoretical models of employee retention mentioned earlier. Table 3 below pictures those elements followed by the sources deriving from them.

| **Element** | **Element category** | **Source** |
|---|---|---|
| Unexplained personal attraction to the work of a chef | Independent reasons | Duffy et al. 2018; Cain, Busser and Kang 2017; Allen and Iomaire 2016 |
| Admiration of the skills of my best friend/-s in the kitchen | | Nasyira, Othman, Ghazali 2014; Yang, Gong and Huo 2011 |
| Loving the challenging work of servicing demanding customers | | Robinson 2008; Galvin et al. 2018; Cooper 2012; Chivers 1973 |
| I naturally fit in the atmosphere of the commercial kitchen | Job Embeddedness | Mitchell et al. 2001 |
| Living with and watching a close family member performing in the kitchen | | Lee, Burch and Mitchell 2014; Adams, Webster and Buyarski 2010; Carbery et al. 2003 |
| Inspiration by the behaviours of the owner of the restaurant (n/a if you are the one) OR your restaurant manager | | Knight and Leimer 2009; Tatar, Muceldili and Erdil 2018; Akgunduz and Sanli 2017; Nasyira, Othman, Ghazali 2014; Selden, Schimmoeller, Thompson 2013 |
| Wanting to be like my role model (from the chef's occupation) | | Robinson and Beesley 2010; Mitchell et al. 2001 |
| Wanting to be the best and compete with anyone in my domain | | Robinson 2008; Mitchell et al. 2001; Galvin et al. 2018 |
| I have no other alternative as good as this one | | Robinson 2008; Lee, Burch and Mitchell 2014 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| An incident or person that has “shocked” me and turned me into a chef | | Holtom and Interrieden 2006; Lee et al. 1999; Lee and Mitchell 1994 |
| Leaving my legacy behind to make my family proud | Internal Locus of Control | Treuren 2009; Carbery et al. 2003; Deery 2008; |

*(Table 3 – Bank of elements)*

In the next stage, each of the agreed elements was written on electronic 5X3 cards separately. These were shared with the interviewee on the computer screen via the online communication platform (Zoom or MsTeams) in a 3X3 structure and random order. Simultaneously, the researcher was working in the background, entering them into the computer so that the nine elements were entered into the grid horizontally, as figure 6 showed earlier. Then, the researcher followed patterns of selecting three cards of three elements and showed them to the interviewee, who was asked to answer the following question:

> *"In what ways do you see two of those elements being similar to each other and different to the third one?"*

Answers revealed two poles of personal constructs, which were put in the grid's vertical columns to the left and right. The ones on the left were considered the 'emerged' constructs, and the ones on the right were the 'implied' constructs. That was repeated in patterns of as many triads of elements as judged necessary by the researcher (usually eight triads).

The following stage of the process required the evaluation of the constructs. Each pair of constructs was compared and assessed with each element. The interviewee answered the question:

> *"Which one of the constructs of the two poles brings you closer to the 'XYZ' element?"*

If they answered the first one on the left, a symbol of '0' was noted on the grid; if they answered the second on the left, then a symbol of 'X' was noted. Figure 6 presents an example of how this is pictured.

After completing the grid, the researcher tried to find common patterns of answers, focusing more on the 'emerged' dominance. For example, as shown in the yellow shaded rows of figure 6, the 'Mentoring others to teach others from experience – Do your job–get on with it', the 'Service is exciting and dynamic – Without training, there is no service', and the 'Chefs are

being paid better today – Pressure from the owners to achieve unrealistic things', all follow the same pattern. That pattern was considered the most important in the grid and was used to proceed to a laddering-up interview process. First, the interviewee was asked to find the key message of the constructs of the same pattern, and the researcher placed the newly created construct on the ladder up. Secondly, the interviewee looked at the above pair of constructs as in figure 7 presented earlier, and was asked the question (in this example):

> *"Why do you prefer to mentor others and teach them from your experience instead of letting them do their job and get on with it?"*

The participant's answer was put in the box next above, and he was asked again to think of the opposite pole, generating a new construct. The same process was repeated several times until the interviewee returned to the same construct, unable to express any new ideas. That point would sign the end of the process, and the final construct would be the core value of the participant.

**4.8 The Process of analysis**

Findings were analysed using RepPlus V1.1, a software specifically developed to analyse the rich data collected from multiple RGT interviews. Dendrograms generated from the comparison of the constructs of all interviews presented the conceptual maps of the research participants, signifying the ones that were closely linked together and, at the same time, the significance they had with the topic in question. Therefore, participants' meanings of specific situations occurring in the research context were classified logically and could predict the future actions of people living in the same context and similar situations (Fransella 2005; Jankowicz 2004).

Data analysis followed a funnelling process with the following stages: it started with analysing the elements in the research as the foundation of the interviews. It then moved on to cluster analysis, a technique to highlight the pattern of relationships in the individual repertory grids by grouping the constructs based on the similarity of individual ratings (Jankowicz 2004). The unit of analysis here was the grid. For the categorisation of the constructs, the study at this stage used the bootstrapping technique, initially developed by Horsti (1968) and later elaborated by Neuendorf (2002). According to them, the grids needed to be examined

separately, and each construct was examined in pairs. If two constructs looked similar, they were grouped under a meaningful title reflecting the researcher's interpretation. They were put under different categories if they did not share any ordinary meaning. The parallel review of the dendrograms was catalytic in the interpretation of the constructs as it offered an additional layer of analysis which elaborated the context of the occurrence of the constructs. The exact process was followed with all possible pairs of each grid until the examination of all elicited grids was finished.

The next stage was a content analysis of the constructs elicited from the participants as a way to aggregate the large set of information gathered from the 23 repertory grid interviews. That stage helped categorise the diverse meanings of the constructs (Jankowicz 2004). It ended up with the creation of superordinate and subordinate constructs representing the chefs' most important meanings they give to their job retention. The unit of analysis in this stage now was the individual constructs, not the grid. An adaptation of Horsti's (1968) bootstrapping technique (definition of the construct categories was added to the original approach) was also employed for the content analysis of the constructs. According to it, the interrelation of content and context of the constructs gives meaning to them both; every category of the created constructs was generated by concentrating on the information collected in each repertory grid (content) in relation to the transcribed narrative of each participant and the preceding clustering process of analysis (context). Whenever the construct seemed equivocal and the category to be allocated was uncertain, the context of the answers was considered for a more accurate understanding. The meaning attributed to the elicited constructs helped to interpret those constructs appropriately and fit them in the most suitable categories.

The study made a further step to ensure the validity of the categorisation of those constructs; the participants proceeded to create their core constructs/ core values through the laddering-up process described earlier. The expectation was that these would not have anything to add to or change from the superordinate and subordinate categories of constructs generated in the content analysis.

For increased reliability of the grouping of elements and constructs into meaningful categories, the complete research sample was tested by two parties: the researcher and an additional independent and neutral to the study analyst. That analyst was asked to categorise

the elements and the constructs separately without knowing the initial categorisation completed by the primary researcher. The person was an experienced researcher in social studies, briefed about the study's purpose and the adopted research process. She was asked to interpret the participants' answers and create appropriate categories based on their distinct meaning that was personally understood.

Adding a second researcher in qualitative studies to independently carry out a content analysis of interviews to ensure the results' reliability is not unusual. It has usually been adopted in the past (Ford, Oberski, and Higgins 2000), especially in the coding process of thematic analyses (King, Brooks and Tabari 2018:194). Jankowicz (2004: 150) also reminds the RGT user of the principle of reproducibility introduced by Hill (1995, cited in Jankowicz 2004) as one of the key steps to ensure the reliability of the categories identified in a content analysis of constructs. Berg (2001:257) also believes that this step is necessary to safeguard the validity of the content analysis and confirm that the researcher's claims and assertions have not derived from a misreading of the data and that they have been documented adequately. Troyna and Foster (1988) justified the involvement of a second person (or more) to spot any possible misinterpretation of information or avoid the possibility of a particular meaning being glossed over by the researcher. In their view, collaboration in the research process is desirable, echoing what Berg (2001) also states. In this study, the independent auxiliary researcher had minimal involvement in the analysis process; it was limited to interpreting the elements, eliciting the research constructs, and categorising them logically. Therefore, she could not be considered a 'collaborator' but entirely neutral for the study, which strengthened the validity of her judgment. That judgment was compared with the initial analysis of the researcher. Any adjustments and clarifications were made for the final presentation of the superordinate and subordinate categories of constructs.

It is acknowledged that in qualitative studies, it is impossible to claim a definitive 'final' categorisation of data (King, Brooks and Tabari 2018). What is necessary, though, is the consistency of the data analysis with the study's philosophical approach (Symon and Cassell 2012). Since the present study is ontologically positioned in relativism and epistemologically in constructive alternativism, it would be incongruent to seek realistic evidence for the conclusive categorisation of elements and constructs generated by the research participants.

More specifically, the comparison between the two different perspectives on categorising elements and constructs resulted in minimum adjustments, as shown in Table 4.

| **Categories of Elements** | | |
|---|---|---|
| % new categories of elements identified | % categories of elements rephrased | % of elements reallocated |
| 15.90%<br>(7 out of 44) | 22.72%<br>(10 out of 44) | 1.45%<br>(3 out of 207) |
| **Categories of Constructs** | | |
| % categories of constructs identified | % categories of constructs rephrased | % of constructs reallocated |
| 18.95%<br>(29 categories out of 153 constructs) | 10.45%<br>(16 out of 153) | 3.26%<br>(5 out of 153) |

*(Table 4 Differences in the categorisation of elements and constructs by second analyst)*

The second analyst rephrased 10 out of the 44 categories of elements that were initially identified. However, this rephrasing was very close to the actual meaning of the initial ones (e.g. belonging to a team vs teamwork; family influence/ memory vs family; impact on self-image vs lack of appreciation; excitement vs challenge & intensity of the job; etc.). As a result of that, six final titles of the categories were rephrased to meet the perspectives of both analysts (e.g. 'family influence' instead of just 'family'; 'love and passion' instead of 'love'; 'belonging in a team' instead of 'teamwork'; 'Better work conditions (staffing/ training infrastructure)' instead of 'Better work conditions (trained teams)'; etc.). Regarding any reallocations of elements, only 3 of them were considered necessary to be placed under a different category.

Similarly, this exercise was applied to the categorisation of the constructs. The second analyst rephrased the understanding of 16 out of the 153 elicited constructs, and in total, she created 29 categories of constructs. The great majority of them were very close to the titles given to

the initial categories (e.g. self-esteem/ pride vs ambition; self-discipline vs consistency; need for appreciation vs intrinsic drive; etc.), so they were merged under the same - or in one case slightly adjusted - label ('suit of ambition/ assertiveness' instead of a category of 'assertiveness' and a category of 'ambition'). Regarding any reallocations of constructs, only 5 of them were considered necessary to be placed under different categories, which according to Jankowicz (2004), is a minimum adjustment and indicates the reliable content analysis process.

Overall, the study did not see any ethical concerns in bringing in an additional independent analysis of the elements and constructs of the research since the process was managed separately, and the person involved was knowledgeable and had neutral relation with the study.

### 4.9 Ethical considerations

Given the nature of the topic, which involves close interaction between the researcher and research participants on a person-to-person basis, the following ethical considerations were made regarding how they were approached, questioned and respected in the accurate interpretation of their responses. In addition, the researcher followed necessary ethical processes governed by the university's guidance to ensure that participants were treated ethically and respectfully, with confidentiality and sensitivity to any issues related to their personal and professional lives.

All individuals involved in the project received adequate information about the scope and context of the research prior to asking them for their consent (appendices 4 and 5). The anonymity and confidentiality of interviews were confirmed in writing. That was central to the later analysis of results as all information is private and hence cannot be openly disclosed (Giordano et al. 2007). Research participants were represented by a code number to which only the researcher had access. Input from interviews was digitally recorded with the interviewees' consent (only one participant did not give consent to be recorded) and stored encrypted in the researchers' account in the university's OneDrive. Participants retained the right to ask to be removed after the end of the project, but nobody did.

Due to the nature of RGT, the risk of the process was low. Participants were not asked sensitive questions, nor were the views of the researcher imposed on them at any point of the interview because both they and the researcher created a set of elements from their job practice and individually built their constructs. They were also given the opportunity to reflect on their answers and understand their position about why they stayed in their jobs at the same time as they were contributing to the research. As Fransella (2005) argues, the benefit of RGT is twofold: firstly, as a reliable tool to answer complex research questions and secondly, as a structured opportunity for the research participant to reflect on their perspectives of their reality and understand their positions deeper in a safe environment. However, in case the participant felt uncomfortable with the interview process or their answers because they might trigger stressful feelings experienced at work in the past, the researcher had visual contact with them to spot it and could ask them to permit to continue or stop the interview. Although it did not happen in any of the interviews taken, it was considered possible, so the research tool ensured a safe environment for the interviewee.

Specific frameworks of ethical research behaviour were followed in the course of the project. Because of the particular interests of the project in the field of Organisational Psychology and Human Resource Management, this abided by the CIPD's code of professional conduct (CIPD 2017) and the ESRC Framework for Research Ethics (FRE) (ESRC 2015). The research also adhered to Coventry University's (2013) "Principles and Standards of Conduct on the Governance of Research". In addition, the appropriate procedure of medium-to-high-risk approval by the Faculty/School Ethics & Governance Leader was followed.

Due to the need for efficient use of time for the data collection phase, data were processed using appropriate software (RepPlus V1.1). It has also been argued that using technology to analyse the constructs is more effective than manual administration (Harlim 2017).

### 4.10 Concluding remarks

The chapter presented the study's methodological approach by explaining its philosophical perspective and justifying the followed research method. The adoption of PCT with the corresponding interview practice of RGT was the appropriate pathway to answer the study's

research question and refine the understanding of chefs' retention. The challenge of moving the RG interviews online was unprecedented but managed successfully in the end. Although it was new to the community of RGT practitioners (Yamnitsky and Jankowicz 2020), it followed the principles of the technique carefully and provided reliable results which were further tested for their validity with the use of the laddering-up process that followed.

The design of this study and selection of the research method was appropriate to refine the existing knowledge of chefs' retention. RGT provided the research platform on which the research participants expressed their hidden beliefs about their careers as chefs, their fears, what keeps them in and could drive them out of the commercial kitchen.

Before starting the study, the researcher was aware of the foundations of Personal Construct Theory on a theoretical level but had no prior knowledge of the RGT, so he had to learn its details from the manuals. Published "how to" guides of repertory grids (Fransella, Bell and Bannister 2004; Jankowicz 2004) helped the researcher understand the theory and practice of the particular research method. Stewart and Stewart (1981) have also described a wide range of applications of RGT in business studies, which proved very helpful for designing the most suitable design of the present research.

A major benefit of this method for the interviewees was the consistent opportunity they had during the whole process of the interviews to reflect on their answers. They were given high levels of autonomy to decide based on the interview (setting the elements of the interview). They experienced the benefits of reflecting on their answers after eliciting the constructs of their reality in their job and reaching their core constructs about the reasons they stay in the industry. The researcher's input was checked by the interviewees so that any constructs added into the grids were agreed on and participants satisfied with. Analysing the research findings was lengthy and time-consuming. It followed many interrelated analysis steps until it reached the final interpretation of the conceptual retention map in the commercial kitchen. Details of the data analysis process follow in the next chapter.

# Chapter 5. Analysis of Data

## 5.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the evidence collected to enrich the understanding of why chefs remain in their jobs. The evidence was collected from the interviews conducted online via Zoom meetings using the Repertory Grid Technique (RGT). The participants' responses were analysed and categorised based on the answers to the six questions before the interviews (see table 1), plus the selection of 3 out of 11 elements pre-set by the researcher (see figure 9). The participants' answers formed each individual's nine elements of the Repertory Grid and were put in random order.

The elements created by the research participants were divided into three periods: past, present, and future, to capture the changing priorities people make in their careers during their tenure. The number of occurrences of each element among all participants was calculated separately for each period, and they were put in order of priority, signifying the importance that participants gave to those elements. The analysis of the elements of the study was mainly qualitative. Elements were divided into categories based on their shared meanings. For a clearer understanding of the elements, essential quotes from the interviews are used in the text, while a more complete representative set of quotes of the interviewees that explain those themes are included in appendix 8.

The meaning of those elements was further refined through construct elicitation, a structured reflection of the participants on their responses to set the situation they would be interviewed on (the elements). Therefore, the elicited constructs formed new categories of meanings referring to why chefs stay in their occupation. That helped the researcher enrich his interpretation of the topic in question (Jankowicz 2014) and identify the system of beliefs, thoughts and reasoning procedures that explain how chefs interpret their retention (Winter 1992).

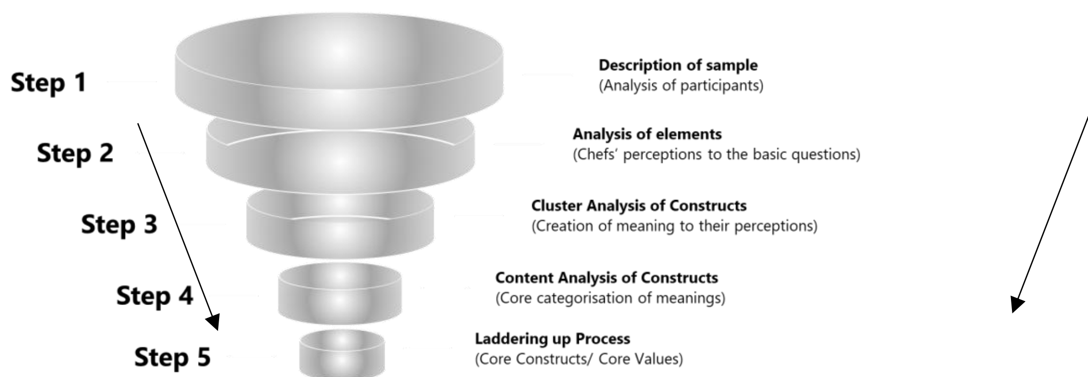
The evaluation of the constructs by the participants on a Likert scale from 1 to 5 (see figure 6) also helped the researcher analyse part of the results quantitatively. For that purpose, the study used the FOCUS cluster analysis technique, developed by Thomas and Shaw in 1976 (Thomas and Shaw 1978). According to the technique, dendrograms were generated to analyse the interconnections of constructs in individual grids. That helped the researcher

define the profound meaning of those constructs more clearly and how they are mostly used by the research participants (Stewart and Stewart 1981). This analysis would represent a refined picture of chefs' retention. To this end, RepPlus V1.1, a specialised software presented in the previous chapter, aided the complex comparisons of elements and constructs of multiple grids.

Content analysis of the constructs followed to assist in grouping the constructs into categories. That was completed manually. To ensure logical categorisation of the constructs, the researcher asked a second independent analyst, an experienced professional researcher in social studies & humanities who had neutral relations with the study, to categorise the elements and the constructs separately. Both outcomes were compared, and interpretations were reconsidered by the principal researcher, who, after making the necessary adjustments to the initial results, concluded in the final allocation of the elements in groups and of the constructs in superordinate and subordinate categories. In qualitative studies, a definitive 'final' categorisation of data is an unachievable task (King, Brooks and Tabari 2018). However, Symon and Cassell (2012) argue that it is not only possible but required to achieve consistency between the data analysis and the study's philosophical approach. In the present study, looking for objective evidence behind the conclusive construct categorisation would be incongruent to the ontology (relativism) and epistemology (constructive alternativism) of the study.

Finally, an additional step in the process was considered valuable to confirm the findings from the content analysis of the constructs made by the researcher; the constructs were investigated from a different angle. That was achieved by revealing the research participants' core constructs/ core values, which were elicited and analysed via the laddering-up process. The researcher identified the main patterns of answers in each repertory grid and elaborated on them further with the assistance of the interviewees. The result of that elaboration was the creation of new constructs, the final product of which revealed the core constructs or core values (Jankowicz 2004) of the research participants, which prioritised the importance of the meanings given by the interviewees to the reality they construed. The rest of the constructs remain valued and important, but the core constructs/ core values prioritise what matters to the participants most and ensure that they do not open new pathways of explaining why they remain in their occupation.

The complete process of data analysis outlined above is depicted in figure 9.




*(Figure 9: Process of the data analysis)*

The analysis ultimately provides evidence for (a) the common themes of the reasons chefs stay in their occupation instead of looking elsewhere, (b) the concept maps of chefs in considering their job retention, and (c) what matters to them mostly in order to remain chefs despite the difficulties of the job.

**5.2 Description of sample**

The process of data collection lasted from September 2019 to June 2021. Overall, 130 experienced chefs working in casual/ upper casual and hotel restaurants were asked to participate, 34 accepted (10 did not follow up), and 23 were finally interviewed, bringing the success quotient to approximately 18%. They all had over ten years of work experience in commercial kitchens (from 10 to 30 years) in leading roles requiring kitchen brigade management. The sample included geographical areas in and around London (South England) and the Midlands, 17 coming from the former and 6 from the latter.

It was very hard to book interviews with female chefs, confirming the initial concerns of the study. The great majority are male participants (82%: 19 male – 4 female). Casual/ upper casual restaurants were more represented than hotel restaurants in the sample (11 to 8; in 4 cases, chefs were working in kitchens of both categories).

Most of the participants were in the age group categories of the 40s or 50s, with significant years of experience as chefs (see table 1 for details).

The research interviews stopped after twenty-three participants reached the theoretical saturation point. After testing the sample with the method of thematic saturation twice (Guest, Namey, Chen 2020), using different criteria, the saturation point was at the twelfth and the seventeenth interview respectively, as explained in the Methodology chapter and described in detail in appendix 4. However, the research continued for another six interviews to safely conduct twenty-three.

Most of the research participants felt well-established in their chef's occupational role and generally very satisfied (table 5); to the question "Are you satisfied with your occupation right now" (on a scale from 1 to 10), most of the interviewees gave a score between 8 to 10. Even the ones who scored lower (5 – 7) did not express their complete dissatisfaction either. The following question they were asked, "Are you considering leaving the occupation" (on a scale from 1 to 10) had similar responses: the majority did not consider leaving their career (scores of 1 to 3); only two participants scored 5. In both of those cases, participants 7 and 10 thought of the possibility of improving their status by moving to other jobs related to food to balance their work with their personal life.

| *Checking levels of satisfaction Questions* | *8 to 10* | *5 to7 (no lower scores)* |
|---|---|---|
| *"Are you satisfied with your occupation right now"* (on a scale from 1 to 10) | *17* | *6* |
| | *1 to 3* | *>3* |
| *"Are you considering leaving the occupation*" (on a scale from 1 to 10) | *21* | *2* |

*(Table 5: Participants' satisfaction from being chefs)*

The chefs commented on the current negative impact of the pandemic on the hospitality industry and the uncertainty that the prolonged closure of restaurants in the country causes. However, no one claimed it was a reason to leave the occupation. For example, Participant 11 was worried that the current situation would change restaurant operations and that could be a career shock to him. However, in the final interview question, "Are you considering leaving the occupation" he did not consider leaving at all, showing that the above scenario of leaving was an expression of future concern, which he did not really think possible. The

interviewees were aware of the changes happening in their industry, with more restaurants turning to 'Take-Away' facilities because of the frequent lockdowns or closing down because they could not afford to run for fewer seats per square metre and manage the emerging risks. However, their desire to continue working as chefs was powerful.

### 5.3 Becoming and remaining chefs – Analysis of elements

The research participants were initially asked to provide their own elements, which would set the situation in question and be used as the foundation for the interview; they answered a set of six questions (in three time periods) (appendix 1) which were divided into two sides:

Positive: reasons that drove them into the chef's occupation in the past, keep them in this occupation in the present, and would continue to do so in the future.

Negative: reasons that could make them leave the occupation in the past, present, and future.

Firstly, the research participants answered what drove them into the occupation at the beginning of their career in the kitchen. Considering the initial reasons people chose their occupation in the past is essential to understand retention. A successful career choice that satisfies someone from the beginning of their career builds on a sense that they fit in that occupational field; hence they would be likely to stay in that career for an extended period. The research participants primarily expressed the opinion that they were initially driven into the commercial kitchen because they were inspired or influenced by their family or close friends or their local environment (Lee, Burch and Mitchell 2014; Cohen and Bailey 1997), which was strongly characterised by cooking. Therefore, they claimed a very "personal feeling" that every time they cook brings them closer to their family (participants 2, 10, 12, 17, 21).

For Participant 17, the family was also central to her career decision, but she valued it from a slightly different perspective; because her mother was working in the local school kitchen, she felt she was always around for her. So, early on in her life, she looked for a job that would fit the needs of her own family, too, where she would not work during school vacations and could look after her children, like what her mother did for her.

The cooking proficiency of a family member or someone from the local environment cultivated a fertile ground in them and helped them grow a desire, love and passion for food. Similarly, this love and passion stemmed from a stimulating foundation of cooking skills in their immediate environment. For most of the chefs interviewed, it was not a detached element of their aptitudes but connected with their inspirational home or local environment they have experienced in their lives since childhood (graph 4.1). Some of the interviewees elaborated on this element very vividly (participants 2, 3, 4,) especially participant 10 who said:

> *"…my mum was a chef, yeah, it came from her, I think it was passed on in my blood, she does love cooking and she passed it on; at a small age I was helping my mum in the kitchen, not that it was an easy transition, but I don't know… maybe because …my mum being a chef, errr…if I had to spend time with my mum I had to stay in the kitchen, to give me that extra little boost of energy, of happiness, or whatever we call it… so the connection with a kitchen brings me happiness…"*

Their family or other chefs and managers that inspired those research participants transferred to them a deep love for food, smell, taste, enthusiasm and creativity in the kitchen. The sense of love and passion was also expanded into the joy of pleasing others, which is reflected in serving guests to have a positive experience at the restaurant, as participant 15 claimed.

Another reason that helped them become chefs was that working in the commercial kitchen at a young age seemed the best alternative to continuing their school education or escaping from home conventions and getting to know the world. Cooking as a job seemed an ideal solution for them to enjoy what they do for a living and achieve high. It was an escape with good prospects (Participants 7, 8, 16, 22).

> *P 22: "…I wanted to get myself out of this and travel the world, see different things. I thought I'm going to study languages, and I hated it, I didn't really get the university right, all this wasn't for me. I worked in another salon and I thought why did I not think about this beforehand? As a chef you can go anywhere!... Why did I go to university? Why did I waste so many years?"*

The argument that cooking is often used as an alternative to school has also been mentioned by Bourdain (2000). It seemed to be repeated by the above participants in this study, too, whose decision to become chefs dates back to the same period when Bourdain mapped the characteristics of chefs (late '90s – early '00). However, the participants claim that this is still happening in the industry.

The two arguments above showed that chefs did not take a one-sided approach to what attracted them to the kitchen work. While there were more arguments highlighting an intrinsic desire to work in the kitchen out of love and passion for food and cooking, others pointed to the instrumental value of the chef's occupation to take some people out of a roadblock they regarded at school. Both perspectives were present in the research participants' views (graph 4.1).

Secondly, the research participants answered what they most love in their occupation currently that makes them stay. The chef participants of the study claimed that they mostly love the challenge of the job with all the intensity that it entails: the buzz, the adrenaline, the problem-solving, the design, and the pursuit of perfection. These are characteristics of the job and a lifestyle that keep their mind busy and focused. That love for the challenge is often linked with the satisfied guest, the happy customer, as well as the team bonding that occurs in the kitchen (Robinson 2008; Cooper 2012), which can also be substantial, hence challenging sometimes.

> *Participant 7: "I love the buzz of the busy service and the adrenaline that you have in the kitchen. They are the kind of things that would make me like it. Nothing else captures that… after a busy service, you know, you've had a good service and you get that adrenaline rush and that buzz, and nothing else quite captures that. And I think that's why a lot of chefs work hard, play hard …because you want to carry that buzz on into the night or whatever…"*

Next to the challenge of the work in the kitchen, they also valued the creative opportunities they get to create new dishes with ownership, with fresh ingredients, experiment on new innovative menus and satisfy the appetite of their guests. That seemed to motivate them to continue working in the kitchen, bond with their brigade, and share a feeling of living together despite the challenging environment they face every day.

> *Participant 15: "…The variety of the job… makes it appealing and want you to stay in it, and it's just… you can't describe for someone like me who does the work, to go in and when you get there and have raw, untouched fresh and greeneries and then at the end of the day you've got meals that people are eating the same day, and that's …that's the attraction to it…"*

Some participants argued that they are driven by their desire to mentor others (Ng and Butts 2009) and see their teams develop into capable and confident chefs. Mainly very experienced

chefs expressed that element, but in one case, a young one did too (participant 12). The fact that the experienced chefs had reached a level of success may have given a different meaning to their chef identity at this stage of their career. It may have made them want to transfer their knowledge to others and leave their legacy behind in the younger generations of chefs, as participant 3 admitted:

Interestingly, a young sous chef (P12) who also referred to his willingness to pass on his knowledge to others also looks up to his role models and learns from them. He believed that the meaning of his role is to have an impact on the industry.

The above quotes also show that their feeling of being the centre of others' development and the master of their kitchen may imply a sense of power and authority over others which gives them kudos, helps them leave a legacy behind, and is rewarding and satisfying too. A career pathway also supplemented this in that the chef occupation allowed some participants (5 and 6) to gain a respectful identity of being specialists in something others admire. Similarly, that feeling of becoming specialists may give them a sense of power in the kitchen which is rewarding and satisfying.

Another noteworthy finding concerning the above was that interestingly, although only a couple of chefs expressed that opinion, similar views also appeared in another time period (future) of the study's questions about the drivers of the chef's occupation; they argued that they get respect from others. Maybe, they do not enter the occupation having that goal in mind, but gradually they seem to find this sense developing in them strongly. Feeling that they became specialists in something that only a few people can do proficiently appears as a sense of belonging to a team of experts with distinctive characteristics and a sense of increased self-esteem and pride that would feed their appetite to remain chefs in the future.

Thirdly, the research participants answered what would motivate and keep them in the occupation in the future. The elements that stood out were divided into three categories:

1. Better work conditions, a significant part of which is improved staffing and training infrastructure, access to well-trained teams of cooks and chefs;
2. Their career opportunities predominantly in the commercial kitchen by undertaking more challenging tasks and projects as executive head chefs, but in a couple of cases, in supervisory roles as chef consultants, area managers and mentors;

3. A reasonable life/ career balance allows them to live a better quality of life; they relate that to two essentials: family and pay.

Regarding improving work conditions, the participants expressly referred to their access to trained staff. They raised the issue of having a more intelligent and more effective recruiting and training infrastructure in restaurants so that chefs can work with more stability. The availability and access to trained kitchen brigades seemed a common argument by many participants. Some believe that the high commercialisation of the food industry has contributed to the deskilling of the industry (Robinson and Beesley 2010) and affected chefs negatively. Participant 2 expressed his despair:

> *"The chains have destroyed the quality of chefs. It's not about money, we pay more than any chain restaurant. …they know that in chains they open a box and put it in a microwave. We had a chef with 12 years as a chef, and he saw the raw meat, we started working with the whole animal and stuff …he lasted for 45 minutes, he walked out. He said he couldn't do it, he had never done it before… 12 years! I mean, I really feel sorry for him… This is no chef career; it's microwave engineer".*

Another argument regarding trained staff was that the industry asks chefs to work on a 'fast track' and under tight financial control. This mindset sacrifices quality staff in the kitchen which would help chefs produce high-quality food consistently and free time from them for new creations instead of training them on the basics. Because the work in the kitchen is team-based, chefs must rely on the ability of their kitchen brigade to perform as necessary continuously (Gill 1997). Participant 3 argued that short-term savings result in longer term increased costs and low quality product.

A couple of participants claimed that the trained teams are not limited to the staff who work in the kitchen. It expands to the entire restaurant team because the guest would see one result, the collective performance, the total experience; this has to be consistent from the front of the house to the food ingredients, to the cooks, and finally to the service.

However, most interviewees acknowledged that conditions have gotten a lot better than in the past: pay has increased, they are under the impression that there are fewer poor managers now than in previous years and team members are more valued. They expressed their wish that the situation would continue to improve. In the past, things were very discriminatory not allowing female chefs to stand out and progress, but tis seems to be improving now (participant 22).Another need recognised by many participants was the career prospect of being a chef for long periods. Some chefs wanted to develop further and see a

transition in their career to a more executive role where they could guide and mentor others into the culinary world (e.g. consultant chefs and kitchen managers). Some others would like to see their careers more business orientated, utilising the knowledge they have acquired from their kitchen experience (e.g. buyers in food companies).

Others also aim for a more international future career to gain diverse experiences and perfect their skills. These chefs are firm believers that this is an excellent motivation for the young generation of chefs; they need to see the vast career opportunities that this job offers them. They also expressed their wish that the chef occupation gains more respect from both the state and the general population with increased investment in the industry (participants 13 and 16).

It was common ground among the participants that work/life balance is necessary to keep working in the commercial kitchen (Harris and Giuffre 2010; Giousmpasoglou, Brown and Cooper 2018). Allegedly, being unable to keep a reasonable balance between work commitments and personal life was a reason for some participants to break their marriage, for some others to see a negative impact on their mental health (participant 7), and for others to regret they could not follow their children's daily happenings as they were growing up (participant 10).

In almost all cases, interviewees claimed that in order to sustain their exemplary level of work, they must find their own ways to "steam off", as participant 9 argued. That applied not only to them but also to their teams who work for them because they realise that showing them that they care about their personal life as much as their work is one of the most critical things for their performance, as claimed below:

> Participant 6: *"we had people with deaths in their family, with injuries, but going that extra mile to look after them, even when they're sick, down or not well, 1) you look after a member of your team, it's family, you know; 2) you look after him and his family because you want him to be at his best at work when he works with you…you know he's going to give his 200% when he comes back, you know… that's for me one of the most important things".*

The interviewees also valued as necessary the freedom to create the dishes they wanted without being restricted by the finances of the restaurant and other managerial decisions to economise unreasonably (Robinson and Barron 2007; Ng and Feldman 2009). The element of

creativity appeared in interviewees' answers in all periods: past – present – future (Table 6). It was of lighter importance in the initial phase of choosing a career in the commercial kitchen but stronger as chefs were progressing with their careers. The element of being free to express their creative skills in their menus and, by doing it develop others in the kitchen seemed to play a significant role in their work as chefs.

Overall, the elements for what drives the research participants and makes them stay in the chef's occupation which framed the repertory grid interviews were the following:

***What drove you in the chef's occupation***

| ***Past***<br>**Can you think of a couple of conditions that drove you into the chef's occupation?** | ***Present***<br>**What is it that you like most in your job as a chef?** | ***Future***<br>**What would make your job ideal in the future?** |
|---|---|---|
| Family Influence (10) | | |
| Love & Passion for cooking/ food (6) | | |
| Alternative to school (4) | | |
| Inspirational environment (1) | | |
| Belonging in a Team (1) | | |
| | Challenge & Intensity of the job (9) | |
| Creative Skills (1) | Creativity (5) | Creative Skills (Freedom to keep applying them) (2) |
| | Making guests happy (3) | |
| | Become mentor and develop others (3) | |
| | Gain identity of a specialist (2) | Respect (for the occupation) (2) |
| | Career opportunities – Lifestyle (1) | Career development – Lifestyle (6) |
| | | Better work conditions (staffing and training infrastructure) (7) |
| | | Life – Career Balance (family and pay) (5) |

*(Table 6: Elements that drive chefs in the occupation)*
** frequency of occurrence in brackets*

In contrast to the arguments about what has driven chefs into the job and what has made them stay, all research participants agreed that the work conditions in the commercial kitchen are very challenging. That could be the first and most important reason to make them leave the chef's career. By 'work conditions', they mainly meant long and unsociable hours, working under the heat of the kitchen, in a confined space, and receiving low rewards for the effort they put into the job. That was the most crucial distress for many participants when deciding

about their careers in the past. Also, it remains a concern for many even after staying in the job for a long time. However, they expressed the feeling that they have come to terms with the fact that to be a chef, someone must develop high levels of resilience and endure the demanding work conditions. The below quote was very representative:

> Participant 5: *"The hard work can make you feel tired, but if you fit in the job you need to love it. …If you have passion for cooking, you will work hard, in the hard atmosphere of the kitchen to go from commis chef to head chef, from the low level to the high level". "If you have the ambition you will get satisfaction; if you don't have ambition, you will get stressed".*

Also, half of the participants stated that they would be willing to retain their enthusiasm in the kitchen if merely financial criteria did not dominate their job. They claimed that strict cost minimisation of the kitchen operations risks food quality, brings untrained staff into the kitchen and damages the cooking experience by sacrificing the quality of ingredients and, ultimately, the freedom of creativity (Robinson and Barron 2007; Robinson and Beesley 2010). They argued that this affects their creative and artistic personality and is a significant reason to drive them out of the chef's occupation presently and in the future.

> Participant 2: *"I love creating new things… The only thing that would put me off from being a chef would be if I am not allowed to create food from scratch".*

Following the above, the lack of sufficiently trained restaurant staff and kitchen brigade was claimed necessary by some participants as it puts them under much pressure to assume all responsibility on their shoulders (Cooper 2012), causing feeling helpless and hence adding stress to their work. They also pointed to the direction of education, the colleges and formal vocational training of cooks and chefs (participants 3, 14). Moreover, as stated by some participants, not having the expected level of quality staff in their team for long periods could also be a reason to push them out of the kitchen (participant 13).

Another concern the participants raised was their fear that the demanding work in the commercial kitchen, which frequently asks them to function under extreme pressure, is mentally very challenging and progressively might affect their mental ill-health (Giousmpasoglou, Brown and Cooper 2018; Eburne 2010). Interestingly, they mentioned that they have become more tolerant of those challenges after many years in the trade. They admitted

that the challenges in the job sometimes make them behave wrongly toward themselves and other team members, but with time they become more mature and regret they had mentally abused others. Some also felt fortunate that they did not abandon their chef careers because of those unfortunate past performances, showing that developing resilience in the occupation is necessary to be part of their role. In some cases (participants 1 and 19 and implicitly 12), that mental challenge was addressed as mental competition, in which chefs are under continuous pressure to do better every time and compete both against others and themselves, making their tasks even more demanding.

Overall, the elements for what drives the research participants out of the chef's occupation which they also framed the repertory grid interviews were the following (table 7):

***What could drive you out of the chef's occupation***

| ***Past***<br>**Can you think of a couple of conditions that could have driven you out of the chef's profession?** | ***Present***<br>**What is it that you don't like at all (or the most) in your job as a chef?** | ***Future***<br>**What would make your job unattractive hence wanting to leave in the future?** |
|---|---|---|
| Work conditions (12) | Work conditions (6) | Work conditions: unimproved (5) |
| Mental Challenge (5) | Mental Challenge (1) | |
| Bad pay (Low remuneration) (4) | Bad pay (Low remuneration) (4) | |
| Career Concerns (2) | | |
| | Shortage of trained staff (7) | Shortage of trained staff (1) |
| | Politics/ Finances undermining cooking (3) | Politics/ Finances undermining cooking (6) |
| | Uncertainty (1) | Uncertainty (1) |
| | Nothing (1) | Nothing (3) |
| | | Life/Career Balance (1) |
| | | Luck of Appreciation (4) |
| | | Health Issues (3) |

** Number figures refer to the frequency of occurrence of each element among interviewees*

*(Table 7: Elements that drive chefs out of the occupation)*

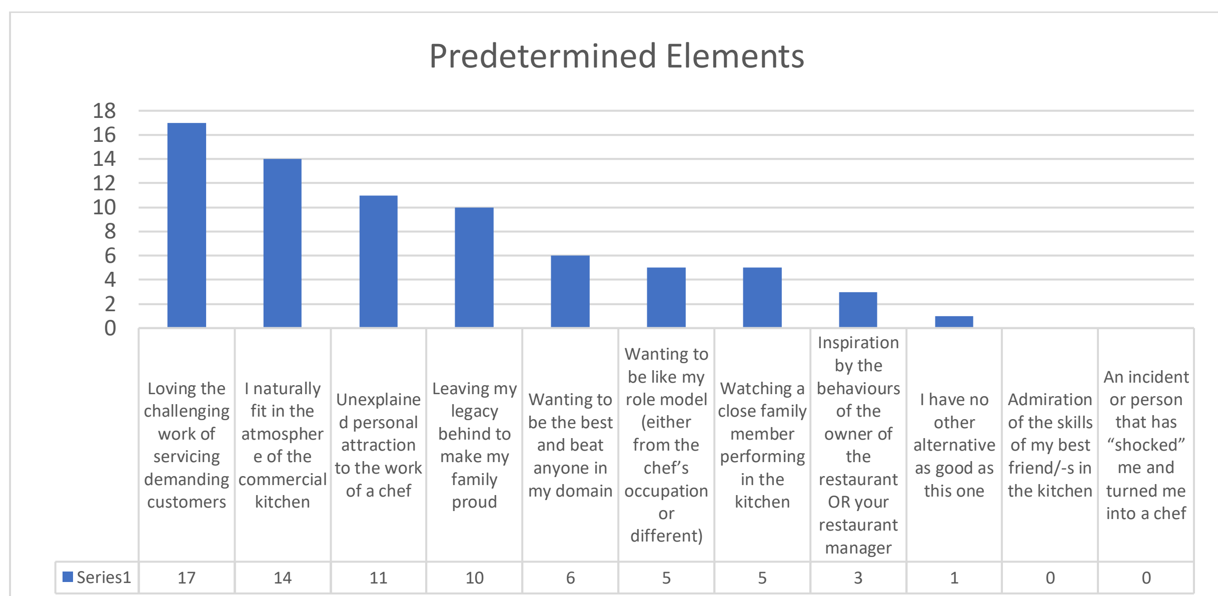
The above findings consist of the set of elements deriving from the answers that the research participants gave to the initial questions they received prior to the interviews to design the individual situation of the study. As explained at the beginning of the chapter, these were accompanied by a set of eleven elements pre-determined by the researcher. The participants were asked to select three of them. Therefore, each participant created nine elements in total

(6 that they owned and 3 out of 11 that were owned by the researcher but selected by the participants) to build the repertory grid interview. As described in the methodology chapter, the pre-determined elements were based on the theories of JE, OE and Internal LOC, as well as unclassified statements that were frequently met in the literature on chefs' retention.

The elements that most research participants selected as reasons for becoming and remaining chefs were:

1. Love the challenging work of serving demanding customers
2. Feel that they naturally belong to the commercial kitchen
3. Unexplained personal attraction to the work of a chef
4. Leaving my legacy behind to make my family proud
5. Wanting to be the best and beat everyone in my domain

Figure 10 presents all the predetermined elements in priority order (frequency of occurrence) among the 23 participants.




*(Figure 10: Interviewees' preference of the predetermined elements)*

The participants selected most of the predetermined elements, as shown in graph 4.4. However, no one selected the elements: "Admiration of the skills of my best friend/-s in the kitchen" and "An incident or person that has 'shocked' me and turned me into a chef". Many of the participants mentioned the former in their answers to the initial questions they were asked, so they did not see the need to repeat themselves here. Regarding the latter, it was pretty surprising that no one from the sample selected it explicitly. Nevertheless, there were

occasions in their interviews where that was implicitly mentioned in the stories about their personal lives that some shared with the researcher. However, they never clearly claimed that a ‘shock’ in their lives directed them to the chef’s career.

Nearly all of the participants selected their “love for the challenging work of serving demanding customers”, showing the emphasis they put in having a desire to serve others when they chose their career path of a chef (Cooper 2012). In addition, they also thought that it is crucial to feeling that “they naturally fit in the environment of the commercial kitchen” (Mitchell et al. 2001) even if sometimes this is an “unexplained attraction to the work of a chef” (Duffy et al. 2018; Allen and Iomaire 2016). Based on the most frequently selected predetermined elements, the participants believed that the main reasons (top four that distinguish them from the rest) that drove them into the chef’s occupation and keep them in are:

- *their “love for the challenging work of serving demanding customers”*
- their belief that they *“naturally fit in the environment of the commercial kitchen”*
- *“an unexplained attraction to the work of a chef”*
- their willingness to *“leave their legacy behind to make their family proud”*

Having presented all elements created by the research participants at the first stage of the research, figure 11 gives an overview of the key findings that set the foundation for a deeper understanding of the meaning that chefs give to the reasons they stay in their occupation for long.

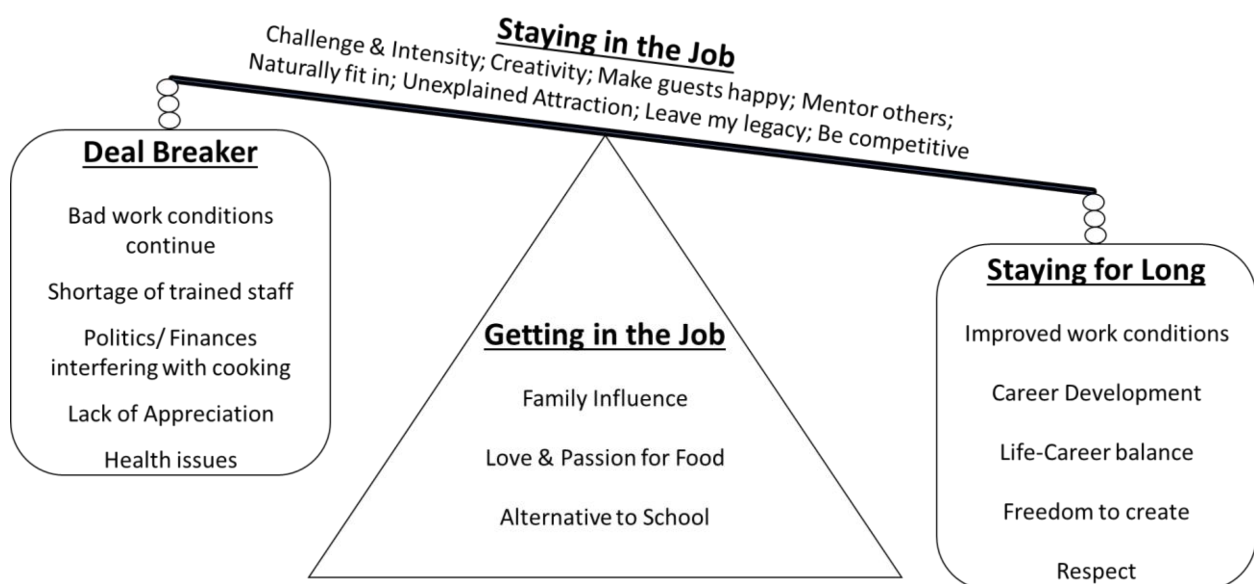



*Figure 11: The main elements of chefs’ retention*

The research participants claimed that they got in the job because their family or others inspired them while in their childhood or adolescence, they had a deep love and passion for food and cooking, and they found the commercial kitchen a better alternative to school, which they disliked. They presently remain chefs because they like the adrenaline of the challenging and intense environment of the kitchen, express their creative shelf, like making guests happy with their cooking, and want to pass their knowledge on to others and develop them. Also, because they feel they naturally fit in the kitchen environment, although sometimes they cannot explain why, they get satisfaction from being in a competitive work environment and finally want to leave their legacy behind. The circumstances that could keep them in the chef's career in the future were a gradual improvement of the working conditions, seeing their career developing in the culinary field, finding a better life-career balance to enjoy other parts of their personal life, too, keeping the freedom to create the food they desire, and seeing their occupation be respected by the official state and the general public more. On the other side of the spectrum, participants argued that a number of conditions could potentially lead them out of the chef's career and become a deal breaker for them. That could occur if the adverse work conditions continue to exist, commercial kitchens continue to be staffed by untrained personnel, politics and finances dominate the decisions about the value of food and running operations sacrificing quality for profit, if chefs keep being unrecognised for the job they do, and finally if they suffer from mental or other physical health issues that make working in the kitchen dangerous for them.

**5.4. Analysis of constructs**

The elements created by the interviewees set the foundation of the RGT. The individuals were asked to evaluate and give meaning to their retention and construct their reality in their sustaining careers. The study aims to reveal the meanings that chefs give to the reasons they stay and refine the understanding of those drivers, not merely identify them. Are they wholly idiosyncratic, or do they meet a particular point of consensus? Do chefs feel they are in control or are they victims of uncontrollable situations that characterise the industry? Have they learnt to develop strategies to confront the job challenges they claim they face in their job? With the use of RGT**,** research participants created meanings of their elements in the form of

bipolar constructs: these were represented in the grids in the form of emerged (left column) and implied (right column), as explained in the methodology chapter. The personal constructs elicited in the interview revealed the individual's stance on their world, the topic under study (Fransella, Bell and Bannister 2004). Therefore, analysis of these constructs provided the researcher with valuable information about how the participants construe their retention in the chef's occupation.

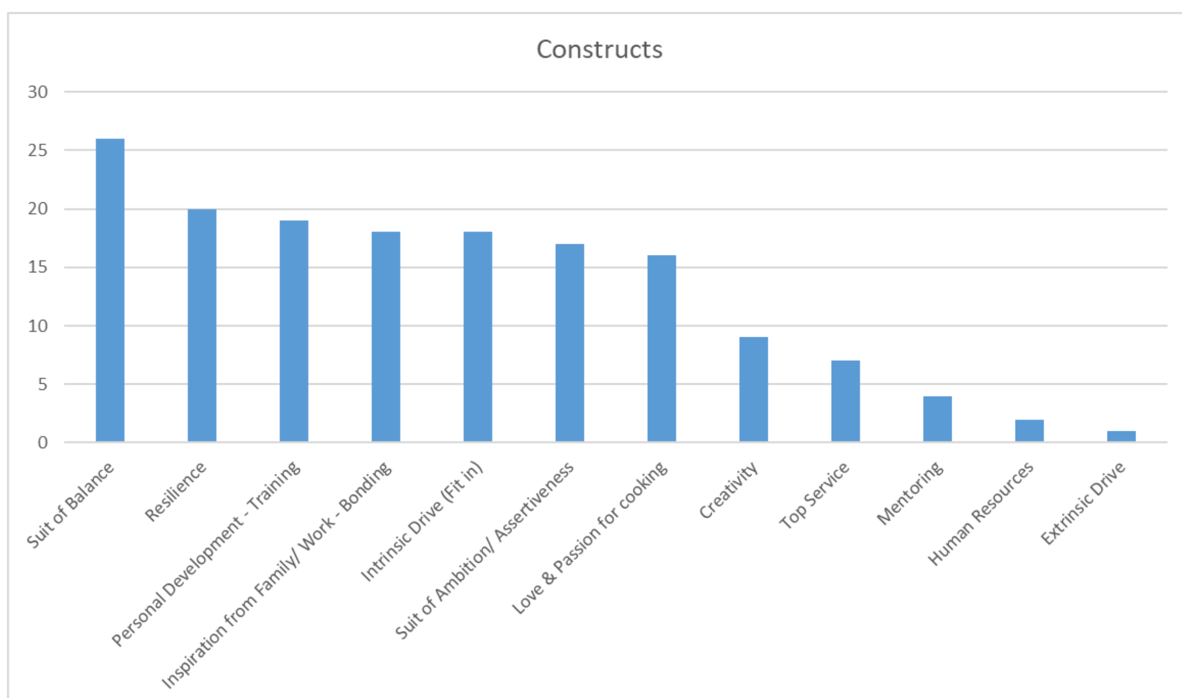
#### *5.4.1. Cluster analysis of the constructs*

The individually elicited constructs were firstly interpreted. However, the interpretation of each construct would have only partial value to understanding the topic in question unless the constructs noted any interrelation with each other. Therefore, the unit of analysis for this stage needs to be the grid, not the individual construct (Jankowicz 2004). If a construct is found to interrelate with another one, it would mean that whenever the research participant considers one construct, they usually consider the other related (Thomas and Shaw 1976). Therefore, the meaning of the former is enriched and defined more precisely. To reveal those interrelations and represent an organisation of the resources of the study (constructs) (Jacob 2004), a cluster analysis is performed. Cluster analysis is a practical way to make meaning out of qualitative data (Miles, Huberman and Saldana 2014). In all instances of clustering (events or acts of individual participants, processes, settings, cases as wholes), the aim is to try to "understand a phenomenon better by grouping and then conceptualising objects that have similar patterns of characteristics" (ibid: 279). In the present application, cluster analysis of the elicited constructs helped the researcher group the constructs based on the similarity of individual ratings noted in each grid and give a more comprehensive meaning to them.

The FOCUS system (Thomas and Shaw 1976) used for the cluster analysis was analysed with the RepPlus V1.1 software. Elements and constructs were clustered in an integrated grid to allow the precise meaning of the constructs. According to cluster analysis by FOCUS, when two (or more) constructs interlink to an extent between .85 and 1, they are closely correlated. The claim of one construct would usually bring the other correlated construct in mind, too (Stewart and Stewart 1981). The intercorrelations in FOCUS are represented in dendrograms which show the hierarchical relationship between constructs (statements, ideas, and even

objects). Their intercorrelations are noted on the scale at the top right of the dendrograms. Constructs are joined together at a specific height. The smaller the height is, the stronger and more meaningful the relationship becomes. The interpretation of the dendrograms presented in the following paragraphs focused on the closeness, hence the similarity of constructs, instead of the remoteness, hence the difference between them. With dendrograms, the interpretation of constructs is made more explicit, and their categorisation becomes straightforward.

For the categorisation of the constructs, the study used bootstrapping. This technique was initially developed by Horsti (1968) and later elaborated by Neuendorf (2002). With its use, the analysis identified 12 categories of constructs out of the 23 interviews of the study. To proceed with the categorisation, the grids were examined separately, and constructs were analysed in pairs. Constructs that looked similar were titled accordingly and grouped together. Constructs that provided new meanings, different than the already existing ones, were put under separate new categories. The dendrograms of the cluster analysis were used in parallel to provide the context of the constructs and interpret them more accurately. The same process was followed with all possible pairs of each individual grid until the examination of all elicited grids was finished. The identified categories were then ordered according to their frequency of occurrence and are outlined in figure 12:




*(Figure 12: Categorisation of constructs after cluster analysis)*

The constructs that the research participants very frequently repeated referred to the following issues (see the complete record of constructs in appendix 2):

- Keep a balance and be sensible, pragmatic and consistent in dealing with the job demands
- Develop a strong sense of resilience at work to be able to tolerate the hard work conditions of the commercial kitchen
- Seek for personal development and training to improve and perfect their cooking skills
- Be inspired by their family or local environment when closely related with the culinary experience
- Admit an internal drive into the chefs occupation which makes them fit in the role, sometimes without being able to explain how
- Show their love and passion for food and cooking
- Have ambition, always aiming high

The rest of the constructs of the list that were less frequently expressed in the research may also be necessary for drawing a complete picture of how chefs construe their reality but were not perceived as pivotal for understanding chefs retention. For that reason, in the following pages of the study, only the first seven have been analysed in detail.

Beginning with the participants most frequently expressed category of constructs, the meaning of keeping a balance was divided into multiple categories, all relative to each other. Most interviewees agreed that work conditions are very challenging, and they must make many sacrifices to cope with them. For example, some chefs expressed the view that their job requirements do not allow them to see their families enough (more apparent when they are parents, with children playing a significant role in their life). Another category shaped by most participants referred explicitly to the difficulties of work conditions: the long hours, low pay, the stress from kitchen operations, management acting up and the need to keep a balance between the job and their expectations. Also, a few chefs connected the lack of work-life balance with a kind of unfairness of their employment contracts (usually signing for a certain number of work hours per week which, in reality, is rarely kept, and the pay does not reflect that) (Cain, Busser and Kang 2017; Deery 2008). Some also admitted that they could not control these conditions, but the nature of the work cannot be changed.

Participant 10 (Appendix 3, Diagram 5) argued that having control over the number of his work hours is only fair and affects his personal life (e.g. holidays). He was concerned that he either keeps a reasonable work/life balance or becomes vulnerable, sacrificing his career progress because of the lack of time to experiment and take the initiative in the kitchen. Also, participants 8 and 12 feared that not keeping this balance at work risks their mental well-being. However, not everyone agrees that work conditions are uncontrollable; there is still room for setting their own priorities and making decisions that would adjust their work conditions to their preferences. For example, participant 1 (Appendix 3, Diagram 1) explained that keeping a balance at work makes him more sensible as he prefers to keep both feet on the ground and do his job right; that is something he feels he has control over. Also, participant 17 (Appendix 3, Diagram 2) chose to build her role around her family life. That involved being more of a developer and having a more supervisory role in the recipes of the kitchens she oversees, sacrificing other things which could make her life more comfortable (e.g. bigger teams to work next to her). Her cluster analysis showed a consistent balance between her satisfaction from working around her family and the difficulties she faces from having a minor team and lower pay.

Similarly, participant 4 had an equally composed approach believing that there are always things you can control and things you cannot (Appendix 3, Diagram 4). He linked those things he can control with his passion for innovation, passing his knowledge onto others, and ultimate fulfilment. The same sense of pragmatism and balance was highlighted by participants 8 and 9, too. The latter argued that her life had been dominated by cooking, and if she let herself loose, it would "swallow her completely"; thus, she intentionally needs to find time to disconnect and gain energy for her personal life. She closely related that construct with the level of control she is allowed to have over the job conditions, which "hinders her personal moves" [initiatives] that she wanted to develop at work and, in particular, her "love to cook special menus" (Appendix 3, Diagram 4). So, she claimed that she could intentionally counteract anything that she thinks holds her back.

The above constructs showed that being balanced, sensible, pragmatic and consistent at work referred to a controlled combination of keeping the passion for the happenings in the kitchen but at the same time caring about essential aspects of personal life, and that was perceived as a critical quality of long-serving chefs.

The second most frequently expressed construct of the research participants' reality was developing a sense of resilience at work (Haas 2013). Almost every time the participants referred to the adversaries of the chef's job, they coupled it with something positive. That observation is congruent with the previous arguments about keeping the balance between the pros and cons of the field. The hard work involved in the commercial kitchen was common ground among all participants; nobody denied it. However, all of them claimed they found ways to undergo those adversaries and remain chefs for nearly two or three decades. They learned how to develop resilience, and that was intentional (Bakker and Demerouti 2007). Participant 5 (Diagram 6) clearly stated that loving the job endures difficulties.

> *"Hard work can make you feel tired. That's correct because we are working as a body… but the atmosphere… if you fit in the atmosphere as a body and your mind… Hard work is the reality in the kitchen; you have to love it as your choice to do it".*

Resilience was related to a wide range of other constructs of participant 5: being passionate personality; personally responsible for the final performance; internally driven with the right character for the job; otherwise, stress may impact the individual's health. All participants who raised the need for resilience in their interviews argued about taking the initiative, finding ways to discover the positives, and becoming active and not passive recipients of what their job gives them; that is how they would tackle the difficulties. Participant 14 (Diagram 7) claimed that he needs to take the initiative, take things into his hands and direct his career to places where his passion for cooking is supported (e.g. consultant chef) and having time available for himself is allowed. It is a matter of *"putting the right priorities in the right place"*, he argued. Similarly, participant 7 (Appendix 3, diagram 8) agrees with that; he claimed that *"work hard – play hard captures the enthusiasm of chefs vs the job is not for everyone"*. He believed that people must realise that this challenging work culture triggers the adrenaline of chefs and if people do not sense that, they should never ("…a 100% no…") enter the commercial kitchen from the outset. That construct was closely linked with the realisation that unless they "leave this stuff behind and move forward", they would not succeed in the job for long. Participants 7, 9, 14, and 16 believed that the key to abiding with that painful and stressful routine is the deliberate discovery of alternatives as a way to have a "normal"

life. In addition, participant 4 put the bar high, claiming that someone who looks up to a role model has to put up with the idea of working under stress; otherwise, [they prove that] they do not want to work on high standards (Appendix 3, Diagram 3). Learning and adapting to the fast track of hospitality was also a reality for participant 6 (Appendix 3, Diagram 9), but that is not an independent achievement; it comes together with the development of a sense of quality and teamwork shared by everyone in the kitchen brigade and the restaurant as a whole (Gill 1997). The opposite would result from "poorly trained staff" and cause a lack of understanding of the production process and low morale as they would not feel part of a team but a number.

In a review of the constructs regarding resilience, it is understood that the construct refers to the chefs' intrinsic ability to bear the job's hardships. It is recognised that this achievement can result from intentional individual efforts or/and the outcome of solid team bonding in the kitchen environment.

The next construct elicited by the interviewees was their inspiration from their families, their role models in the restaurants they worked in the past or the continuous positive team atmosphere they experienced in the commercial kitchens they worked in (Robinson and Beesley 2010). Being inspired to be chefs was a powerful statement many of the research participants made, which keeps their enthusiasm high and outbalances many of the negatives of the job. For example, participants 2 and 15 spoke very vividly about the importance of their family in their chef's career, using it as a driver for their work. Especially participant 15 (Appendix 3, Diagram 10) linked his family with his hard work to stand out in the field and make his customers happy.

> *Participant 2: "You make no money, and you don't know why you are really here [laugh]! You see, you are here because maybe you are following your family tradition? …probably something that I would want to see in my kids too… I love being in the kitchen… it is an unexplained reason, I followed my father, maybe following an internal instinct, because this is what I mostly knew, I grew up in the kitchen".*

In addition, participant 11 claimed that the feelings experienced in the kitchen, the quality of bonding with the kitchen brigade (Robinson 2008; Cooper 2012), were comparable to the

ones he developed in a family environment and that was so strong that was enough to make him want to do the job:

> Participant 11: *"that is why I like the job,… I have worked for example with a very good close friend, not a family member but we consider him as family, and the feeling that you build with somebody like this makes you feel like really strong and really good, like family."*

Other participants referred to the inspiration they get from their role models (Cooper 2012) or people they once admired or currently do, showing them the way to move forward with their careers (Participant 13). Most of the interviewees, though, praised their teams and spoke highly of the uplifting atmosphere they live in their kitchen brigades. They perceived that as a major inspiration to create, innovate, and run the extra mile. Participant 6 (Appendix 3, Diagram 9), for example, considered himself lucky to have worked with top teams who taught him and inspired him to cook with the best ingredients and produce quality food. Equally, participant 17 believed that the kitchen atmosphere drove her to perform high, but having a family member working in the kitchen made her feel proud. Participants 7 (Appendix 3, Diagram 8) and 13 (Appendix 3, Diagram 11) expanded on the same argument and became more precise, building a construct that restaurant managers have strongly motivated them to perform well and ease the guest service process.

So, the interviewees claimed that the commercial kitchen offers a variety of sources to inspire chefs and keep them at the top of their performance. For example, family members who have worked as cooks professionally or unprofessionally, the team bonding which creates an uplifting atmosphere at work and stirring managers who bring the best out of their team members and make them proud of themselves are reasons that keep chefs inspired.

A good number of the research participants commented on the need for continuous development to increase effective performance (Pratten 2003). That claim took two directions: a) their ability to personally develop their careers as chefs or in a career parallel to that of a chef, and b) their efforts to develop others in the kitchen brigades.

Regarding the former, participant 4 saw his personal development as vital for his rounded career personality; he felt that he does not have a place in the industry without it. He perceived the following constructs as tightly (100%) connected: "Emulate the top menus vs

Follow what is standard" with "Look for the challenge of the kitchen vs Just a role to be fulfilled". Similarly, closely linked with these constructs was the "Naturally fit and constantly learning/ teaching vs Working following standard menus" construct. These very close correlations of the constructs mean that every time the participant thinks of developing a new challenging menu, it is the product of his "passion for cooking fresh food". However, at the same time, it was another way of arguing that he disapproved the stagnation in the kitchen (although understanding that following standard menus is necessary kitchen practice – see Appendix 3, diagram 3). Participant 7 added that he could not meet his expectations without asking for more training. However, participant 3, who was also a strong advocate of the necessity of good continuous training (Appendix 3, diagram 12), argued that this training does not come easy. Therefore, he built the construct: “"High-end food comes out of high training vs Without discipline you won’t get high-end food”", investing his high performance in consistent training, characterised by discipline.

> Participant 3: “*Discipline is the key. In everything in your life, you make the effort, and you will get the rewards for sure. Discipline – discipline – discipline every day*”.

Regarding the latter, the same participant also linked discipline to his own and his team’s development. He thought that since he had reached a high level in his chef career, he had to pass this knowledge on to others so that they do not stagnate: “Mentoring others, teach others from experience vs Do your job – get on with it”.

Participant 15 was adamant about the value and more disciplined style of training existing in the past, which should also be the case today to be effective:

> Participant 15: *“…wanting to be the best of my domain is basically down to the way I was taught and the way that my head chefs at that time instilled what they were taught through theirs into me. And that brings up the [quality of chef I became] …because training has become much softer nowadays… I used to fear my head chef; if I did something wrong, I was scared of the outcome… that he’d throw a pan in the air and crash on my face or hit me with a spoon or something [laughing]. If I was to do this nowadays, I would go to prison. I don’t see that the youngsters and the trainees fear if they do something wrong as much as we used to in our days.*
>
> *MK: “From what you say and what you wrote to me you seem to believe that the past type of quality of training was more effective; was it more successful?”*

*P15: "Definitely! Because again, if I was to, say, be in a situation when I did something wrong and the chef was explaining in his way of… why you went wrong, and I kept interrupting or answering back, …I'd be washing pots for a week, before doing anything else. But if I was to do this in nowadays??? I'd say that the privilege of being a boss has been taken away in the kitchen by the… by the modern-day offended nature of the youngsters".*

However, all participants did not share the above perspective of a stringent and very disciplined training style. Participant 22 was glad to see the ''old school'' of chefs moving out of the picture and being replaced by structured but more compassionate and understanding kitchen leaders. According to her, that transition had essential consequences for the development of young chefs, as becomes more evident in the following paragraphs.

As much as the personal development of chefs comes out of discipline, according to participant 8, it also comes out of adaptation to the kitchen environment and modesty: "Speaking the language of the kitchen makes you more adaptable vs Just knowing something about the kitchen doesn't make you a specialist of the kitchen". He also related that construct with the responsibility of institutional training, claiming that "Part of the creative thing is not part of the school curriculum vs Strengthening apprenticeships or NVQs would keep standards high". To him, practical experience is the key to becoming a trained chef (Appendix 3, diagram 13). Participant 13 expanded on the same argument about the culinary schools expressing his dissatisfaction with the fact that there is no school to prepare executive chefs and picture what is suitable for aspiring leaders of the commercial kitchen. He claimed that people do not necessarily understand the efficiencies and inefficiencies of the job (Appendix 3, diagram 11).

A combination of all the above perspectives was collectively highlighted by participant 22, who summarised it:

Participant 22: "*"My life has been made easier by self-development and by the development of other"".*

Overall, interviewees claimed that personal development is necessary to stand out in the cooking field. However, that should be a joint effort, a task orchestrated by existing chefs who should show their teams how to improve and by culinary schools who prepare future chefs. In any case, the individual must have a strong desire to develop in order to be developed.

As the research participants mentioned previously, a chef needs to have an inner drive to remain in the occupation and feel that they fit the role well (Duffy et al. 2018). The following

constructs elaborate on that in more detail. Participant 2 was very clear about the value of being internally driven; it derived from his family experience, meant everything to him, and was like "following his internal instinct", as he believed. That motive was so attractive and robust that, according to him, nothing would stop him from being a chef except physical illness (Appendix 3, diagram 14).

That construct was very strongly correlated with another one concerning reaching his goals: "Got a target, a goal vs Not achieved a goal", and also a construct about having access to the right people to support him in reaching his dreams: "Uninterrupted cooperation with staff to meet dream vs Lack of resources". Being internally driven was the key to making participant 2 determined, helping him overcome any obstacle and meet his goals and dreams. Also, participant 5 added another perspective to his internal drive, that unless that drive is strong, his health might be affected by the difficulties of the job, which would have an impact on his character in the job (being unable to stand the difficulties) (see Appendix 3, diagram 6). Fitting in the kitchen environment well is a "feel-good situation" for participant 19, who closely related it with her feeling of being creative and appreciative, giving real meaning to the chef's job and making her want to stay (Appendix 3, diagram 15). Based on the participants' perspectives described here, fitting in the atmosphere of the chef's occupation was a feeling determined very personally by each individual and not by external factors (at least not clearly articulated). Sometimes that drive was acknowledged as an internal instinct, while sometimes, this was unexplained.

Elaborating on the above construct of appreciation, a perspective of the internal drive the research participants commented on was the joy they get from the sense of adding value to the kitchen and the need to be appreciated for that at work. Some claimed that a lack of appreciation makes them feel bad (participant 19). Similarly, participant 18 argued that appreciation is what she looks for in the jobs she wants to work at. That is where she feels complete, which gives her meaning, not where she is being undervalued, which prompts aggressive (performance and career) strategies to gain something for herself alone (Appendix 3, diagram 16).

> Participant 18: *"[I fit in the atmosphere of the kitchen] when I have a feeling of wanting, and belonging… an emotional attachment to something that is similar to the*

*top, where I add value, right? A feeling of wanting and belonging to something important, meaningful, valuable".*

Also, participant 22 specified that it is not necessary to belittle chefs' pride by showing a lack of appreciation for the effort they put into their work. Based on her experience, she believed that head chefs needed to empathise and understand that these people were strongly internally driven to work in the kitchen. They would develop and freely deploy their full skillsets only if they are encouraged at work. However, she expressed her faith that the 'old school chefs' are fading away now, replaced by more encouraging ones who show a more humane face to their kitchen brigades and better understand people's intrinsic drives (Appendix 3, diagram 17).

In summary, the research participants' perspective on the necessity of using their intrinsic drives to fit into the chef occupation was unclear. It depended on where individuals thought it came from: from past, present successes, or somewhere else that cannot be expressed clearly. However, they all agree that being intrinsically driven is a key characteristic that helps individuals see meaning in their occupational future, which helps them focus on the future and endure the difficulties of their jobs.

Another construct that the participants frequently raised was being ambitious with their occupation (Cooper 2012). For participant 1, that was something that kept him going without letting any frustration from the job put him off (see bipolar construct: "Ambition vs Frustration" in Appendix 3, diagram 1). However, in order to occur, he should love the job, even if he does not know why. To complement that construct, participant 5 saw ambition perhaps as a remedy to the stress, too, hence the frustration caused by the challenges of the job (Appendix 3, diagram 6). Nevertheless, participant 10 invested a lot in his ambition. He built the construct, "Hopefully open something of my own & put my heart on it independently vs fail to leave my name behind"". For him, ambition as a chef meant freedom to be the best that he could and unfold his full potential, believing that in this way, he would not experience an inconsistent flow of guests. Furthermore, ambition was seen as the future personal promise to leave his stamp on the field and make his family proud (Appendix 3, diagram 5).

In parallel to the above, the research participants interrelated ambition with setting goals in their work. These goals tend to make them happy (participant 18), stand out from their competition (participant 12), but also compete with themselves (participant 1, 19). It works as a motive to succeed and earn more; however, this success may prove challenging for their life. Participant 7 expressed his fears that success is a self-fulfilling achievement that in certain periods of time isolated him from his other life activities. It is energy caused by continual success. It may result in an unpleasant experience, not leaving room for anything else but the job: "Success brings more success & keeps you going vs Unable to enjoy other things in life" (Appendix 3, diagram 8). Being linked with the construct "Enjoy the job and bear the long hours vs There are alternatives to school to enjoy", his argument was emphasised even more; the internal call to achieve more paved the way for spending more hours in the kitchen and not with the family.

Ambition, in general, was perceived as a powerful channel that shows chefs where they are heading without getting stressed because of a lack of orientation. However, participants were also mindful to note that too much concentration on ambitious, targeted future performance could sacrifice the pleasure of life, so they need to keep reminding themselves about that risk and control it.

Love and passion for cooking was also a group of constructs voiced emphatically by most participants, either as a key ingredient of success or as necessary to have as chefs (Hendley 2017). Participant 1, in particular, could not really explain why he does what he does if not for love.

> Participant 1: *"…in the past I tried to stop cooking and do something else instead, and I did it… but after a couple of years I was missing the kitchen and went back to it [laughing]. Why did I do it? I don't know…"*

An answer to his rhetoric question was given by participant 21, who said that love for food and cooking comes from home. Moreover, that love is absolute as it was closely related to constructs of total satisfaction from the chef's occupation and artistic expression that he built (Appendix 3, diagram 18).

Participant 10 claimed that his passion for food kept his enthusiasm at work high. If that is non-existent, he would just do the work for an extended period and get no pleasure. To him, this construct was very closely related (95%) to the "Discovery of new techniques vs Not

enjoying cooking, lost passion" (Appendix 3, diagram 5). Therefore, his passion for cooking drove him to search for new techniques to improve his cooking performance. That was also supported by participant 3 (Appendix 3, diagram 12), who claimed that whenever he sees a lack of proper cooking qualifications in a kitchen brigade, it is linked to the absence of passion and desire. He was convinced about the meaning of incompetence. He tied this construct inextricably (100%) with "Quick results vs Believing in what you do and living it" and with "Mentoring others from experience vs Do your job – get on with it". He could not imagine people who love cooking resting with the idea that they know enough, assuming no need to learn more. Contrary to that, if he identifies passion in his team he would put the effort to mentor and train them so that they become better chefs. He argued that he cares for those people and wants to help them reveal who they are and discover their abilities; that would be because he sees the passion in them.

He makes a point about dynamic communication in teams because love and passion from one side elicit the appropriate positive behaviours from the other, head chefs of the team; hence the whole team excels: "Service is exciting and dynamic vs Without training there is no service" (Appendix 3, diagram 12). Looking at the same issue from a different perspective, participant 2 identified financial problems in those who do not love cooking because he stated that love for food and cooking is what would keep them developing and improving in difficult times. He expanded on this construct further, saying that people who are not well attracted to cooking are likely to be influenced by negative customer comments, reviews, etc. hence their performance would suffer (Appendix 3, diagram 14). Similarly, participants 14 and 21 claimed that allowing someone to apply their love and passion they have for cooking would keep them in the business, whereas taking it away from them would push them out.

In addition, passion for food was linked with two more constructs: a) creativity; according to participant 11, the sense of being able to create new things can be strong enough to outweigh the low payment of the job (Appendix 3, diagram 19), and b) becoming a role model; as participant 13 claimed, a chef's love and passion for cooking facilitates togetherness in the kitchen, establishes an engaging environment and turns a chef into a role model for the team (Appendix 3, diagram 11). The lack of the above makes the job in the commercial kitchen uninspiring, bureaucratic and ultimately vulnerable.

In summary, the research participants mentioned the influence of childhood experience on building love and passion for food and cooking. They acknowledge that it must be something esoteric that is hard to explain sometimes. However, they also acknowledge that it is a powerful driver to help chefs bypass any hurdles they meet in their everyday experience at work. At the same time, keep up the enthusiasm they need in dish creation and cooking.

Three more essential categories of constructs were found in the cluster analysis: creativity, top customer service, and mentoring.

Creativity was perceived as the way to express themselves artistically at work and remove the monotony of repetition (Tongchaiprasit and Ariyabuddhiphongs 2016; Robinson and Beesley 2010). Interestingly, a bipolar construct shared by participants 5 (Appendix 3, diagram 6) and 8 (Appendix 3, diagram 13) was that creativity results from continuous experimentation and focus. In contrast, the opposite is uncreative, repetitive and generic work, which was something they both disliked.

As pictured in the last construct analysed earlier, creativity was closely connected with a passion for food and cooking. Although most participants wished they had all the necessary ingredients to make the dishes they desired, they also believed that creativity requires them to be able to create unique dishes from anything available to them at any time. For example, participant 10 argued that discovering new techniques is part of the chef’s job. Participants 16 and 21 stated that this might be challenging but very rewarding, and they would not let anything stand in front of them as an impediment, "only health issues" (participant 21).

Seeking top customer service was also essential for the chef’s role among the study participants. Providing top service to customers and giving them a good experience would make them leave the restaurant happy. Participant 9 (Appendix 3, diagram 4) believed that *"everything is about customers"*, not only *"about skills and personality"* of the chef, and participant 3 (Appendix 3, diagram 12) elaborated on it, claiming that *"pleasing people and making them happy is what the job is about; we are not here for our egos*". In addition, participant 14 (Appendix 3, diagram 7) admitted that the satisfaction he gets from seeing guests happy after a good meal is potent ("you feel you can beat the world"). It has a double

effect on the chef: (a) satisfied because he has made others happy, and (b) happy with himself because he feels he is so good that he can make others happy.

> Participant 14: *"…you get that satisfaction from seeing people that are happy and then I think it's personal gratification, I would say, because you start thinking 'well, I'm good!'*

So, the satisfaction of his ego comes from serving their customers successfully. Consequently, he continued, this purpose of pleasing his guests makes the job very attractive sometimes regardless of the difficult work conditions they face, especially the sacrifice of a more traditional family life where he is actively involved. He argued that there is a battle inside him, an "internal conflict", between doing what he loved doing while not being where and whom he loves being with. Therefore, the feeling a chef gets from hearing 'thank you' from the guests is very powerful.

Finally, some participants expressed willingness to mentor their staff and safely lead them to success. *Mentoring* for them was seen as a personal need to share their knowledge with others and see them improve (Yang, Guo, Wang, Li 2018). However, it was also expressed as a source of power and entitlement in the commercial kitchen community (participants 3 and 8). Nonetheless, mentoring was seen as a deliberate action which aims to develop others' careers. Participant 15 distinguished the recipients of his mentoring between his kitchen brigade and members of his family (his son) (Appendix 3, diagram 10), connecting the personal with the working life together, therefore considering mentoring as a personal value beyond his occupational identity. In both cases, he would actively pass on his knowledge to them, making them equally happy. Aiming for the same results, but through mentoring others indirectly, participant 8 recognised that he could also develop his team by showing his example as a chef to others, by being mindful of his life needs alongside the demands of the work in the kitchen, and in that way passing on his personal values at work onto others. Therefore, two aspects of mentoring were considered: (a) cooking skills and kitchen management and (b) life skills and attitude as a chef who needs to balance both work and personal life efficiently.

In summary, the cluster analysis presented above helped the interpretation of the personal constructs elicited by the research participants and contributed to understanding them more clearly within the particular occupational field in question. However, that is the first step to a

logical categorisation of the constructs in groups of shared meaning. The study furthered the process of realising the need to aggregate the information collected and logically ordered up to this point, but at the same time retain, not completely sacrifice, a certain degree of the particular meaning they have for the participants. Therefore, the next step of the analysis offered an accurate definition of the categories identified from clustering the constructs and recognised groups of meanings that answer the study's central question more precisely.

### *5.4.2 Content Analysis of the constructs*

The analysis of many repertory grids produced a wealth of information that started to take shape after the initial cluster analysis. In that stage, constructs were grouped based on the similarity of individual ratings as identified in the dendrograms above. That grouping paved the way for the analysis of the content of the constructs, the only feasible way to aggregate the information collected, as Jankowicz (2004) claims. That is achieved by collecting and categorising the meanings attributed to the elicited constructs recorded in the grids. The content analysis offers the ground to expand the interpretation of the categories of constructs into a set of superordinate and subordinate ones. The following paragraphs aim to deliver on that to refine the existing knowledge of chefs' retention.

The study was faced with the practical challenge to compare multiple grids where all individual constructs and most of the elements are different; it would be easier if all the latter had been common statements. As explained in the methodology chapter (paragraph 4.4), that diversity of both constructs and elements was designed by the researcher because he wanted to give the participants full ownership of the elements and understand the construing of their reality deeper (Burr, King and Heckmann 2022; Burr and King 2019; Stewart and Stewart 1981). While that task is robust, it is also very challenging because additional critical interpretation of the participants' answers is needed to proceed in the construct categorisation (Fransella, Bell and Bannister 2004; Jankowicz 2004). Moreover, because of the number of interviewees, a direct comparison of the constructs on their career retention becomes a very complex task. The 23 interviews produced 157 constructs in total (eight and, in a few cases, five bipolar constructs in each interview). Therefore, the route of the analysis

had to adapt accordingly: in order to analyse the constructs, some detail in each of the grids would need "to inevitably be sacrificed [for example, the distinct scoring of the evaluation of each construct], while trends that are common to all of them would need to be recognised" (Jankowicz 2004:147). To that end, a content analysis was carried out. Different construct meanings from all grids were summarised, categorised and checked for the level of similarities and differences they had within each category.

The content analysis identified four superordinate and twelve subordinate categories of the constructs. More specifically, the constructs, as phrased by the research participants, were firstly analysed, interpreted, and categorised in groups of similar meanings. Secondly, these groups were further refined and positioned under four superordinate categories, which explained the constructs more comprehensively. Finally, the sets of the emerged constructs shaped the answers to the question of how chefs conceptually map their decision to remain in the 'chef's occupation.

The analysis used an adaptation of the bootstrapping technique by Holsti (1968) in which the meaning of both the content and context of the constructs is the outcome of the interrelation of the two. As it was mentioned in the methodology chapter, the information collected in the individual repertory grids (content) and the narrative of each participant together with the insights of the preceding cluster analysis (context) contributed to the generation of the construct categories. Especially in the cases where there was ambiguity in the meaning of constructs, hence they could be allocated in more than one category, the context of the answer was considered for a more accurate understanding. The recognised meaning of the elicited constructs assisted in their suitable categorisation. The first two columns of appendix 7 describe the process. For example, participant 4 created the bipolar construct of: "Stressful to look up to somebody VS Lack of stress means you don't follow your role model"; participant 5 created the construct of: "Hard work is a reality VS Love it as a choice"; participant 7 created the construct of: "Work hard - play hard captures the enthusiasm of chefs VS Job is not for everyone"; etc. Further elaboration of them by exploring the transcribed narrative of their interviews and their correlated personal constructs in their grid defined them more precisely. They provided the reasons to fit those constructs in the category of 'Resilience'.

The third column is a product of the initial cluster analysis; it includes the definition of each category as it was shaped in the previous stage of the analysis process and was further

concluded here. The fourth column records the number of emergences of those constructs among all participants allocated in the respective category, followed by their percentage against the total number of constructs. The categories have been ordered according to their frequency, from higher to lower.

Initially, the analysis resulted in eight categories of constructs and several independent ones, which were positioned closely, but outside those categories. The context of the constructs, evident in the narrative of the interviews and their initial cluster analysis, assisted in a funnelling process to avoid having many uncategorised constructs. Jankowicz (2004:149) suggests that 5% of uncategorised constructs is acceptable. In this study, the following filtering process resulted in 157 constructs fitting into ten categories and four constructs consisting of a separate category named 'Miscellaneous' (see appendix 7). For example, drawing on the case of 'Resilience' mentioned earlier, a second filtering process identified the construct "Enjoy the job and bear the long hours vs There are alternatives to school to enjoy" built by participant 7, which was initially put under a category 'Alternative to School". However, what the participant supposed in his interview was that

> *"if you don't enjoy serving the customers you wouldn't bear the long hours at work, …"*

and his emphasis was on that 'emergent' part of the construct, because, on the 'implicit' part, he continued as

> "*…I can't really say now if not continuing with school was a better alternative, [laugh] because obviously I didn't continue, so I don't know…".*

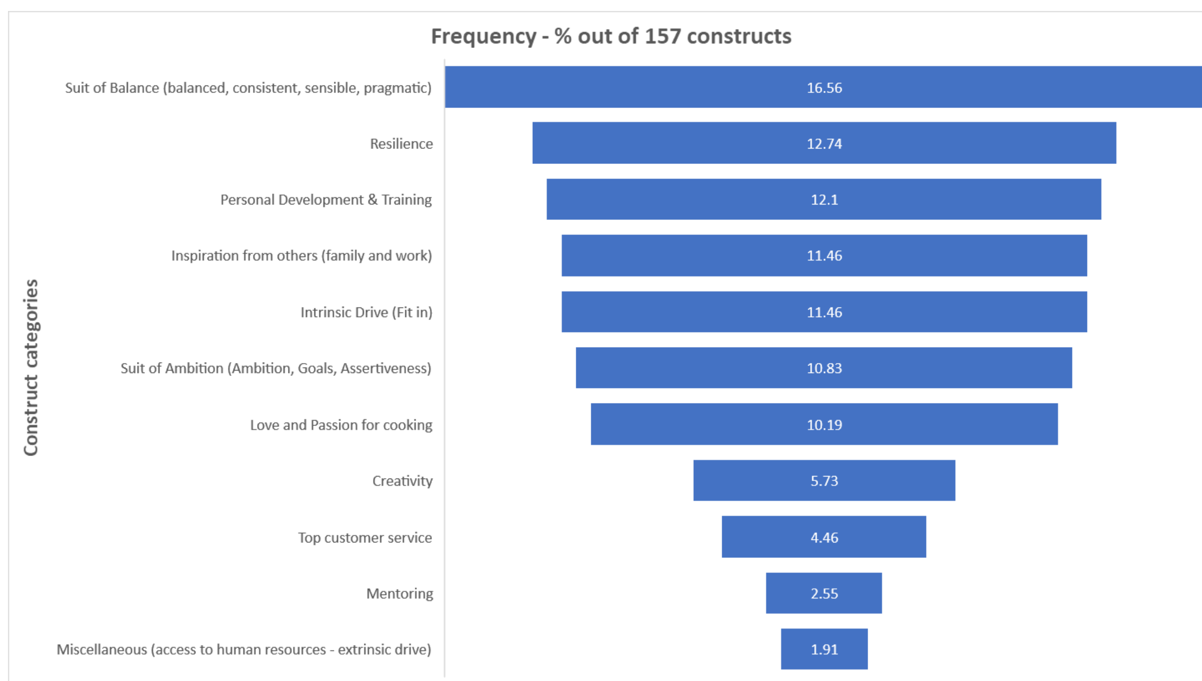
Therefore, the context of the construct guided the researcher to allocate it logically in the category of resilience.

To strengthen the reliability of the analysis, the researcher asked an independent, experienced academic in social sciences to interpret and categorise the elicited constructs separately. That person did not have prior knowledge of the collected data, nor had she looked at the initial judgment of the primary researcher. After the researcher had initially completed his content analysis and categorised the constructs in the above categories, that second independent analyst, who had also broken down the elements of the repertory grids in categories of shared meanings at the previous stage of the analysis, repeated the content analysis independently. Following that, the initial results were cross-checked. Finally, the

researcher put the two judgments in parallel and compared them. The interpretation of a few of the constructs was reconsidered from this auxiliary analysis. For example, some constructs moved from the category of 'Love and Passion for the Job' to the category 'Intrinsic Drive (Fit in)'. Also, the smaller category of 'Assertiveness' merged with the bigger one of 'Ambition' and formed a broader category of 'Suit of Ambition/ Assertiveness'. Consequently, the existing categories adapted their titles to a refined interpretation of their content. They were reordered based on their adjusted priority among the number of statements allocated in each category. As a result, the 'Intrinsic Drive (Fit in)' and the 'Suit of Ambition/ Assertiveness' moved up two places and ranked before the 'Love and Passion for the Job'. The rest remained in the same position.

The hierarchical core categorisation of the constructs (Jankowicz 2004) described in figure 13 based on the frequency of occurrence revealed a few categories of constructs which primarily emerged from the research participants:

- Keeping a balanced, consistent, sensible and pragmatic attitude in the work of a chef;
- Building resilience to outweigh the challenging work conditions;
- Seeking personal development and training on becoming specialists;
- Identifying the inspiration deriving from family and/or the work environment, especially highlighting its bonding element;
- Recognising an intrinsic drive towards cooking so that individuals feel that they fit in the job;
- Having high ambition and the assertiveness to achieve their goals; and
- Expressing their love and passion for food and cooking




*(Figure 13: Core categorisation of constructs)*

Each construct which looks similar among people does not necessarily mean the same thing to every individual; people define constructs personally (Kelly 1955). That was clarified through the context in which the construct was built and its bipolar presentation illustrated in the repertory grid interview. Therefore, it was impossible to provide a single meaning to each of the construct categories above under that prism. Instead, it was appropriate and consistent to give a concise account of what the research participants believed the boundaries were within which the constructs take meaning for them. More precisely:

*Keeping a balanced, consistent, sensible and pragmatic attitude* in the work of a chef was defined as the condition in which chefs continue to be passionate about cooking, creative and happy, and at the same time keep a balance with their personal life, not allowing their work to occupy their life completely. That was perceived as critical because the opposite exposes them to career uncertainty and makes them vulnerable in the market. Therefore, chefs need to distinguish the things they can control and the ones they cannot; be open to opportunities but take sensible and pragmatic approach to what they choose to do; think of what is feasible; and take ownership of their positive actions that outweigh the negatives of their work.

*Resilience* for the study participants meant that chefs accept that the hard work that the job entails is key to becoming a chef. The desire to follow this career path and tolerate the

substantial hardships of the commercial kitchen must be driven internally. It is not a job for everyone, but only for those who have a passion for it, want to work hard to be like their role models and always keep learning. That implies three requirements: 1) build on what can be controlled and not get stuck by what cannot, 2) develop a feeling of belonging, work in teams and feel part of them, and 3) remember to find alternative ways to live a 'normal' life, because the hard work of chefs may have a detrimental effect on their health.

Emphasis was also put on *personal development through constant training*. Participants claimed that this is the only way to keep someone moving up as a chef, expand their horizons and help them stand out. That is a complex task achieved only through discipline, adaptation and modesty. Knowledge acquired through training should not only be kept by the chefs individually but shared with younger chefs too, by practically showing from their experience and sharing the joy from developing in the job. Constant development makes a chef's life easier to be able to adapt to changes and challenges.

The *inspiration* they get from family or work is perceived as critical to keep being a chef. The participants held that the feeling of having family members in the kitchen or inheriting the family chef tradition is very strong and drives success. Likewise, kitchen brigades act like a family, which also drives success. Nothing should stay in between and break these bonds. In a top team with such substantial cohesion, operations become easier, engagement levels increase, peers support and motivate each other, performance gets high and enjoyable, and ultimately everyone feels proud about the outcome of the work.

Another construct that emerged in the interviews equally strong was the *intrinsic drive* that chefs understood they have, which helps them meet targets and succeed. That was defined as a psychological force that derives either from how chefs have been brought up by their parents and family or by the success experienced in the job. In either case, this drive is so strong that it could lead them to their dreamed goals and successes, but it also could absorb them in an environment of continual self-fulfilling success, where nothing else but work matters in life. This sometimes-unexplained draw into the chef's occupation stands opposite to the obstacles raised by the adverse work conditions and makes people overcome them. In that sense, it was implied that another element for building resilience is the strong intrinsic drive which keeps people going without thinking of the difficulties.

Research participants also built constructs around *ambition*. That was perceived as driving energy which pushes chefs to high performance and recognition. Ambition could refer to work targets, hence competing with others and self, but running after success alone could make it hard for them to enjoy other facets of life. Therefore, creating an enjoyable team or work environment or anything meaningful to the individual is also perceived as an ambition. Being ambitious in these terms is not perceived as stressful; on the contrary, a lack of ambition could lead to stress.

A construct, which was seen quite frequently, was the participants' *love & passion for cooking*. That was a catalyst for enjoying the job in the commercial kitchen regardless of its difficulties. It was claimed it is a solid and intrinsic element of the job, but it is hard to explain where it derives from; it might come from personal upbringing. Love and passion for cooking make people focus on what they are passionate about and ignore other problems attached to the chef's occupation (e.g. low pay). Passion can be controlled and may take different forms according to current conditions. However, it needs to exist to keep the enthusiasm high, ensure continuous personal development, be creative, become a role model for others, and elevate the whole team's service performance to higher levels. With love for food, chefs can endure anything; only health problems can stop them. *"Without passion, there is no job"*.

Other constructs that are possible to make the participants feel comfortable in their occupation and remain in their chef careers were the following: the expression of their *creativity* in the job and their freedom to maintain it in their operations; the focus on providing *top service* for their guests; opportunities that chefs are given to *mentor* other members of the kitchen brigade; and, also, some reference to easy access to the right (trained) *human resources* when they are needed. Details of the categorisation of the constructs are presented in appendix 7.

The meanings given to the emerged constructs analysed above revealed characteristics met in more than one construct. These definitions are derived from the combination of the final meanings of the constructs with the intercorrelations between the bipolar constructs, as presented in the dendrograms in the FOCUS cluster analyses. For example, participants 2, 13, 14, and 23 (see their FOCUS cluster analysis diagrams in appendix 3) linked 'love and passion for food and cooking' with qualities that help chefs sidestep the hurdles of a demanding work environment and tolerate any struggles that derive from it. Hence, it is interrelated with the

construct of ‘resilience’. It is also one of the features that some participants (4, 13) believed can be controlled, so it can be ‘balanced’ and handled ‘sensibly’. Additionally, love and passion for food was perceived as ‘an intrinsic drive’ and may derive from how people were brought up at home (participant 21 and 17), inspired by their family environment.

Content analysis revealed similar interrelations in other groups of constructs, too, consisting of a network of connections among them. Figure 14 illustrates the interconnections recognised among categories of constructs in detail. Therefore, the interpretation of that network positioned ‘Resilience’ in a central role amongst all other constructs as it connects with most of the constructs. Also, ‘Being ‘balanced, sensible and pragmatic’ and ‘Inspired by family and work’ are also pivotal to understanding what makes chefs stay in their occupation as the participants highly ordered them. ‘Loving food and cooking’ and recognising the ‘intrinsic drive’ to work in the commercial kitchen also seemed to connect with almost all other central constructs and therefore sit at the heart of all interrelations. Between the categories of ‘resilience’, ‘being balanced, sensible, pragmatic’, ‘inspiration from family and work’, ‘love and passion’ for food and cooking, and ‘intrinsic drive’, there was a common impression: people feel that they *fit in the chef’s occupation and feel good about it*; they express themselves safely and in comfort in the sense that they do not need to put an extraordinary effort to perform in their role as if they were someone else; it comes natural to them.

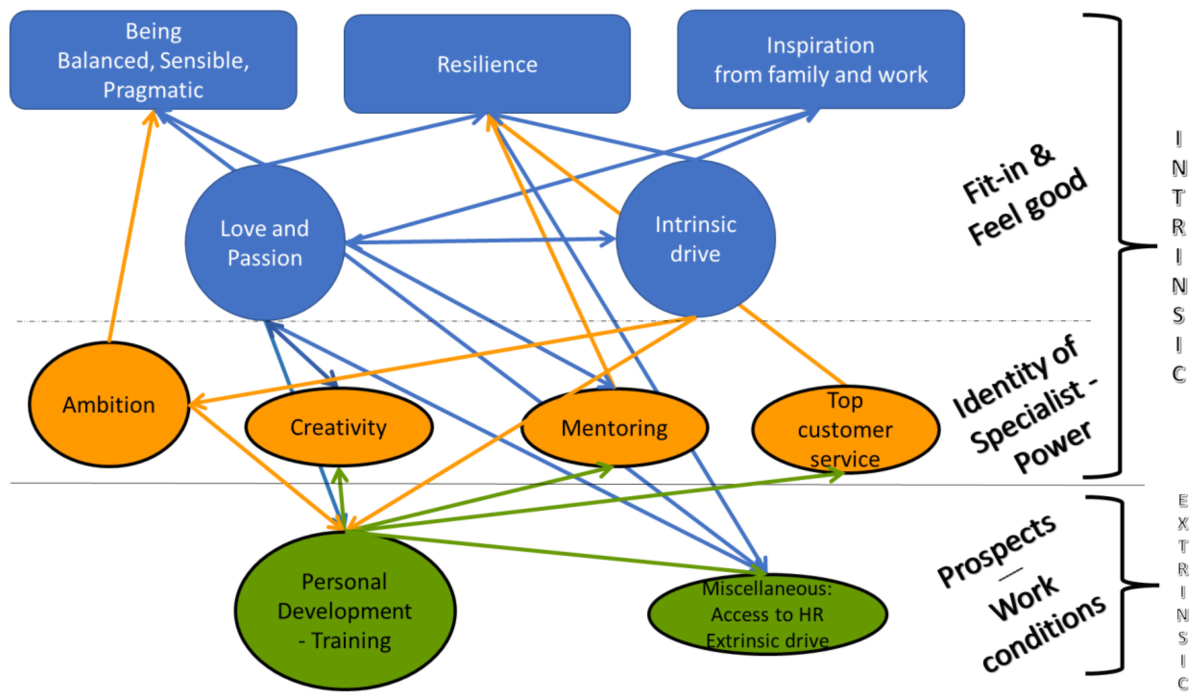
The set of constructs that referred to ‘ambition’ also consisted of constructs linked with being ‘balanced and sensible’ and reinforced by chefs’ ‘intrinsic drive’. In the same way, ‘creativity’ was interrelated with the ‘love and passion’ for food and cooking and the expectation that chefs need to ‘personally develop through training’ continuously to apply their creative ideas. ‘Mentoring’ was expressed as a direct reflection of ‘love and passion’ (participant 3) and the realisation of experienced chefs that they have a responsibility to pass on to new generations the qualities of resilience and balance in their decisions about the job and their life (participants 8 and 16). The construct of providing ‘top customer service’ was also linked with the ‘resilience’ chefs need to develop against the challenging work conditions of their job (participants 9, 11, 14, 15). Setting goals and having ‘ambition’ for their job, expressing their ‘creative’ side, becoming ‘mentors’ to others and being recognised for the ‘top service’ they provide their guests gives chefs a sense of identity. That includes having *authority and*

*power* from possessing *special knowledge* of the culinary art and technique that only a few can manage.

Both of the above groups of constructs were internally developed and driven either in the past before the participants began their careers in the commercial kitchen or progressively evolved in the person while working as chefs. For that reason, they are characterised as ‘intrinsic’ types of constructs (figure 14).

The construct of continuous ‘personal development through training’, frequently expressed by participants, seemed to be interrelated with many other constructs that emerged in the study. When chefs get trained consistently and develop as specialists and managers in the commercial kitchen, they become capable of providing excellent guest experience; are allowed to actively use their creative minds; learn strategies to confront the difficulties of accessing the right kitchen staff as necessary; are pictured as knowledgeable chefs who can mentor others. Also, the participants’ ambition to reach and challenge their goals makes them refer to the construct of their personal development with emphasis. It also derives from a very intrinsic drive to be as good as possible in their job and stand out. In general, this is perceived as a reason to identify positive prospects for their job and improve their careers (participants 7, 13, 15). Therefore, the multidimensional interconnection of the personal development of chefs through training with so many other constructs gave a pivotal role in explaining chefs’ desire to stay in their job alongside being balanced, resilient and inspired by family and others at work.

Seeking for personal development provided by their organisation or offered by their managers in particular, together with the less frequently emerged constructs of ‘extrinsic drives' and the ‘limited access of chefs to the right human resources’ are external constructs to the individuals. However, they are not controlled by the individuals because the research participants perceived them as conditions provided to them by others (people or organisations/ institutions), either positively or negatively. Therefore, these are categorised as ‘extrinsic’ constructs in figure 14.




*(Figure 14. Content Analysis of Constructs)*

The detailed content analysis of the constructs described above pointed to the direction of creating four inclusive superordinate constructs. The understanding of why chefs stay in their jobs can best be treated under four headings: Fit-in and Feel good, Identity of Specialists with Power, Career Prospects and Work Conditions. The first two are intrinsically driven, whereas the rest two are more extrinsically driven. Each of those categories of higher order contains several sets of constructs, as outlined in table 8 and portrayed in figure 14.

| **Fit-in & Feel Good** | **Identity (Specialists with Power)** | **Career Prospects** | **Work Conditions** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Suit of Balance (Being balanced, consistent, sensible and pragmatic) | Suit of Ambition (ambition, goals, assertiveness) | Personal development & training | Access to Human Resources |
| Resilience | Creativity | | Extrinsic Drive |
| Inspiration from others (family and work atmosphere) | Top customer service | | |
| Intrinsic Drive (fit in) | Mentoring | | |
| Love and Passion for cooking | | | |

*(Table 8: Superordinate and subordinate categories of constructs)*

As a result, our research findings showed that the participants of the study believed that the two most substantial reasons they remain chefs are the following: Firstly, because they feel that the commercial kitchen is 'like home' to them, they fit in perfectly and working in this setting makes them feel good, as they do not have to stretch themselves to do things they feel uncomfortable with. Secondly, because the job role they acquired gives them the identity of someone with special knowledge of a craft, art and technique that few people can handle effectively. They feel that others also recognise this, giving them a sense of authority and power, especially over their peers and younger generation of cooks and chefs, which is materialised by being their leaders and mentoring them. These are two solid categories of constructs that derive from the person, hence are considered intrinsic to the individual.

On the opposite side, deriving from factors that sit outside chefs' complete control are the opportunities given to them to develop their careers and see promising prospects in what they do for a living. According to the research participants, that is achieved by engaging in continuous training about perfecting their technique, learning about new dishes, managing the kitchen more efficiently, and generally improving their delivery. Chefs seemed to put much emphasis on that construct. Also, there was a minor reference to some of the challenging conditions they must learn to work in, like the returns they get back for the effort they put in the commercial kitchen and the availability and accessibility to a trained workforce, which allows them to produce the expected outcome. However, these are issues perceived as extrinsic to chefs; they cannot always be attributed to the capability of the individual chef but rather to the conditions of the occupation. Continuous exposure to them with no signs of a resolution was then considered a reason to make chefs stay or leave their occupation, as a few argued (participants 7, 11, 22).

### 5.5 Core Constructs – Core Values: Laddering-up process

To confirm the initial analysis of the constructs collected from the research participants, especially the superordinate constructs figured in table 8 (Burke and Jankowicz 2018), a further analysis was conducted, which clarified the core meanings that chefs gave to the reasons they stay in their occupation. That decision to triangulate the reliability of the results was based on the value of revealing the core constructs of interviewees interviewed using

RGT. This process is called laddering-up and aims to prioritise participants' key constructs according to their critical role in their decisions. As Stewart and Stewart (1981:22) argue, "the construct system is not just a jumble of assorted perceptions; it is a hierarchy, with some constructs closer to the centre, to the essence of the person and others more peripheral". Following up from the interrelation of constructs exercised earlier, showing the pivotal role of some, laddering up helps picture this hierarchy by specifying the core position of specific constructs, hence the intensity of their influence on the person. The laddering-up process is used "to elicit the more abstract values associated with the high-order constructs" (Marsden and Littler 2000). As it is suggested by Stewart and Stewart (1981:160), where content analysis of constructs is to be conducted, laddering-up and core constructs should be discussed with the research participants as a follow-up. That is achieved by extending the repertory grid interview by asking the interviewee to explain further the constructs that seem to stand out in their grid:

At the end of each interview, the researcher and the participant identified the strongest repeated pattern in the evaluation (scoring) of the elicited constructs.

The researcher observed identical (or almost identical) patterns of scoring the constructs on the grid horizontally (eyeballing technique (Jankowicz 2004)), which indicated some common themes of the answers the interviewee had given.

After joint consultation (researcher and research participant) and agreement on the interpretation of those common constructs, the interpreted theme consisted of the basis (a new bipolar construct) of the laddering-up process of eliciting the core construct of the research participant.

Jankowicz (2004) also considers this technique as a way to reveal the individual's core values regarding the study in question, as he recognises that the higher people's constructs are ordered, the clearer they become core values.

When the interviewer put the primary bipolar construct at the bottom of the ladder, the interviewee was asked to explain why they thought that it was so important to them. Their answer was also written to the next step of the ladder in bipolar format. That consisted of a new construct for which the interviewee was asked to explain the reason they thought it was important to them again. This process was repeated several times, consistently producing a

superordinate construct. Finally, when the interviewee provided a circular argument around the same topic and could not generate any new construct easily, it meant that they reached their core construct. It was then noted at the top of the ladder. That was a higher-order construct also perceived as the core value of the participant. As such, this was likely to be very personal and had probably reached deeply embedded beliefs of the person. According to Stewart and Stewart (1981:160), individual core constructs usually have "survival value for them and get them around the world well enough", so they need our extra attention. Therefore, before the interview was completed, the interviewer would ask the interviewee if they agreed with the finding to avoid any misunderstanding. In all interviews conducted, the participants expressed their satisfaction to the researcher in the end (in some cases expressing very positive emotional reactions) that this was indeed the highest value they have in their work, making them remain chefs.

The laddering exercise showed distinctive core constructs among the 23 participants, as described in the middle column of table 9. Next, these core constructs were interpreted again and grouped into seven broader categories of shared meanings, as outlined in the first column of the table below:

| **Categories of core constructs/ values** | **Core constructs/ values** | |
|---|---|---|
| Constant developing and improving | *Love getting the knowledge to create new dishes – always learn* | Participant 4 |
| | *Discover opportunities, alternatives, variety and more interesting tasks utilising the wealth of skills you develop as a chef* | Participant 8 |
| | *Being a Chef requires high knowledge/ education to perform* | Participant 11 |
| | *Improve and develop always with others and for others (customers)* | Participant 16 |
| Top service to others | *My life is about cooking for my job and for others – that is who I am* | Participant 9 |
| | *Stay happy and make others feel happy through the kitchen* | Participant 17 |
| | *Being passionate and happy and make others happy with the food I cook* | Participant 21 |
| Remain competitive with myself and my team | *Keep high standards in my industry through myself and my team* | Participant 3 |
| | *Build your credibility among your team and your network* | |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | *You need good people around you to succeed & carry on with your new goals* | Participant 6<br>Participant 18 |
| Recognition/ Self-esteem and Pride | *Leave my signature to anything I do*<br>*Independence – confidence & self-esteem makes you feel proud*<br>*Being artistic makes you proud not only for you, but for your clients too* | Participant 2<br>Participant 7<br>Participant 14 |
| Calculated development | *Both legs on the ground*<br>*Be pragmatic and enjoy a prosperous career*<br>*Knowing your job inside out makes you feel comfortable* | Participant 1<br>Participant 15<br>Participant 23 |
| Improve and stay humble | *Being self-aware and scan the environment around you with humility makes you improve*<br>*Want to improve and improve the lives of younger generations in a humble way* | Participant 19<br>Participant 22 |
| Fit in | *Personal value to be in the right job because you have the right character to succeed*<br>*Be happy and enjoy the work of a chef or do not do it* | Participant 5<br>Participant 20 |
| Inspired by a leader/ role model | *Having someone to look up to creates the commitment and drive to continue*<br>*A leader passes the love and passion for food on to me and I on to others* | Participant 12<br>Participant 13 |
| Be authentic | *Be true to myself and my food and that would satisfy my guests and sustain my business* | Participant 10 |

*(Table 9: Core constructs – Core values)*

The above core constructs/ core values either stood alone and independent from the rest or, in three cases, were interrelated with others and enhanced the understanding of each with more clarity and inclusivity. More specifically, categorising the core constructs/ core values reiterated the participants' desire to self-develop and improve their skills in the commercial kitchen. That was also elaborated by a few chefs who clarified that development in their role should not be coupled with arrogance but with a balanced, sensible approach, humility and calculated risks. Participant 19, in particular, was adamant that if chefs do not listen to their criticisms, they do not improve; they become stagnant:

Participant 19**:** *"Well, if you can't consistently think that you're always doing things [in a certain way], but it's a pattern of these comments [about your work by others], there's obviously a common denominator, and most likely, it's you. So, unless you change that, you're never gonna progress and grow and, and continue to... or succeed. I'm sure there's lots of people…, but then you hit a wall, hit a ceiling…… just constantly thinking that you're*

*never, never improving, and then you stay stagnant. There's no progression, right?…… I think of a lot of chefs that just don't have this humility".*

Similarly, participant 22 commented that her development should not be for her own kudos, but for the next generation; that's the way to move forward:

Participant 22: "*I don't need that bloody label and title like, …I'm not, …like, …I've never had an aspiration to have my own restaurant with my name over. They don't need that to be tied back to me. You know what I mean… It's not an end in that way. Not for kudos and reputation… It's just common sense from how life goes. …You could say improve in a more humble way".*

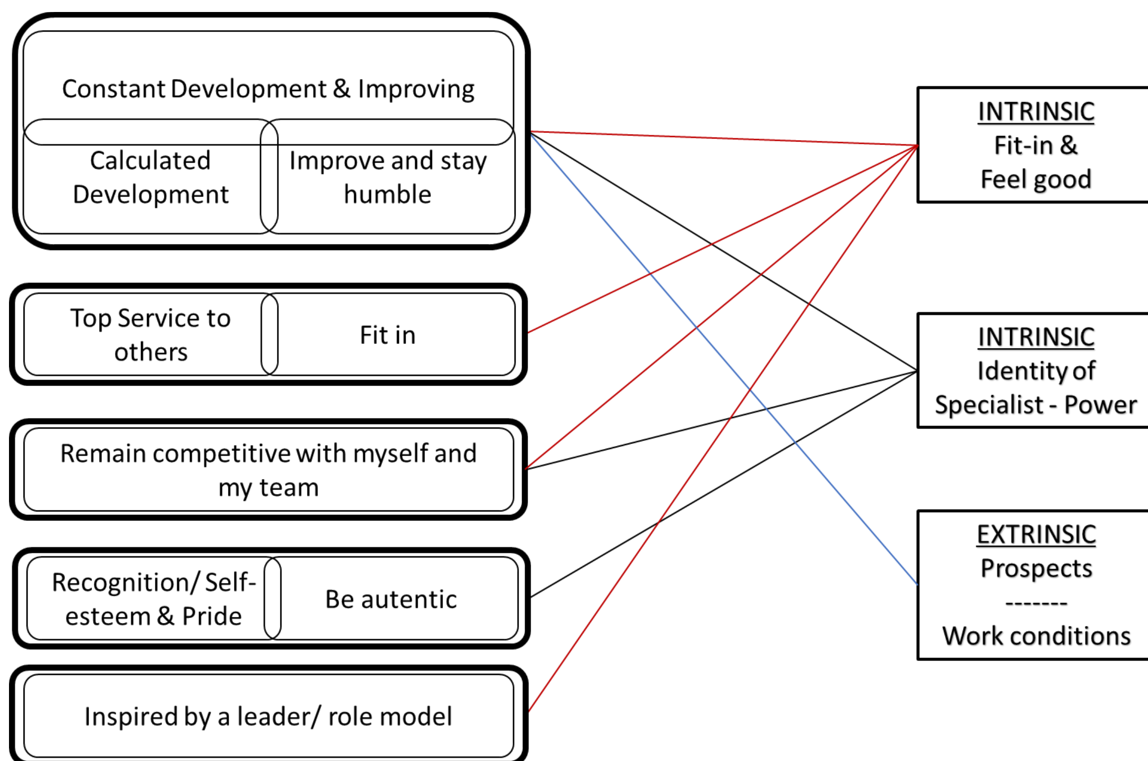
Another set of core constructs/ core values referred to the necessary condition of realising the purpose of the chef's job, which was to provide customer service. If someone fits in that purpose, staying in the job would be natural. It is "difficult to deny who you are", as participant 9 stated; surprisingly, she had abandoned a promising career as a future lawyer for the commercial kitchen. Similarly, participant 17 argued that someone needs to feel happy in what the kitchen does to them and enjoy what it offers to the guests "or not do it at all". So, fitting in the chef's job was supplementary to providing top customer service.

The expression of the desire to be authentic in the kitchen also shared features of the core construct/ core value of maintaining self-esteem and being recognised (Gunders 2008). Participant 10 would look forward to opening his bistro where he could serve his food creations and feel proud of himself and his children. That was very close to what participant 2 also said about his purpose as a chef: to leave his stamp on anything he does, so be recognised for that by others. The standard message in these core constructs was that chefs gain recognition and raise their self-esteem by remaining authentic in their work. Contrary to what would be expected, the connection between recognition from the public and accurate technical skills was not found anywhere in the participants' core constructs/ core values. That does not imply that they downplayed that aspect of their capabilities (it was present in the elicited personal constructs analysed earlier) but that they did not consider it a core construct/ core value that could lead to their retention.

The analysis of the core constructs/ core values with their interrelations described above finally consisted of five main categories, shown on the left of figure 15. These were considered the most influential values of the study participants to explain their retention in the chef's

occupation. The scope of this process was to ensure that the analysis of the constructs conducted in the study was reliable and could be replicable if looked at from a different perspective.

These core constructs/ core values confirmed the content analysis of the constructs of the study. The laddering-up process did not reveal any new meaning to the pallet of meanings identified earlier. It also reassured the analysis of the findings that the intrinsic type of constructs ('Fit in & Feel Good' and 'Identity of a Specialist with Power') is stronger than the extrinsic ones ('Career Prospects' and Work Conditions'). It captured the majority of space in the decisions of chefs to stay in the occupation. Figure 15 illustrates the reassurance for the results that the laddering-up gave to the study and highlights the interconnections observed between the main categories of the constructs explained in the content analysis and the groups of core constructs/ core values of the participants.




*(Figure 15: Interrelation between superordinate categories of constructs and core constructs – values)*

In addition, the laddering-up analysis revealed a new element of consideration; a few research participants (mainly female) noted that their personal and career development

should not make them arrogant and selfish but keep them humble. Their core construct/ core value of personal development provided an idealistic view of their role as chefs, which serves the creation of good dishes, good guest experience and good future chefs predominantly and not them directly.

**5.6 Summary**

The chapter presented the study's findings divided into two main parts: the immediate reactions of the participants to their retention of the chef's occupation (elements) and the specific meaning they gave to those reactions (constructs). The latter was furthered and confirmed by revealing their higher order constructs (core constructs/ core values) which they claimed have more influence on the chefs' decision to stay in their jobs.

Firstly, the interviewees believed that they remain chefs because they love the challenge of serving customers; they naturally fit in the kitchen environment, even if the reasons behind that are elusive and cannot be explained easily. They also remain because they want to leave their legacy behind to make their family proud. The participants also claimed that the conditions that could make their jobs ideal in the future and support their desire to stay are their ability to get easier access to trained staff, having the opportunity to mentor others and pass on their skills and knowledge to them, keep seeing positive career prospects, maintaining their freedom to be creative in the kitchen (irrespective of kitchen politics and financial constraints), keeping a reasonable work-life balance, and especially developing stronger resilience to manage the adversaries of the chef's occupation, embedded in the nature of the commercial kitchen.

Secondly, in the attempt to discover the particular meanings of those elements that keep chefs on the job and identify them in clusters of similar significance, it was found that seven categories of constructs play an essential role in their work for the research participants. These were:

- Keeping a balanced attitude and being sensible, pragmatic and consistent
- Developing resilience in their work
- Being inspired by their family or work environment

- Seeking their personal development through training
- Responding positively to a strong internal drive into the chef's occupation
- Keeping their ambition alive and active
- Continue to show their love and passion for food and cooking

Thirdly, the set of constructs mentioned above was interrelated according to the idiosyncratic meanings given to them by the participants and further grouped into four superordinate categories: feel they fit in the chef's occupation and feel good working in the kitchen; gaining an identity of a specialist who has a degree of power and authority over others; being able to see positive career prospects as chefs, and argue for the improvement of the work conditions to facilitate their job in the commercial kitchen. It was found that the first two categories are more robust than the rest, consisting of constructs that are all perceived as intrinsic to the individuals. On the other hand, the other two are extrinsically driven, and although they have a few strong advocates, they are not equally critical to chefs to stay in their jobs.

Finally, the above findings were confirmed via the laddering-up process of analysis, which revealed the participants' core constructs/ core values. This analysis reiterated that intrinsically driven constructs are considered much more important than extrinsically driven ones.

# Chapter 6. Discussion of the findings

The picture that emerges from the preceding analysis presents a rich set of reasons that the participant chefs claim influenced them to sustain a career in commercial kitchens. In this chapter, the research findings are considered in relation to the existing theory of employee retention in the context of chefs' occupations. More specifically, the findings critically analyse the extent that Job Embeddedness and Occupational Embeddedness (as a whole or partly), as well as Internal Locus of Control, can be refined to build on their current adequate explanation of the retention of chefs (see figure 5). In doing so, they revisit key cultural characteristics of the chef occupation and the explain the increased resilience that chefs show to function in their work successfully.

Following that discussion between the findings and the abovementioned theories of retention, new observations are presented and critically evaluated based on a dialogue between research findings and the existing literature. This chapter discusses how the objectives set at the outset of the study are met and intends to answer the research questions raised based on both the scholarly community and the practitioners currently being challenged by the increasing shortage of chefs. The chapter ends with the concluding interpretation of the study results, which maps the cognitive journey of chefs who sustain their careers and refine what is already known about chefs' retention. That cognitive map contributes to a clearer understanding of the chef's identity and distinguishes the ones who turn their job to a sustainable career from those who use it as a vehicle to make a living.

This discussion is logically structured, firstly, by reviewing the key findings of the research concerning the main theoretical frameworks of employee retention considered in the study: job embeddedness, occupational embeddedness, and internal locus of control. Secondly, while these theoretical frameworks were present in the research findings, the participants gave personal meanings to their experience in the occupation, which explained why they stayed in the chef's job over a long period, despite the difficulties they face in the commercial kitchen environment. These meanings of retention are interpreted and discussed through the prism of the intrinsic and extrinsic nature of drivers. Finally, the discussion concludes with a cognitive map of chefs, which explains the pathways and direction of their thoughts to the reason for their career retention. This cognitive map refines what is already known about

chefs' retention and gives more profound insights into why they remain chefs over a long period.

## 6.1 Research findings and job embeddedness (JE)

The study aims to gain a deeper understanding of why chefs stay in the commercial kitchen despite the recognised adversities of the job. The research question, which evolved from the aim of the study, was to find the integrated reasons chefs stay in their jobs and the thought processes they employ in their decisions to retain their work in the commercial kitchen and not move to other careers. The study was based on existing theories of employee retention, also considering peer-reviewed studies in the context of hospitality. The three factors which affect employee retention in the model of JE are fit, links, and sacrifice (Mitchell et al. 2001). Mitchell and his team distinguish these factors into two categories: 1) organisationally driven (on-the-job) and 2) community-driven (off-the-job). Therefore, as some of the elements of the study created by the participants at the beginning of the research borrowed domains from JE, it is necessary to discuss how far JE can account for chefs' retention and, in a way, 'trap' them in their occupation (Felps et al. 2009). Also, consider if there were areas found to expand on it. The following paragraphs comment on the degree of congruence between the study's findings and the JE domains of Fit-Organisation, Links-Community, Sacrifice-Community, Fit-Community, Sacrifice-Organisation, and Links-Organisation in order of appearance in the discussion.

### *6.1.1 Fit-Organisation*

The findings reflected a query raised by Robinson et al. (2014), who researched retention in hospitality in Australia. They claimed that the domain structure of JE, although valid, might not be as robust for the hospitality industry as compared to studies in other industries. Also, other studies outside hospitality (Coetzer, Inma and Poisat 2016) found that some of the JE domains (e.g. links) may have a different effect on small organisations compared to bigger ones, with the former valuing quality of links more than quantity. However, this study suggests that almost all JE domains (except Sacrifice-Community, which was implied) apply 'o chefs' decisions to stay in the occupation.

More specifically, the study found that some of those domains appear strongly in analysing the interviewees' answers in the first phase of the research (elements). First, the domain Fit-Organisation: in answering the preliminary questions (to shape the elements of the repertory grids), participants expressed their firm belief that they naturally fit in the kitchen environment, and for that reason, they have become and remained chefs. As many of them claimed, one of the perspectives of the job that is attractive to them is a love for serving demanding customers. That love for specific aspects of the occupation was further extended in the personal constructs elicited in the interviews to the 'Love and Passion for Food and Cooking'. Participant chefs initially stated that they feel an unexplained personal attraction to the job. The analysis of constructs showed that this might reflect being drawn into ’the chef's role because of a personal career calling (Duffy et al. 2018; Cain, Busser and Kang 2017), an 'intrinsic drive' that makes them fit in. That drive might not always be directly linked with the Fit–Organisation domain. However, it is necessary to understand how chefs are driven into the occupation and are ready to fit in their organisation that offers them the opportunity to experience what they love doing, cooking professionally. A prime (superordinate) category of constructs which emerged in the study and incorporated the above constructs was the 'Fit-in and Feel Good' about being a chef, which also matches the meaning of the domain of Fit-Organisation. Therefore, it seems that this was common ground among the research participants. The chef participants specified in the study that their fit in the kitchen organisation made them extra resilient. That is a characteristic of highly stressed careers (Hodges, Troyan, and Keeley 2010); hence able to overcome any difficulty, big or small, that appears in their everyday experience.

#### *6.1.2 Links-Community*

Part of the explanation they gave to their fit was the belief that they had positive personal experiences during their childhood based on observing or cooking together with someone from their immediate family (or others they were acquainted with) who passed on a love and passion for food and cooking. That involvement in the professional kitchen reassured chefs that they did something with their careers that made close members of their immediate social environment happy or proud of them and, consequently, a sense of belonging to their family legacy of competent cooks. Therefore, the chefs' ability to fit into the organisation led to

another domain of JE: Links–Community. That sense of belongingness to the legacy of the nuclear family (or to significant others outside the organisation) seems to increase the likelihood of workplace attachment which helps employees remain in their occupation (March and Simon 1958); that was the main academic explanation of turnover for many years. Mitchell et al. (2001) elaborated on attachment theories in turnover and retention. They referred to it as the impact of 'links' on employee retention, but the above finding of the study broadens and specifies the JE domain of links in the chef's industry to the nuclear family. The family impact on the retention of employees had not been particularly taken into account at the initial stage of Mitchell et al.'s (2001) model. Later, Ramesh and Gelfand (2010) explored the impact of family on JE and named it family embeddedness. They argued that family influences people's decision to stay in their occupational careers. However, it is possibly culturally sensitive between individualistic and collectivistic cultures, requiring more comprehensive investigation. That must be especially important in the culinary industry, which widely represents chefs with diverse ethnic origins; therefore, the cultural influence is profound.

Also focusing on the Links–Community domain, the sense of continuing the family cooking tradition also provided participants links with their immediate community by building a widespread legacy of capability which would make their family proud. It is not sure from the study that having strong links with the nuclear family positively influences strong links with other community members who surround cooking. However, as found in the personal construct analysis, the chef participants claimed satisfaction from being recognised for their cooking skills and abilities by not only their immediate family but also the general population or the stakeholders' system of the culinary industry (food critics, chef accreditation bodies, younger cooks, customers, and others). That recognition gives them the 'Identity of a Specialist with Authority and Power' over others (a superordinate category of constructs). According to this, chef participants highly value that through their job, they gain a highly acclaimed identity of being specialists in something that not many people can do, and they feel that they have some power in their domain. That is an additional source of reassurance in the study that they are valued for what they do by their community, confirming the Link-Community domain of JE.

### *6.1.3 Sacrifice-Community*

The research findings show that chefs believe this connection with their guests and the wider audience keeps them in the industry. Additionally, it may imply that it meets the domain of *Sacrifice-Community* because being admired for their chef capabilities is an occupational benefit and a personal asset they have gained, which they would not want to lose if leaving. Ashforth (1998) argues that this might be evidence of the fusion of self with organisation, which chefs experience after a long practice in the occupation, what he calls organisation identity. However, nowhere did the research find that participants admitted that any failure in their kitchen or restaurant was only perceived as their personal failure. Instead, they appreciated their ability to balance the significance of external factors and their own performance in the final product, value their capabilities, and not take failure personally. Therefore, their ability to actively balance their capabilities and their failures in the face of guests or other external stakeholders of their industry could minimise the impact of the JE domain of sacrifice-community on their job retention.

### *6.1.4 Fit-Community*

If the research participants had only referred to the organisation as the source of admiration, then the finding would refer to the JE domain of Fit-Organisation alone. However, they involved the broader list of the stakeholders' community of the industry. Therefore, they first highlighted the Fit-Community domain of JE (they seemed to love the buzz and adrenaline of the demanding customers, competition from other restaurants to gain accreditations, etc.) and, consequently, the Links-Community domain of the construct again. Additionally, chefs argued that the positive teamwork they experienced in the kitchen and the bonding with their peers was preferable to continuing education at the school or university, strengthening the fit-community domain further.

### *6.1.5 Sacrifice- Organisation*

The preference in the cooking industry over traditional schooling also supported the JE domain of Sacrifice-Organisation. As the commercial kitchen was believed to be a better alternative to other pathways, it gave chefs a strong sense of belonging and a reward level

they would not want to lose by moving out of the occupation. Belongingness is a solid human motivation with several effects on the individual's well-being, creativity and adjustment to different situations (Baumeister and Leary 1995). Seeking an occupational setting where people feel they belong is vital for their happiness at work, job satisfaction and career success. In contrast, the opposite tends to be avoided as it causes them disbelief that they are capable enough (low self-efficacy) to fit in and happily progress (Tellhed, Bäckström and Björklund 2017). It was interesting to hear from those participants who supported the above argument that when at school, they suffered from bullying or isolation because of a particular character they had (primarily reserved) or their neurodiversity in learning (later found as dyslexia). Therefore, they did not feel they belonged in the school environment, did not believe they were capable of learning and did not identify with the academic processes.

Contrary to that, in joining hospitality and cooking in commercial kitchens, they particularly enjoyed bonding with other team members, the inspiration they got from the kitchen owners or managers, and the supportive environment they found. So, they felt they experienced what they missed in the school environment because the people working with them had similar interests and enjoyed the same things. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, the above feeling also sits at the foundation of the Fit-Community domain, which leads to retention.

The feeling of belongingness in that occupational group helped them effortlessly fit into the commercial kitchen community. Indeed, the commercial kitchen provides a lively characteristic of being an active member of kitchen brigades. That gives them the sense of belonging in a supportive team and the freedom to express their uniqueness as they are consistently encouraged to be creative; that is a feature of the job they particularly said they like. As Randel et al. (2018) argue, these characteristics mean that leadership is inclusive and offers a good balance between belongingness and uniqueness. Therefore, it was easier for the participants of the study who felt that way to learn and develop in such a positive environment, hence seeing their careers progress.

Moreover, for a number of the participants, there could not be any other similar opportunity for them to manage teams or travel to, live and work in other countries and continuously learn various performance techniques in their job. That is undoubtedly something the chef organisation offers to their professional members that they would not like to sacrifice for any

other job. Therefore, fitting in the commercial kitchen community subsequently leads to the Sacrifice-Organisation domain of JE too.

### *6.1.6 Links-Organisation*

The Link-Organisation domain of JE also found reasonable grounds in the findings of this study. Research participants claimed that they want to be amongst the best in their professional community and be recognised for their commercial success indicating a strong sense of competitiveness. There has not been adequate research on the level of influence that competitive attitudes of individuals have on the retention of their careers; therefore, this finding shows a perspective of chefs' retention, which attracts further attention to what is already known. Chef participants claimed that they like to stand out and be known for their uniqueness and creative performance; it gives them a sense of being where they are recognised by their occupational community members, therefore meeting the JE domain of Link-Organisation. That finding goes beyond the sense of belongingness discussed earlier; it requires a length of time in the organisation for anyone to be known and recognised by others. The more they stay on the job, the more extensive the network of peers becomes (Mitchell et al. 2001) and the higher the chances of being visible for their skills and capabilities in the kitchen. However, the findings shed light on a slightly different aspect of the domain, focusing on the quality of those links, not only the quantity. The research participants argued that, in restaurants, which are usually small-sized organisations, the relationships with leaders, team members, competitors and guests (links-organisation) facilitate lower stress and better life-career balance. For them, these relationships mattered, meeting the arguments of Coetzer, Inma and Poisat (2016) regarding small-sized companies. So, they value the quality of the links they have in their field, especially after long service in the kitchen, and prefer to select them more carefully.

Succeeding in gaining recognition from their work, the research participants stated that they would also like to offer mentorship to younger generations joining the occupation, highlighting the same JE domain from a different perspective. It is an intention deriving from them not being guided by others as another job task in their role. Mentoring young cooks, chefs, and other 'out-groups' would aim to create a legacy around their name or be respected for what they have achieved in their career, developing links both in the organisation and the community. Mentorship in the workplace has been mentioned in other studies, too (Treuren

2019), as an institutional suggestion to increase embeddedness in organisations and increase employee retention. However, what is new in this study is that mentoring in the chefs' industry is not perceived as an instrumental solution for employee retention deriving from a coordinated organisational initiative. Instead, it is perceived as a personal initiative of chefs out of their own drive to pass on their skills and knowledge to the younger generation and improve their performance and careers. Nobody mentioned in the study that their managers instruct them to mentor members of their kitchen brigades and others; they do it for their legacy, credibility, acknowledgement, respect and ultimately, facilitation of their job.

The above findings highlight the importance of developing strong links with the people that chefs relate with in their work. Hence, they match the domain of Links-Organisation as defined by Mitchell et al. (2001) and Lee, Burch and Mitchell (2014): the extent to which people have formal and informal connections with other people or institutions.

These links with others on-the-job and off-the-job were not found to be instrumental for chefs but more inclusive, representing a more profound need to relate with them. It is worth mentioning that the key findings concerning JE discussed above show the importance of a construct that almost all research participants commented on: their love for the job. Although chefs could not easily explain what this love is consisted of, the definition of the construct created from the research analysis (see appendix 7) shows distinct all the characteristics which coincide with Bygrave's (2020) model of the 'love of the job' (LOJ). In this model, Bygrave explains that LOJ is a three-factor construct:

1. passion for the work (fuelled by Self-Esteem/Self-Actualisation);
2. meaningful workplace relationships or belongingness (a basic human need to bond and belong to a social group) and;
3. commitment to a purpose or the organisation (virtuousness- a need for socialised power).

All of the above cause work-life balance and contribute to individual well-being while disempowering turnover intentions (ibid). Therefore, the finding of this study, where love and passion for food and cooking improve the resilience of chefs and help them endure the difficulties of the job, is valid and pivotal to explaining why chefs remain chefs for the long term.

These results support the association between the majority of the JE domains. Table 10a shows which of the constructs were found to match the domains of Mitchell et al. (2001) framework with fit-organisation, links-organisation and links community domains of JE, proving more robust than the rest of the framework's domains.

| **Job Embeddedness** | |
|---|---|
| **Dimensions** | **Constructs** |
| Fit – Organisation | Fit in and Feel Good<br>Love and passion for food and cooking; Intrinsic Drive; Resilience |
| Fit – Community | Fit in and Feel Good<br>Inspiration by others (family and work) |
| Links – Organisation | Identity of Specialist with Power<br>Suit of Ambition/ Assertiveness; Personal Development & Training (and mentoring) |
| Links – Community | Identity of Specialist with Power<br>Personal Development & Training (and mentoring); Top Customer Service |
| Sacrifice – Organisation | Career prospects<br>Personal development & training |
| Sacrifice - Community | *Identity of Specialist with Power - implied* |

*(Table 10a: Research findings against conceptual framework: Job Embeddedness)*

The preceding discussion showed that in the context of the commercial kitchen, JE domains explain what keeps chefs in the occupation and strongly attracts them so that they can tolerate the challenges they face in their job. According to the meanings shared by the chefs in this study, some of the abovementioned JE domains are met efficiently and without much effort. In contrast, others are strong enough to trap them in the chef careers (Felps et al. 2009) and learn to be resilient.

## 6.2 Research findings and occupational embeddedness (OE)

Specific interest was also given to OE since the study was interested in researching the retention of chefs in a specific organisational setting and the chef's occupation in general.

According to the comprehensive framework of JE in which OE is included, the emphasis is on stability and security (Ng and Feldman 2009) as a reflection of employees who stick to their career choices for an extended period (Feldman 2002). However, the domains of fit, links and sacrifice remain essential in OE. Therefore, OE is considered an additional category of job embeddedness next to the organisation and community (Ng and Feldman 2009).

One of the essentials that the research participants thought were significant was the career prospects of being chefs. They claimed that their long retention as chefs gives them the satisfaction that this career has offered them many benefits (personal development, power and recognition, diverse work experiences, and job titles) that would be very hard to find elsewhere. The positive relation between tenure and embeddedness has been argued in the literature several times (Mitchell et al. 2001; Ng and Feldman 2007; Holtom, Tidd, Mitchell and Lee 2013). Employees think of the benefits of retaining their positions after long service and look at the career prospects more safely; they have gained a lot by staying in a job for long that they probably do not want to sacrifice by looking for an alternative career.

Research participants claimed that they value their careers to ensure a better work–life balance with their families and their loved ones. Gaining kudos or financial wealth was not as important to them. Participant 7, in particular, said he was looking for career development into a buyer in a food company to work closely with commercial kitchens, which he has deep knowledge of, only to spend much more time with his daughter. Similarly, research participant 14 wanted a career progression to a consultant chef, which would give him more flexibility and freedom in his life:

> Participant 14: *"…you can charge as much as you need but work a third of your time, and that strengthens the point that you have more time for your family, more time for yourself, and you start loving your job even more because you get to be more creative… it's putting the right priorities in the right place"*.

In that sense, believing that the chef's occupation offers good career prospects to ensure a better life–career balance meets the meaning of OE because the job gives individuals what they claim they need with a safe projection into the future.

Ng and Feldman (2007) found that occupational embeddedness is positively related to task performance and creativity. That was also stated by the study's participants highlighting the importance of feeling settled in an occupation for maintaining creativity. Looking at the career

prospects of chefs and achieving a better life–career balance without sacrificing their freedom to retain their creativity was revealed in the participants' answers. It encapsulated the importance of OE for their retention in the commercial kitchen. To further support this argument, most participants reasoned that, after having spent many years as chefs, they could leave the profession entirely if the kitchen's politics and extensive financial concerns blur their career prospects jeopardising their creative expression. As analysed in the previous chapter, some participants (11, 13) concluded their interviews with a warning and a thought. Their warning was that they would not hesitate to change careers and turn to something more prosperous if the frequent covid-related lockdowns minimise the professional opportunities they have now. Their thought was that their above decision to leave would also become necessary because working in an environment that does not provide the conditions to flourish loses its meaning and affects chefs' mental well-being. So, they need to take action to protect themselves. This finding emphasises creativity as a critical element to retaining chefs and has not yet been explored adequately enough in embeddedness (Robinson and Beesley 2010). In studies around the retention of expert employees – not in the chef industry – it has been mentioned (Renaud, Morin, Saulquin and Abraham 2015) that HRM practices which establish a continuous “respectful and stimulating work environment” are considered necessary for their retention. The creative environment was one element out of many that described the compelling character of the workplace, and it was looked for by employees who possess expert skills and knowledge. In this study, continuous creativity alone was a clear determinant of chefs’ retention.

The above argument that some of the participants will not hesitate to leave the occupation if they see that the present unfortunate conditions of the pandemic lead the industry to shrink dangerously does not imply that they would willingly move to another – safer – occupation happily. Although this possibility did not emerge as strongly in the study results, it showed that even among chefs who are embedded in the industry, there might be a possibility of situational decisions to leave the commercial kitchen. In that case, they would then become ‘reluctant leavers’ as Lee et al. (2008) call them, who usually are satisfied with their jobs but are under considerable pressure to change jobs. That reluctance of chefs to leave, even when conditions push them to, is congruent with the powerful internal driver of their love for food and cooking. The fact that they would be ready to sacrifice their love and passion signifies

how severe those work conditions must be that make staying in the job an impossible task for chefs.

The connections between the research findings and OE discussed above are depicted in table 10b showing the constructs that drive stability and security in the chefs' occupation.

| **Occupational Embeddedness** | |
|---|---|
| **Dimensions** | **Constructs** |
| Stability – Security | Career prospects<br>Personal Development & Training<br>Identity of Specialist with Power<br>Creativity |

*(Table 10b: Research findings against conceptual framework: Occupational Embeddedness)*

To summarise, OE was found important in the study for two reasons: its existence was claimed necessary by research participants to develop and retain chefs in their job and provide the right environment to sustain their creativity. Contrary to that, and of equal importance, the prolonged absence of OE was considered possible factor to drive chefs out of their careers.

### 6.3 Research findings and internal locus of control (LOC)

The third theoretical framework considered in the design of this study was the LOC (Rotter 1966). Up to now, there has not been adequate research on chefs' LOC related to their intention to stay or leave the occupation. There has only been an attempt to explore the effect of LOC on chefs' stress at work (Murray-Gibbons and Gibbons 2007), revealing some unexpected findings that the level and type of control chefs have are unable to predict stress experiences. That lack of evidence for LOC in chefs' retention made this part of the present study essential to refine the current understanding of why these highly skilled and talented specialists of professional cooking stay in the occupation. In general, people's disposition to define the success or failure of their actions depending on their involvement in determining those actions has proved critical for their retention at work (Kang, Twigg, and Hertzman 2010; Huang 2006). LOC is distinguished into two categories: internal and external. People with

internal LOC trust they are responsible for their actions, whereas those with external LOC believe that other factors, independent of them, are responsible for events of their life.

Most of the research participants selected the element of leaving their legacy behind and making their family proud as the main reason they stayed in the chef's job. They actively choose to work hard to honour the people they love. Additionally, they give equal merit to living the kitchen challenge, intensity, and adrenaline to the full. They do not complain about it; they absorb and enjoy it. Several of them (typically the most senior chefs of the sample) also expressed the desire to mentor others to pass on their knowledge to the young generation. It also implies that mentoring others helps them build a legacy around their names, and as they argued, this is down to them to do, not anyone else (participant 12).

Chefs also think that they are responsible for personally feeling happy by mentoring others and making others happy and fulfilled too because of their mentoring; hence they feel they are actively involved in something good for the industry. They show particular interest in what Diller, Mühlberger, Löhlauand and Jonas (2021) call 'imagine-others empathy'. Mentoring their teams or young peers gives them additional satisfaction in their job because they can contribute to the development of others; giving is also a means for receiving, as they implied (participant 3). They do not do it to project their personal development onto others ('imagine-self empathy') (ibid). Instead, they demonstrate active involvement in improving the work of others, and this is satisfying.

The chefs who express their concerns for the next generation of cooks and deliberately act to transfer their skills and knowledge to them make all efforts to arm them with the necessary tools to succeed in cooking. They consciously or unconsciously create a mastery climate in the commercial kitchen; a climate that has been found to influence the retention of chefs (Steindórsdóttir, Nerstad and Magnúsdóttir 2021). That is not an accomplishment being left to external factors but to their willingness and determination to help inexperienced cooks become competent chefs in the future. Employees who perceive their workplace as a safe and stable environment, which provides them with structure, policies, and guidance that can develop them, would prefer to stay because they would not want to miss this role certainty, where they know exactly what they do in their job. Moreover, they would prefer to stay because they could develop relations of respect with their mentors, which would last for long.

Although Steindórsdóttir's et al. (2021) research took place in the Nordic countries only, there are indications in their study that their findings may apply to other parts of the world too.

The above sense of being in control of their actions and personally responsible for the industry's present and future, hence having internal LOC, was also expressed in the active ways chefs thought about getting access to trained staff in their kitchens. All participants who claimed that recruiting trained staff is very important for their jobs believed that getting access to that staff does not happen automatically. They should take personal initiatives regardless of any difficulties: the current negative trends of the labour market (due to the pandemic, which hit the hospitality industry significantly) or the nature of hospitality in general which defends high employee turnover rates.

They all argued that there are strategies they need to implement to ensure suitable cooks and chefs are working next to them. Those strategies were distinguished into ones that (a) are their organisation's responsibility to arrange and follow and (b) they should personally consider and adopt. Regarding organisational strategies that need to be followed, participant 22 strongly argued from experience about the benefits of organised vocational training and effective apprenticeships in a way it could change people's life. In her case, it certainly took her out of the university to a more enjoyable and rewarding world; similarly, she has seen doing the same to others in the field. Participants 20 (and 9) believed that the communication between operations and the front of the house, which can be problematic due to a lack of trained staff, can change if restaurant managers take action. It is not unavoidable like the antisocial hours of work are. As he claimed, improving people can be controlled and, therefore, improve the working environment.

Likewise, participant 11 put the responsibility of food and cooking education (he never used the word 'training') to the personal effort and strong will to competently be able to sell what they offer to others. He finished with an emphatic belief that people are holders of their own success. Participants 2 and 3 also moved on the same principle that it is their responsibility to learn and become proficient chefs as well as train others to stand next to them competently, strengthening the internal LOC argument ('my life is determined by my own actions') that people are responsible for their own future, not external factors.

These results corroborate the findings of previous work on the relationship between internal LOC and retention of employees in the culinary arts (Huang 2006), which, albeit limited to the tourist hotel employees of Taiwan, provided some evidence for strong correlations between the two constructs. In this quantitative study, Huang (2006) found that culinary art employees in Taiwan (mainly male) who scored high in internal LOC were positively correlated with employee job satisfaction and tenure in the kitchen and negatively correlated with work stress and turnover intention. The research participants of this study showed confidence that they are in a position to impact their industry with their actions, a finding which coincides with the increased relation of internal LOC with self-assurance and self-esteem among employees who experience success in their job (Judge 2009; Southwick, Tsay, Duckworth 2019). Both Judge (2009) and Southwick et al. (2019) integrate the above relation in the construct of core self-evaluation; they claim that this leads employees to higher levels of satisfaction, higher performance and career success, which in effect helps them sustain their positions in their occupational roles. In addition, these results of strong confidence amongst chefs may indicate a high degree of insistence in achieving their aims, either the creation of a personal cooking legacy or personal contribution to the development of the young generation of chefs.

The perseverance to attain those goals is also characteristic of the theory of LOC (Judge 2009) and contributes to job satisfaction and sustainable, innovative behaviour at work. As Murray-Gibbons and Gibbons (2007) have found, employees with strong internal LOC do not hesitate to delve into stressful endeavours that they think would improve their working life. Southwick et al. (2019) connect the characteristic of perseverance which is met in LOC with grit at work, the tendency to pursue especially long-term goals with passion and perseverance, which leads to retention, among others (work engagement and job performance). Therefore, the abovementioned findings may contribute to the retention of chefs in their careers for an extended period experiencing job satisfaction and the ability to set personal strategic plans for successful careers.

Table 10c outlines the connections between findings from the participants' constructs, as presented in the analysis chapter, with the meaning of internal LOC.

| Internal LOC | |
|---|---|
| **Key definition** | **Constructs** |
| Personal responsibility for actions & outcomes | Fit-In & Feel Good<br>Love & Passion for Food & Cooking; Resilience<br>Identity of Specialist with Power<br>Suit of Ambition; Mentoring<br>Career prospects<br>Personal development & Training<br>[Improve] Work Conditions<br>Get access to trained staff |

*(Table 10c: Research findings against conceptual framework: Internal Locus of Control)*

The comparison between the findings from the interviewees' responses to the questions about the retention of their chef roles with the three theoretical frameworks of employee retention highlights that JE, OE and internal LOC explain the chefs' decision to stay in their occupation for an extended period. The study elaborated the participants' responses to a deeper level of analysis to elicit their core meanings (superordinate constructs) and refine the understanding of the theoretical frameworks of retention mentioned above in the context of the chef's occupation.

### 6.4 Chefs refine the understanding of retention in the commercial kitchen

Echoing Mitchell's et al. (2001) introduction of the JE model and several other affirmations that the model can predict employee retention (Crossley, Bennett, Jex and Burnfield 2007; Holtom, Mitchell and Lee 2006; Holtom and Inderrieden 2006), the study found that almost all dimensions of the model are met in the occupational retention of chefs. Similarly, it was found that chefs with internal LOC, showing ownership for their achievements, are more likely to stay in their jobs, meeting the scholars' conviction that the construct is closely related to employee retention (Huang 2006; Allen, Moffit and Weeks 2005; Kang, Twigg, and Hertzman 2010). However, the above findings are not exclusive to why people stay in their jobs, as Mitchell et al. (2001) admit, and do not adequately explain how those decisions to stay evolve in chefs' minds. Therefore, this study extended the existing knowledge of chefs' retention and

used it as a foundation for the research. It built on the interpretation of the life events in the commercial kitchen (elements), as deployed by the participants' personal constructs, not to discover the factors of retention, but to understand the process of the chef's decision to remain.

Discussing the superordinate constructs of the chef participants identified and ordered in the study, the emphasis in this section is firstly placed on the solid presence of resilience developed by chefs who like to keep a balanced and pragmatic approach in their work. Secondly, it is placed on the love and passion for food and cooking they maintain, continuously sustained by people who inspire them. Thirdly, the changes in the retention strength noticed throughout the years of tenure are deliberated. Also, the findings lead to the discussion on the power of occupational stability, which creates more reasons to stay on the job and keep the benefits from a respectful identity instead of leaving and losing all that the chef's career identity supports. Finally, the section expands on the ways that the personal constructs of the chef participants explicitly or implicitly meet the JE domains and support the internal LOC.

The process of eliciting the participants' personal constructs revealed that among all categories of constructs, the most critical characteristic which keeps them in the job is to have a balanced, sensible and pragmatic attitude towards their work conditions. Alongside that, the second most crucial construct that chefs agreed on is their resilience against the difficulties of the job. Both constructs indicate the need for a specific attitude that optimally calculates the advantages and disadvantages of a situation and acts accordingly. It is a very active role of the self to avoid risk or danger (Klonowicz and Sokolowska 1993). Individuals develop strategies that evaluate the situation, prioritise what matters to them most and tolerate the pain or loss to reserve energy and continue with their lives. The practice of developing resilience by finding optimum ways to perform, calculating risks and balancing work and life commitments derive from positive psychology and are effective ways to keep positive levels of individual well-being (Bolier et al. 2013). Therefore, chefs may intentionally or unintentionally choose to be balanced, sensible and pragmatic as a way to keep their mental health in a highly stressful and demanding work environment which is perceived as a strong part of the occupational culture. The conservation of resources theory (COR) (Hobfoll 1989) explains this phenomenon accurately. When people get involved in stressful situations,

they develop mechanisms ('objects or energies') to reserve valuable resources that ensure their pleasure instead of stress. Compatible to the context of the 'masculine' character of the commercial kitchen, if chefs admit that they cannot cope with the demanding work conditions they are challenged with, they might lose face among peers and miss the joy of cooking. Most importantly, they would lose their identity as chefs, negatively affecting their self-esteem, hence getting even more stressed (Hobfoll 1989; Ng and Feldman 2011). The study showed that by keeping a balanced, sensible and pragmatic approach to their work, the participants intentionally declared those mechanisms to preserve the joy of work, continuity, cooking standards and their sanity.

This result does not fully explain why the research participants retain their careers as they initially said. In chef participants' terms, being balanced and resilient is not contained directly in the three domains of JE. However, it may indirectly affect OE because, throughout the years, people build a sense of security around what they are used to perceiving as stable work conditions and may not decide to leave it for something else. Thakur and Bhatnagar (2017) claimed some relation between parts of what the chef participants described as a balanced attitude; they argued that JE is a potent mediator between maintaining work-life balance practices and intention to stay. This evidence supports that it is possible to assume that keeping a balanced attitude at work links with JE (all domains: fit, links, sacrifice), but it remains to be proved in future research to be definitive.

In general, the interviewed chefs defined being balanced and resilient as effectively self-regulating the anticipated demanding conditions of work (see appendix 7: 'Content Analysis of constructs – Core categorisation'). With time, these conditions retreat to the background and seize to sound so unexpected and hard to cope with. To achieve that tolerance, a positive work environment with supportive teams is necessary. Indeed, in recent studies on resilience in small and medium-sized enterprises, long employee tenure has also been related to increased levels of resilience under the support of the internal social capital of the organisations where employees work (Polyviou, Croxton and Knemeyer 2020).

Similarly, Polidore, Edmonson and Slate (2010) perceive resiliency as part of a calculated combination of internal and external LOC that develops in time through relationships. Therefore, the length of experience someone has in their occupation matures their thinking and rationalises their expectations for their work environment. That coincides with some of

the research participants' perspectives too. For example, the viewpoint of participant 12 was that, after some years of experience, keeping a balanced approach at work and his personal life is a matter of what the individual does as well as what colleagues in the kitchen brigade, managers, and the restauranteurs do. However, Polidore et al. (2010) found, in their qualitative research on educators in rural South America, that internal LOC is critical for the retention of professionals. They confirmed that individuals with external LOC are more likely to leave their jobs if they think that others inhibit their efforts to perform as they believe best. Therefore, considering what was found in this study and what others have argued about the way people form their resilience, chefs who remain in their careers may follow a cognitive path with subsequent logical steps: firstly, individual active involvement in paving the way into personal, occupational success (making use of their internal LOC) and secondly, when this success becomes visible, an attempt to rationalise the difficulties that emerge in their job and minimise the harmful effects of external constraints on their performance (continuing their ownership of the course of their careers). These two chefs' priorities to achieve resilience at work meet the research objective concerning the steps chefs follow to endure the adversities of the kitchen and the challenges of the job. The priorities mentioned above were evident in the narrative of many participants as described in the analysis chapter (e.g., participants 1, 4, 5, 19, 20). They did not want to leave out of their control elements of their career and everyday events in the kitchen, which affected that career. On the contrary, they wanted to have full control on them which gives them a sense that they own them, hence it is easier to tolerate their difficulties.

The above characteristics of the chefs' resilient behaviour coincide with the holistic explanation of a positive mindset at work given by Roberts (2022). According to her, employees may sometimes persistently confront a tricky situation and get through it regardless of how challenging it is. That is mental agility. That was evident in the personal constructs of almost all chef participants of this research. However, on some other occasions, they might acknowledge the difficulties of work, accept any possible mistakes they make because of the pressures experienced, take a step back by actively creating free time for them to think, consider future improvements and, finally, come back in full action not showing they were disturbed, as if nothing had happened (Haas 2005). That is resilience. As some of the participants in this study stated, they need to make time for themselves and breathe to

rethink how they are doing and sustain their good energy at work. Therefore, chefs who stay on the job instinctively make full use of the efficient combination of mental agility and resilience, comprising a positive mindset in the kitchen (Roberts 2022).

In the list of the categories of constructs most frequently used by the chef participants, two stand out: the inspiration from others (family and work) and chefs' love and passion for food and cooking. These two categories of constructs show that chefs who stay in the commercial kitchen believe that it is because they link with significant others they admire, hence like to follow their example. They fit in the job environment for reasons they either realise or are unconsciously driven towards. Two things are noteworthy concerning the latter. The research participants claim that: (a) they are resilient and ready to put all job's problems aside because they love cooking and food. (b) Their passion is something they can control and adapt according to current situations but is kept alive to ensure enthusiasm at work.

Regarding the former, it seems that when chefs refer to love and passion at work, they mean the harmonious type of passion, not the obsessive one (Trépanier et al. 2014). The harmonious passion ensures engagement and mental resilience; the obsessive passion restricts emotional energy and resilience. Furthermore, the participants argue that their passion for cooking helps them tolerate the challenging work environment of the commercial kitchen. Although there is no adequate universal research on the relation between the two constructs (Carstens, Koekemoer and Masenge 2021), it is, therefore, possible that the person-environment fit of chefs facilitates the development of increased resilience too.

Regarding the latter, if the individuals' love and passion for cooking are controllable, it implies that the participants do not believe it is independent of them, hence self-regulated. Quite the opposite, they believe they are accountable for sustaining their high passion levels. Therefore, the primary (superordinate) category of constructs found in the study named 'Fit-in and Feel Good' supports the importance of internal LOC for the chefs' retention. Furthermore, although the participants acknowledged that the commercial kitchen environment plays a reciprocal role in their career success and resilience, as has also been argued in general by Caniëls and Baaten (2019), they did not perceive it critical for their retention but supplementary. Therefore, highlighting the importance of the internal LOC, chefs seem to get their energy from within intentionally to make it fit in the work situations they confront regularly.

The second superordinate category of constructs, named 'Identity (Specialists with Power)', is equally pivotal for the retention of chefs. The content of this category of constructs shows that the research objective concerning the evolution of chefs' desire to stay is reached. More specifically, chefs' desire to be creative finds a suitable place and space for expression in the commercial kitchen. Similarly, they could see their tendency to serve and please others (guests) with their food creations in their occupational role. Therefore, they feel they fit in the job environment and can see themselves remaining. At the same time, as they gradually improve their networks, gain recognition, achieve awards and credits for their successes, and gain regular guests as followers or other professionals who want to work with and learn from them, they develop links with the community, which reassures them that they are in the right place in their careers. Therefore, the temporal nature of fit finds application in the chef's industry as it does in other industries (Jansen and Shipp 2019).

These realities set career conditions that build a clear identity of the 'knowledgeable' professionals. The interviews showed that almost all participants thought this was flattering, and after many years, chefs felt proud of that identity. Considering London's (1983) theory of career motivation, part of which is building a career identity (integrating one's career with their identity) retains people in their jobs. It is possible that this also applies to chefs. It acts like a centripetal force that keeps chefs in their job because losing the benefits of that identity may be unpleasant, hence undesired, whereas staying in sustains their identity of being the ones who know and can direct things in their work. To that end, they would not decide to change their occupational direction easily so that they do not lose their colleagues, projects or perks that stem from their identity described previously (Mitchell et al. 2001). Consequently, the third domain of JE, 'Sacrifice', also has reasonable grounds in the study's findings. With JE being a cognitive belief of individuals (ibid), the concomitant relation between the three domains found in the present study is logically explained and adequately justified.

### 6.5 New perspectives on the research findings

The discussion above elaborated on the theoretical frameworks of retention used in the research and refined the understanding of many domains related to the chefs' careers. The

superordinate constructs of the chefs concerning their retention gave a more rounded approach to what is already known and enriched the view of the chef's occupational culture. It also paved the way for different directions to the discussion of chefs' retention, from the 'what' leads them to stay to the 'why' this is significant and 'what' it means to them. Up to this point, none of the theoretical frameworks used in the study showed where the drivers of chef retention derive from. This section intends to discuss these new perspectives in the study of chef retention and design a cognitive map of chefs' desire to stay in their occupation over the long term, reaching one of the study's research objectives to make the tacit knowledge of chefs about their retention explicit.

The research findings illustrated that the wealth of reasons that chefs stay in their occupation claimed by the participants are rooted in two main categories: intrinsic and extrinsic. The superordinate constructs of the study are positioned under these main categories according to their source of energy, as described in the previous chapter. More specifically, the 'Feel Good & Fit-in' and the 'Identity of Specialists with Power' are drivers with an intrinsic character. At the same time, the Career Prospects and the desired Work Conditions are extrinsic (see figure 13).

The intrinsic reasons reflected those constructs that derive from the individual's beliefs about what matters most in retaining their chef careers. These are either the result of a calculation or are intuitive and help chefs maintain their willingness to perform successfully under any condition in the commercial kitchen, favourable or unfavourable. Sometimes those constructs refer to explicit and easily recognised actions known to the participants, and chefs realise that they play a role in their retention (being consistent, pragmatic, resilient, ambitious, mentors or making guests happy with the pleasurable experience they provide). According to the research participants, it was usually their natural ability to balance the things they control. Similarly, the findings of a recent study in developing countries (Khorakian et al. 2021) showed that chefs gradually develop a paternalistic leadership style (mentoring) as they grow in experience, which coincides with the research participants' personal desire (not out of any institutional obligation) to mentor younger chefs.

Sometimes, however, those constructs are not easily recognised and act in the background of their attitude as chefs. They originate from their upbringing, the inspiring people they met in their lifetime who became their role models and the values they developed in life (being

inspired by significant others, having a solid drive to fit in a career environment, being passionate about something, creative). The common ground of the above is that they derive from the individual and deliberately or not are expressed in their job behaviours. Chefs believe that working in the commercial kitchen is a natural thing for them and absorbing as it can quickly become fully integrated with their personal life.

The extrinsic reasons refer to those constructs the participants feel strongly about but admit are out of their hands, that they are more passive recipients than active performers. These are their desire to learn new cooking techniques and develop their careers through continuous training; also, getting access to trained kitchen staff members and being paid more. However, although they have the desire to learn and develop, there are little things they can do to achieve the desired techniques, as these rely on the benevolence of some charismatic leaders they work for and the positive institutional decisions that facilitate their work and their careers. Chefs do not feel they have full ownership of any of these decisions and rely on the ecosystem of their careers (Baruch 2015). Therefore, they are perceived as accidental and sequential (Elbasha and Baruch 2022), hence extrinsic to the individual.

Although the research participants did not emphasise the extrinsic factors affecting their retention a lot, it was interesting that a few of them implied or explicitly argued that continuous exposure to those conditions could lead to them leaving the occupation. What was evident in most interviews was that they dislike stagnation, which confirms one of the motivational forces of employee turnover argued by Hom et al. (2012). For example, participant 18 said blasely that “being stagnant and not adding value to what I’m doing [would drive me out of the profession]”. They perceive themselves as specialists with aspirations and want to be allowed to work in places where they can meet those aspirations. Therefore, the two superordinate categories of constructs identified in the study, ‘Career Prospects’ and ‘Work Conditions’ can make or break the chefs’ decision to stay in their career or not.

As seen in earlier arguments, it is noteworthy that all participants who claimed they have a balanced approach to the chef’s occupation used active verbs or words highlighting their deliberate efforts to keep themselves balanced, sensible and pragmatic in their job. This finding further supports the principle underlined in the internal LOC, where individuals believe they are the ones who control their future, not their fate or other known or unknown forces in life. The same characteristic is noticed in most of the qualities that were present

before the participants of the study became chefs: people were ambitious, passionate about food and cooking, experienced an internal drive to cook, could tolerate difficulties and showed resilience. The study confirmed that the active use of someone's existing qualities is a strong motive to move them to the job and keep them in. Other scholars in the past (Huang 2006; Allen, Moffit and Weeks 2005; Kang, Twigg, and Hertzman 2010) also claimed the same, endorsing the effect of internal LOC on employee retention.

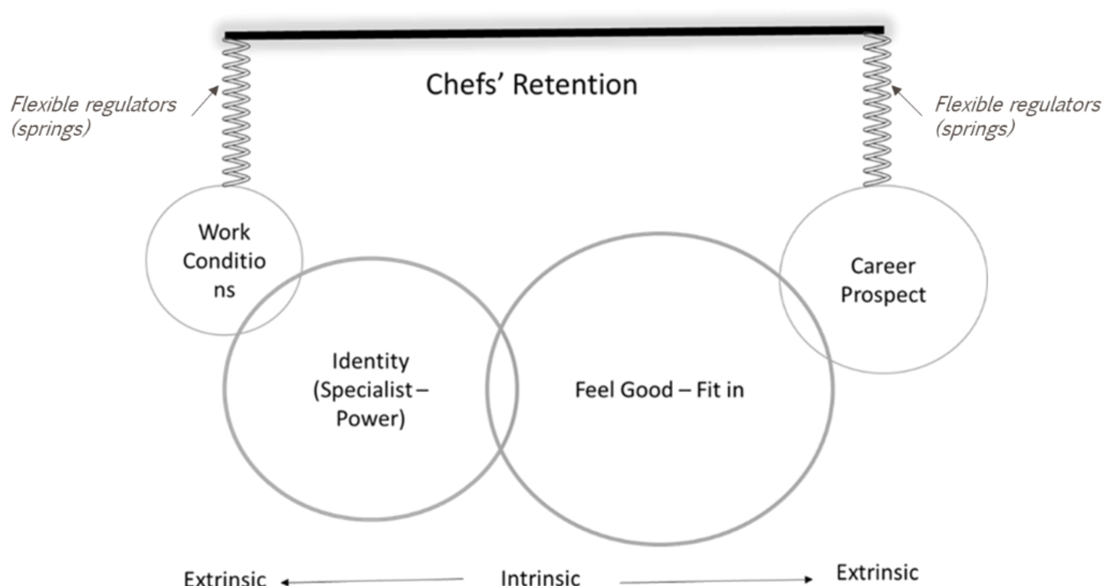
The interpretation of the personal constructs under the abovementioned categories is represented graphically below (figure 15). All four primary categories of constructs found in the study are integrated into a consistent cognitive map:

(i) The *Feel Good & Fit-in*, which is the most substantial set of reasons chefs stay in their occupation.

(ii) The *Identity of Specialists with Power*, which also strongly influences their decision to retain their occupational role.

(iii) The available *Career Prospects* that make the chef's job continuously attractive instead of stagnant.

(iv) The desired *Work Conditions*, which would allow chefs to perform according to their capabilities and aspirations.




*(Figure 16: Sources of the drivers of chefs' retention)*

The figure is a cognitive map which illustrates the central role of the first two categories of constructs: retention of chefs is predominantly determined by the 'Feel Good – Fit in' and the 'Identity of a Specialist with Power' constructs. They believe they mainly stay on the job because they fit in the kitchen environment, making them feel good about their choice. In addition, through their performance and experience through time, they gain the identity of a specialist, which gives them a sense of power and authority over others. Zhang et al. (2022) connected the two constructs by arguing that when employees live in a climate of mastery where they feel special, they develop harmonious passion, which makes them feel good about their function. Therefore, these two constructs sit in the centre of the map as being the most critical and interrelated ones.

However, the following two primary categories of constructs seem to play a pivotal role in stabilising the above structure: seeing a future in their careers and operating in working conditions that help them perform are also considered essential determinants of their retention. However, the continuous absence of those conditions in the commercial kitchen could knock down the whole construct of retention. Therefore, that seemingly small link based on extrinsic factors out of the individual's control could become critical for the chefs' sustainability.

Aiming at reaching the initial research objective concerning the extent to which personal and intrinsic drivers contribute to chefs' retention, it is reasoned from the above that intrinsic drivers make chefs love the job, enjoy the job, tolerate the difficulties of the kitchen, invest in the job, gain admiration for the job and help them sidestep anything that stands as an impediment in front of them, and hence stay in the job. However, if the extrinsic drivers, things they cannot control, are problematic, they may lead them to look elsewhere. In that case, they may sacrifice the benefits they receive from their current occupation for a different one with better career prospects and better work conditions, regardless of their intrinsic drivers to remain. The study showed that this is not a definite consequence but a possibility. To argue about it with certainty, that finding would need further longitudinal research to check if this is a threat or an actuality for many chefs. What is certain, though, from the present research findings is that the structure of the chefs' cognitive map is shaken if the two external primary constructs mentioned above ('Career Prospects' and 'Work Conditions') are

persistently challenging. For that reason, this dynamic relationship between the constructs and chefs' retention is represented by two rings hanging from the retention bar with a spring coil, which allows them to spring up and down without breaking easily.

The above intention of chefs makes them 'reluctant leavers' (Hom et al. 2012) as they do not want to leave, but some unfavourable persisting circumstances, distant from their own will and imposed on them, push them to do so. The meaning of reluctant leavers in the present study expands on the one that Hom et al. (2012) introduced. In their perspective, employees who are satisfied with their jobs usually must leave because of non-work-related social pressures; for instance, their spouse decides to pursue a career in a different geographical location and is required to follow them, or they become carers of their ageing parents. Additionally, it does not coincide with any of the four paths of the unfolding model which Lee and Mitchell (1994) had introduced earlier in the literature on voluntary turnover. In no way should the chefs' consideration to leave their occupation be accounted as a response to any shock as defined by Lee and Mitchell (personal additional life plan; an abhorrent workplace; a competitive offer from someone outside the organisation; traditional job dissatisfaction). As noted in the analysis of findings, in one case alone (participant 11), the future shortage of career opportunities because of the pandemic's impact on hospitality, was mentioned as a potential to drive him out of the occupation. However, that was only expressed as a threat which was not really favoured by the participant. Therefore, it coincided with Holmes (2015) research findings on employee retention, who argued that hiring shortages can (only potentially) be a reason for career exit.

The thought of leaving the job in the kitchen is more of a chef's response to a set of conditions that, for many years, they wanted to believe there was a chance to improve, but finally, they do not. Their love for food and cooking may have kept them in the job long-term, helped them build a psychological shield against most of the difficulties they face in the kitchen and raised their levels of resilience. However, some research participants admitted that this could change if they see no light at the end of the tunnel after many years of trying to change their work conditions. In these terms, they would become reluctant leavers after trying to see things improve, but they did not in the end.

The above findings strengthen the view of the temporal nature of fit in a job as defined by Jansen and Shipp (2019). What they have claimed in their qualitative research is that

employees see their level of fit in their occupational careers as a journey, not as a decision they make at some point at the beginning of their careers. In this journey, they seem to revisit their sensemaking regularly, both retrospectively (was it worth it) and prospectively (will it keep being worth it). In the present study, chefs seem to have joined the job in the commercial kitchen because of strong intrinsic drivers, which have made them stay in the job for a long time. However, this does not stop them from regularly reassessing the conditions of work which are extrinsic and outside of their control, especially under the current experience of a very volatile environment in the labour market due to the ongoing pandemic. The outward direction of arrows from the intrinsic to the extrinsic, not the opposite, represents the dynamic relationship between the intrinsic and extrinsic drivers. Therefore, the superordinate constructs of 'Work Conditions' and 'Career Prospects' play the role of flexible regulators of long retention, as if hanging from a coil spring bouncing up and down the good feeling from fitting in the chef job (Feel Good – Fit in) and the identity of becoming specialists with power in their hands (Identity: Specialists – Power). However, they are not critical determinants of chef retention and cannot eliminate the two intrinsic drivers of chef retention.

The hospitality industry's current situation and labour market offer an interesting debate. Looking at the findings discussed above from a different perspective, the current business turbulence experienced in hospitality caused by the Covid-19 pandemic allows the arguments of the unfolding model (Lee and Mitchell 1994) to compare with the possibility of chefs leaving their occupation. A few research participants admitted that the continuous lockdowns frustrated many chefs who had to stop working and become furloughed for many months. According to the unfolding model, that could be perceived as a 'shock' that disrupted both their professional and social lives. Also, according to the unfolding model, that could be an adequate reason to push chefs to leave the commercial kitchen in search of other, more stable careers. However, the research findings showed that distresses like the pandemic are not considered enough to make chefs change careers. Instead, these shocks are noted, evaluated, and integrated with the set of difficulties of the job, provided that people feel that they fit in and feel good in the kitchen's work environment and enjoy the identity of being specialists, which gives them a sense of power and authority over others.

The view of 'Feel Good - Fit in' adopted in the present idiosyncratic research is based on the individually perceived fit perspective (Kristof-Brown and Billsberry 2012: 4; Billsberry, Talbot and Ambrosini 2012), not the interactional perspective of fit. Therefore, fitting in the chef’s occupation was perceived as an intrinsic driver of the individuals, similarly to the superordinate construct of gaining an identity of a specialist with power. These intrinsic core drivers emerged from the construct analysis, helping the chef participants manage any job difficulty and show unbelievable resilience to maintain their performance in the kitchen.

The above discussion reviews the occupational culture of chefs and their professional identity and further elaborates their key elements. More specifically, the culture of the chef’s industry, as described in chapter 2 in detail, is mainly characterised by masculinity, military-type hierarchy, meritocracy, strong teamwork, and action orientation. It is a highly stressful environment which often asks for extreme behaviours to respond to the demands of the job. These demands stretch them and often affect their mental well-being. However, chefs who stay on the job develop mechanisms to be resilient and work effectively and efficiently under the adversities of their workplace. The chefs’ identity which is shaped by factors inside the boundaries of the occupational culture (Cooper, Giousmpasoglou, Marinakou 2017) and the ‘outside world’ (Kang, et al. 2010; Palmer et al. 2010) gains kudos from the development of distinct competencies which are rare to find in the public. Therefore, they are perceived as specialists. Chefs who remain in the job seem to embrace that identity of the specialist as this gives them power and authority over others, that prefer not to miss by leaving the occupation.

It is appreciated that the central argument of the findings is that chefs are engrossed and stay in the occupation predominantly because of their solid intrinsic drivers. This argument highlights the value of finding meaning at work that employees integrate with their lives. Is it likely that chefs who stay in their jobs long-term have found strong meaning in their work? The study results show that they feel strongly connected with food and cooking, balanced and fulfilled, as some of them claimed that cooking and serving guests is their whole life. They express the opinion that they are well being in the kitchen and secure that they do what they love. According to Eggebrecht (2003, cited in Holbeche and Springett 2004) these are different ways of expressing spirituality at work. Spirituality is a powerful energy that convinces people that there is high scope in what they do (Holbeche and Springett 2004). For that reason, they

are ready to put their soul and spirit into their work (Gratton, Hailey, Stiles and Truss 1999). Chefs showed that they manage their kitchen brigades from the inside out rather than the opposite. They want to pass on their skills and knowledge to others (mentoring) and develop them out of respect for the job. That is what Holbeche and Springett (2004: 41-45) argue is the definition of finding internal meaning to the work people do. It is expressed by being ready to go the extra mile, interconnected with others, keeping one's autonomy and respecting the efforts of others, working towards a balance between professional targets and humane work behaviour, making a difference to others (stakeholders), instilling trust, aligning their personal with their work values, making their work part of their life's mission, and finding a spiritual purpose of their role. All these components of meaning in the workplace are incorporated in the constructs identified in chefs' retention. They are expressed in actions of discretionary effort because they feel an intrinsic drive makes them fit in the industry. Finding such intrinsic meaning at work supports a long-term career (Holbeche and Springett 2004: 4) and helps chefs stay in the occupation instead of searching for other alternative pathways.

The intrinsic nature of the drivers who play a pivotal role in chefs' retention finds some common ground with Olcker and Du Plessis (2015), one of the very few studies about retaining highly skilled employees. According to them, highly skilled talents who stay in their jobs showed increased psychological ownership in their organisations. As chefs are considered highly skilled employees, possessing knowledge and qualities which are not easily replicable by others, both research projects have provided evidence that some representative groups of highly skilled employees need to be predominantly internally driven in order to stay. As retaining talented employees is becoming a big challenge lately (Sheather and Slattery 2021), it would be very interesting to build on this domain in the future and expand the research to other highly skilled employee populations, which would contribute to the knowledge of a newly emerged research topic about the retention of these talents.

Regarding the possibility of leaving, the participants of the present study only raised the interminable incompatibility between what chefs need to perform according to professional and personal expectations and what institutions do not do to accommodate those needs. Following that argument, Yam (2018) researched retention in hospitality, finding that only JE-organisation (not JE-community) could predict voluntary turnover. It supported the view that

organisations have increased responsibility to continuously accommodate the needs of their employees who are embedded in their occupation to stay in their jobs.

In the attempt to confirm the research findings from a different angle and prioritise their importance for the individual – the elicitation of the participants' core constructs/ core values – the emphasis on the intrinsic reasons why chefs stay was reiterated. Interestingly, the most frequently expressed core construct/ core value was the 'constant developing and improving'. The same or similar prime category of the construct analysis ('personal development and training') was interpreted as an extrinsic driver. However, the investigation of the core constructs/ core values showed a more intrinsic character of the construct. It consisted of actions that individuals owned (e.g. Love getting the knowledge to create new dishes – always learn; Discover opportunities, alternatives, variety and more interesting tasks utilising the wealth of skills you develop as a chef; Being a chef requires high knowledge/ education to perform; Improve and develop always with others and for others (customers)). As a result, the process showed that the priorities of why chefs stay in their occupation are intrinsic, active, very personal, and not rely on interventions by external powers. The reasons they might want to leave are extrinsic, resting on the continuance of organisations not responding to vital chefs' needs to perform as they think appropriate.

To summarise the above, the study found that all domains of JE (fit, links, sacrifice) predict chefs' retention. However, to be more holistic, it needs to be supplemented by (a) the meanings of OE and (b) the principles of the internal LOC to explain what makes chefs stay in their occupation. OE is necessary to highlight the significance of first ensuring stability in their career before developing a strong sense of not being willing to sacrifice the benefits they get from their job. Internal LOC is needed to incorporate the decisive importance of intrinsic drive and responsibility for anything that happens to them and for them. Before this study, the cognitive process of chefs' long-term decision to stay in the occupation had not been examined. It was unstructured and unclear. This study showed that the path chefs follow begins with strong intrinsic drivers, stays there to grow and develop routes to the ground, and moves to extrinsic drivers mainly deriving from the organisation and the existing state of the industry. In case the extrinsic drivers prove inconsistent for an extended period, the whole

cognitive structure of chefs' retention springs up and down precariously, making them flexible regulators of the form that chefs' reactions would take: stay or leave or finding a particular way to remain by leaving.

# Chapter 7. Conclusions

This final chapter outlines the key findings which answer the initial research question of why chefs stay in their occupation. Firstly, the extent to which each research objective has been met by the research findings is reviewed in a logical sequence. Secondly, the chapter considers the contribution of the study's results to the existing literature of chefs' retention. Thirdly, although the aim of the study was not to provide practical recommendations to the hospitality industry, special space is given to explain the contribution of the research findings to the practice of restaurants in their attempt to retain their chefs and tackle the existing shortage in the commercial kitchen. Finally, the chapter finishes with the main limitations of the study furthered by areas and ideas for future research that have evolved, concerning the application of the present research into the refinement of chefs' selection strategies, coupled with an expansion to new areas of research into retaining highly skilled talented employees.

## 7.1 Main points of the study

The purpose of the current study was to refine the understanding of chefs' retention in the commercial kitchen. The reasons chefs leave the occupation had been researched in the past and were known to the scholarly community and hospitality practice. The reasons chefs stay in their careers had also been researched, although not adequately, so the 'what' causes them to remain chefs, was known, too. However, before this study, there was no research on how chefs form their desire to stay in the commercial kitchen for long periods. The absence of understanding the thinking process of chefs who remain in their jobs had also been recognised by Ghosh and Gurunathan (2015). This research filled that gap by tracing how chefs construe their reality and mapped their cognitive process of thinking about their stay.

One of the key research objectives was to reveal the cognitive maps chefs use to decide to stay, making the tacit knowledge of chefs regarding their retention explicit. To that end, the study elicited personal constructs of chefs that explained the topic in question and took what was known about the retention of chefs deeper. The research followed a logical process which firstly examined whether Job Embeddedness (JE), a widely accepted theory of employee retention, applies to the particular conditions of the commercial kitchen, hence could predict retention of chefs, as Mitchell et al. (2001) state in their model. Also, it explored how far

Occupational Embeddedness (OE) applies to the same domain, as Ng and Feldman (2009) argue that it does.

The results show that JE, together with OE, can explain chefs' retention as the domains of fit, links and sacrifice were found to be present in the personal constructs created by the research participants. That had been implied by Robinson et al. (2014) but required additional investigation in the chef occupation specifically, as their research referred to the hospitality industry in general. Therefore, those research findings expressed reservations about the extent to which the employee retention frameworks of JE and OE apply to the industry of chefs. Furthermore, the study ensures that the presence of JE in chefs lowers the likelihood of discovering and taking advantage of other career opportunities (Mitchell et al. 2001; Ng and Feldman 2009). More specifically:

Many chefs were brought up with respect and admiration for food and cooking, which gave them joy. Every time they come closer to cooking, that feeling of joy re-emerges; hence they want to keep experiencing it. Therefore, their desire to stay evolves through time, often since childhood, but also during their career as Jansen and Shipp (2019) argue and the study explains further. The evolution of that desire is outlined in the following paragraph. There are cases when they do not precisely know or understand why they are pulled into the commercial kitchen and attribute it to an unexplained solid personal drive, like a personal call to the chef career (Duffy et al. 2018; Cain, Busser and Kang 2017). Overall, they believe that the love and passion for food, either explained or unexplained, give them pleasure and the feeling that they naturally fit into the chefs' career.

With many of the chefs who participated in the study, continuing the cooking tradition of their parents or relatives meant they felt that they sustained the links with their immediate community (Lee, Burch and Mitchell 2014). Additionally, they value the recognition they receive from the public and stakeholders of the culinary industry. That shows that they appreciate the identity of someone who is a specialist and is appreciated by others in their community; therefore, the links-community domain is present. Similarly, chefs show noteworthy competitiveness in an attempt to stand out from the community of chefs and be acknowledged in the industry for their expertise and distinctive capabilities (Robinson 2008; Galvin et al. 2014). It creates a network of peers in the field they are known to, which they

consider essential for their career; therefore, the links-organisation domain is also present in chefs' retention.

Many chefs admitted that the occupational environment of the commercial kitchen was a far better alternative to traditional educational pathways (secondary education or higher). That conviction coincides with Bourdain's (2000) description of the chef's occupation and Cooper's (2012) and Zopiatis' (2010) analysis of the chef's culture. Research participants claim that they earned experience, skills, travels, kudos, and developed a career that they would have never enjoyed had they stayed in education. Moreover, after spending many years in the occupation, they would not wish to leave and lose the benefits and status they feel they have gained up to now. Hence, they would not sacrifice their job in the kitchen for other occupations (Mitchell et al 2001).

Chefs with a long tenure in the occupation believe that they have an evolving feeling that the job has paid them off. Therefore, they showed that the longer they stay, the more embedded they become (Mitchell et al. 2001). That applies especially to arrangements around their life-career balance, their career prospects and the power they increasingly get in decision-making about the creative delivery of their product. As explained in OE (Ng and Feldman 2009), the safe continuation of these two factors, career stability and conditions that ensure sustained creativity, are considered key reasons to keep chefs in the occupation or make them leave the industry entirely. Therefore, their desire to stay develops through time.

In order to map the cognitive journey of those chefs who have remained in the occupation for an extended period, the study furthered the application of JE and OE. It explored more idiosyncratic explanations for chefs' decision to remain for the first time in the scholarly community, which derive from distinct personal constructs and offer a deeper understanding of what drives them to stay. Another objective of the study was to see how that personal drive determines why chefs stay while showing resilience to the adverse conditions of working in the commercial kitchen. The research found that JE and OE did not draw a complete picture of why chefs stay in their job because these two theoretical frameworks did not manage to adequately cover enough of the explanations that research participants gave in the study. That was also implied in the hospitality studies of Robinson et al. (2014) and Arici et al. (2023) who claimed that more focused empirical studies are needed to adapt the retention theories to different contexts of work. This research revealed an essential finding to compliment

previous research, that chefs direct their thinking about remaining in the job from inside to outside, from things they feel ownership of to things they do not. They seem to recognise the dynamics between the two directions but put more emphasis on the intrinsic elements of their decision.

The chefs who participated revealed that the reasons they stay in the job are predominantly intrinsically driven, irrespective of the demanding conditions and characteristics of the job. Chefs who stay in the occupation long term initially make sure they feel good in it because they get the sense that they fit naturally in the kitchen ('Feel-good and Fit-in' superordinate construct), love being there, are passionate about food and cooking and want to keep doing it. Then, they acknowledge that their role offers them a strong identity of a specialist with knowledge and abilities that not many others have. Hence, they get a sense of authority and power in their kitchen and the culinary domain ('Identity of a Specialist with Power' superordinate construct). Unless these two conditions are present, chefs reason that they are unwilling to keep working in the kitchen long term. The study shows that feeling good and fitting in and getting the identity of a specialist with power are internal rewards instigating intrinsic drivers which play a protagonist role in chefs' retention. Compared to the existing literature, the need to love their job had been considered significant for chefs to follow the chef's career (Pratten 2003). However, the combination of fitting in the work environment of food and cooking and feeling good about it, instead of doing the job as way of earning a living has not been commented on previously. Equally, gaining an identity of a specialist which gives them power over their inner and outside community is not new in the literature (Cooper 2012; Cooper, Giousmpasoglou and Marinakou 2017). However, those studies referred exclusively to fine-dining chefs and did not imply that it applies to chefs of other segments of the industry. This research showed that not only it applies to the ones of casual/ upper casual and hotel restaurants, but it also plays a pivotal role in their career retention.

The protagonist role given to the intrinsic drivers suggests that chefs who tend to stay in the occupation believe that they are primarily responsible for their future. Hence, they justify an internal LOC, not allowing external conditions to influence them. The research participants highly valued their ability to influence their legacy, making them and their families proud. Having that attitude of building a reputation around their 'brand name', they show high resilience to external forces that make their work difficult; essentially, they consider those

forces as challenges that are part of the job they embrace. They also stated their willingness to help the younger generation of chefs adopt a similar mindset of taking ownership of their successful careers in the commercial kitchen. In mentoring and developing others, chefs see their reputation growing and their links with the community and the industry strengthening. Mentoring has been recognised as an essential management initiative to generally reduce staff turnover in hospitality (Yang, Guo, Wang, Li 2018) or to strengthen chefs' recognition and bonding with their kitchen brigades (Cooper 2012), but in all cases it has been treated as a managerial instrument for better results. This research revealed the intuitive desire of chefs to contribute to the development of their teams (and others) not as an organisational managerial task requested by others, but by the chef's own initiative.

Therefore, internal LOC is a distinct filter that gives further meaning to the presence of the domains of JE and OE and explains why chefs remain, confirming Ng and Feldman's (2011) claims. That is important for understanding chefs' retention because being intrinsically driven is a predominant and necessary condition. It becomes the central point of chefs' tenure, with anything else emerging from and revolving around that. The interaction of JE, OE and internal LOC had not been looked at previously in relation to the chef's occupation, and it enriches the understanding of chefs' retention.

Intrinsic drivers may be the core requirement for chefs' retention, but they do not stand alone. Chefs value their organisation's strategies to develop them and keep them up to date; they invest in their continuous learning. They see this development as the safest way to satisfy their curious and creative mind and remain competitively employable. That is the common denominator of the existing literature about chefs' technical and management development (Pratten 2003; Pang 2017) where chefs training has been instrumentalised by external to the chef sources of power. Improving their career in the commercial kitchen does not always come from their initiative – due to lack of available time, finances, and other personal factors – but also from the initiative of their organisations and the awarding bodies they are members of. Therefore, being offered opportunities to develop from external forces is something they expect to feel secure. Additionally, they also hope that the work conditions improve. Despite their own efforts to organise their work environment and make it professional but humane too, there are structural issues of the work that individuals cannot determine, but organisations collectively can (for example, shift hour arrangements, number of workdays,

modern kitchen equipment, healthy and safe kitchen rooms, timely access to trained kitchen brigades).

Although these external drivers are not perceived as vital for chefs' retention, they are dynamic hence flexible regulators of the intrinsic drivers, which can move them in various directions, qualities and intensities. However, contrary to what is widely believed in the literature (Frye, Kang, Huh, and Lee 2020), the study showed that extrinsic drivers are not strong enough to override intrinsic ones entirely. Only if the individual reaches a saturation point when they think that (a) their occupational safety is consistently jeopardised and (b) their physical or mental health is risked, they may voluntarily leave the occupation. These two conditions need to be emerging for an extended period without showing signs of being fixed in order to be considered adequate reasons to leave the occupation. If this occurs, chefs would be reluctant leavers (Lee et al. 2008) as the intrinsic drivers would not have been removed. In that sense, extrinsic drivers act as alarm clocks to remind chefs of their position and help them reflect on what they most value in their work and life.

It is essential to highlight that the retention forces are directed from the inside to the outside, from intrinsic to extrinsic drivers of chefs, not the reverse. It is apparent in the study that chefs who have served the occupation long term always find ways to show their resilience to any difficulty they face in their job, physical or mental. Prioritising those ways, they do not seem to be influenced by decisions, actions or conditions influenced by external sources (restaurant managers, awarding bodies, negative critiques, the industry's market environment). Instead, they remain loyal to their core personal reasons they remain chefs: feeling good because they fit in the job and getting an identity of a specialist with authority and power in their hands.

## 7.2 Contribution to the literature of chefs' retention

This study refined the existing understanding of chefs' retention. It went beyond what causes retention and gave more profound meaning to the direction of chefs' thinking and desire to remain in the career. Firstly, it ensured the application of Mitchell et al. (2001) and Ng and Feldman's (2007) theoretical frameworks in the context of chefs; fit, links and sacrifice, occupational stability and security are domains of JE and OE that can explain the desire of

chefs to serve long-term in the commercial kitchen. However, internal LOC acts as a necessary filter to evaluate the importance of the drivers that lead someone to stay in the chef's occupation. Given the challenging working conditions of the commercial kitchen, which admittedly put many chefs off from making a career in the field (Karatepe 2012; Robinson and Beesley 2010), the contribution of internal LOC to retention, as mentioned previously, gains additional importance in this occupational domain.

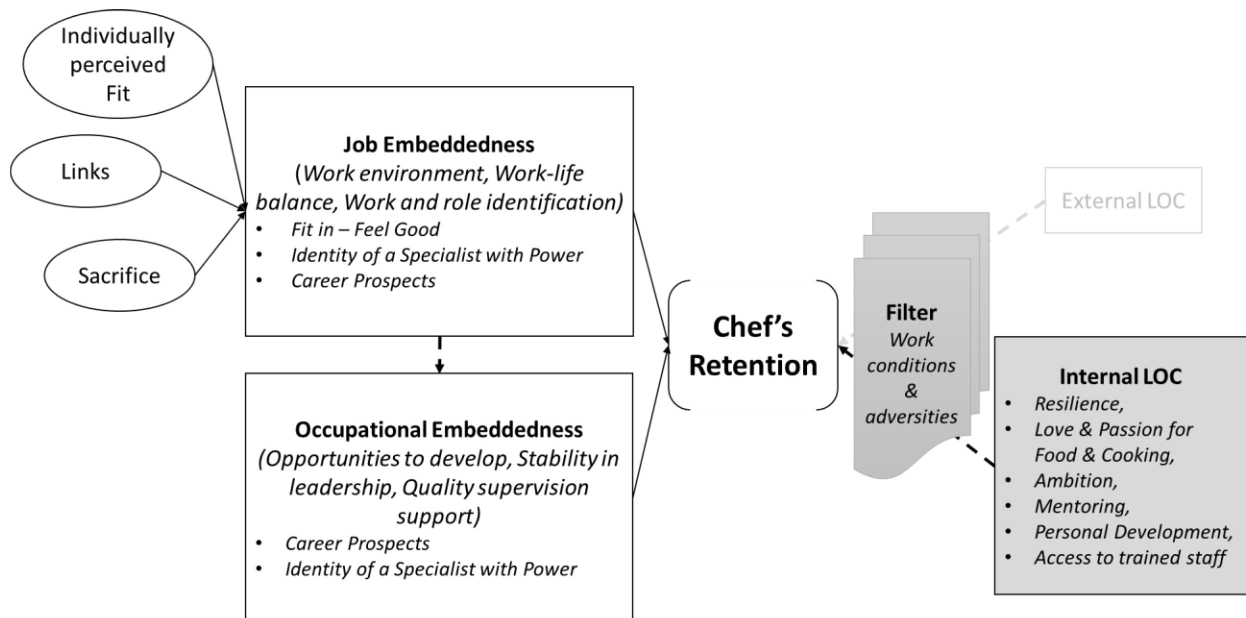
Secondly, before the study, hospitality scholars had yet to explore how chefs think about staying and what drives them to want to stay. The critical role of JE, OE and Internal LOC in employee retention, regardless of any particular industry, was known in the literature. It was explicitly argued by Mitchell et al. (2001) and Feldman (2002) that these theoretical frameworks, independently and to some extent interacting with each other (Ng and Feldman 2011), contribute to employees' intentions to stay and their ultimate retention. Therefore, it was assumed that they play a similar role in chefs' desire to stay on the job for the long term. However, how this desire was formed in chefs' minds had not been approached before this study. The priorities they set to embrace the challenging work environment of the commercial kitchen and endure the several forces that could potentially drive them out of the occupation had not been defined. This study brought to light the tacit knowledge among chefs of specific restaurant types, distinguishing the important from the unimportant, the primary from the secondary, and the catalytic from the deterrent drivers of their decisions to stay in the chef career. It was found that chefs' retention goes through a pathway involving most of the factors mentioned in previous research that influence chefs' decisions to stay: develop resilience, get inspired from family members or other role models, love food and cooking, show ambition to stand out, be creative, want to serve customers and make them happy, and learn new things continuously. This pathway prioritises those factors depending on their point of departure (intrinsically or extrinsically) and the individual meanings they get from chefs (personal constructs).

The breakthrough in the chef literature introduced by this study is that the intrinsic drivers are stronger predictors of tenure in the commercial kitchen, and they need to be present to support chefs' retention. Furthermore, extrinsic drivers are not absent but play the role of flexible regulators to chefs' retention and demonstrate the influence of the temporal nature of fit (Jansen and Shipp 2019). Even the ones who feel very strongly about their roles as chefs

have moments of doubt about their career choice and question their occupational future in the commercial kitchen. These are the result of external influences that can shake their retention. However, it is remarkable that although their retention is shaken, it does not break. On the contrary, it bounces back to its initial position, where chefs keep loving food and cooking, being authentic, performing and competing with themselves and with others, being creative, stretching themselves, continuously and carefully improving (and some of them staying humble), enjoying offering top food experience to guests. These are fundamental reasons that chefs serve in the occupation long term.

It is unclear if chefs who have sustained their roles for a long time never leave. They highlight that if forced to leave for the externally driven reasons explained earlier, they would leave. However, it would be against their will so they would become reluctant leavers. In this study, the reluctance to leave is not the result of social pressures, as Hom et al. (2012) have argued, but the result of external and adverse conditions that persist and are out of the individuals' hands to resolve. That is also what is generally believed in the literature (Robinson and Barron 2007; Robinson and Beesley 2010; People 1st 2017). The question, however, remains: would they finally leave even if they see no improvement in those conditions in the future? The present research timeline did not allow a longer-term observation of the research participants' careers, especially those who claimed that they would leave if they were not satisfied by the course of their career prospects and the challenging conditions of their work environment.

The above conclusions elaborate the initial conceptual framework on which this study was based (figure 5). The research findings specifically as discussed in the previous chapter (see tables 5.1a, 5.1b, 5.1c) and outlined here, defined, and furthered the use of JE, OE, and LOC in retaining chefs, as well as adapted the individual factors of retention to the above theoretical frameworks. The retention of experienced chefs is the result of all domains of JE and OE but necessarily filtered by internal LOC that filters all adversities of the chef career. That is depicted in the following figure:




*(Figure 17: Conceptual framework of chefs' retention)*

In that approach to employee retention, the focus is on the individual perspective, hence the emphasis on the personal construct theory (PCT) with the use of RGT. In previous approaches to retention where the central point of research were the individual perceptions of work and the workplace environment, the emerged findings were slightly different than the application of all domains of JE, for example retention with links, fit but not sacrifice (Halvorsen, Treuren, and Kulik 2015). Similarly, with the consideration of internal LOC in this study, it was found that the intrinsic drivers of chefs are so strong that they only allow extrinsic constraints of work to shake chefs' desires to retention but not remove them. Usually, employee retention is examined from a managerial viewpoint, which mainly sits outside the individual (what organisations do to increase retention rates) or the interactional perspective in which managerial initiatives still have the upper hand in this relation, seeking a positive P-O fit (Billsberry, Talbot and Ambrosini 2012; Paterson 2004). Putting the individual as a starting point in the research approach opens new pathways in the exploration of employee retention.

The current situation of the pandemic, which shook the hospitality industry significantly for the last two years, could be an excellent reason for a longitudinal study to check the consistency of the warning signals chefs of this research send if their career is jeopardised. That is a new area of research which has just started to emerge (McCartney, Chi and Pinto 2022). Suppose it is found that a good number of the research participants changed or

adapted their job roles to the new work conditions emerging after the pandemic. In that case, there may be an excellent foundation to argue that they meant what they feared would happen to them and left the occupation. On the other hand, if they stayed in the same career, continuing to perform as they love, then the study's meaning to the flexible regulators is strongly confirmed. A future longitudinal study could answer this question more reliably.

### 7.3 Contribution to the practice of chefs' retention

Although the aim of the thesis was not to directly provide managerial recommendations to decision-makers in hospitality, its concluding remarks can offer some valuable points to support the recent concerns about the industry's sustainability. The conclusions of this study are very timely and particularly essential in the present phenomenon of increased rates of shortage of chefs in the UK. It is being argued that this may be due to some endemic and pandemic attributes that have hit the industry enormously: the first being the effects of Brexit on the incoming cooks and chefs from various European backgrounds (Bosetti and Washington-Ihieme 2019), and the second being the repetitive lockdown effects because of Covid19 which forced hospitality to close down three times in two years for a period of a few months each (Partridge and Partington 2021; Race 2021; Davies 2021; Thomsen 2021). These may be problems which could be overcome in time (maybe partly) as new strategies are set and cover the losses created from initial shocks of the industry. Based on the study's scope, the focus of those strategies should not be based on who leaves the occupation alone, hence take management initiatives to fill the gaps, but on who stays and sustains the business.

There will always be reasons for employees who work in hospitality, an industry with high turnover rates, to change their career desire and leave the commercial kitchen (Park and Min 2020; Frye et al. 2020). Improving the pallet of extrinsic motivation offered to chefs (e.g. higher wages, healthier ergonomics in the kitchen, publicity and PR) could act as a remedy with quick results. However, they will not be enough to keep them in long-term occupation. What prevails in chefs' decision to retain their occupational roles are intrinsic drivers, hence strong enough to keep them in. Therefore, HR strategies should strive for retention rather than fighting against turnover. Therefore, the research findings imply the following strategies to retain chefs:

Employee selection strategies and consequent processes could be more effective if they move focus from searching for the expected skills (experience and dexterity) to identifying the talents with the right skills and desire to progress who are worthwhile investing in and seeing them grow. That dialogue has already started, and scholars are experimenting with various non-traditional tools in the pre-selection and selection phase of employees; for example, the use of biodata to identify JE dimensions to ensure retention (Rubenstein, Kammeyer-Mueler, Wang, and Thundiyil 2018). Shedding light on employee retention that derives from the individual's desire to make a career in the commercial kitchen in challenging times that hospitality experiences nowadays is a shift of mind. It has been argued that more emphasis must be put in the Person – Environment (P-E) fit in the employee selection processes so that candidates are recognised for the evolution of their 'being' during their occupational work, how they have developed throughout time (Vleugels, Verbruggen, De Cooman, and Billsberry 2022).

Based on this study, the selection criteria of chefs could be refined by looking for the intrinsic drivers which make candidates feel good in the kitchen because they naturally fit in; expressly, adding to the existing required competencies, the chefs' environmental fit in the commercial kitchens they aim to work for. Also, looking for the ones that reveal their deep aspiration to gain an identity of a specialist that not many people can do, hence putting their mark on their field.

These two main strands of criteria are broken down into a set of competencies and career/life characteristics: being balanced, sensible and pragmatic; showing high levels of resilience; being inspired by people who are close to their hearts and have a history in cooking; loving and being passionate about food; showing genuine enthusiasm about the job which sometimes may not know where it derives from. Also, they should be able to argue about their ambition, provide portfolios which illustrate their creative minds, show love for providing top service to others and value the power of mentoring.

The research findings also show that organisations could distinguish chefs between the ones who intend to make a career in the kitchen and those who think of the occupation as a means of living. The industry needs both and in many cases, it depends on the latter employees (Wright, Knox, and Constantin 2019), but hospitality decision-makers would find it more effective if they are clear about who is investible to sustain the business and build its

reputation and who is investible to keep the business running. This study shows that ensuring favourable work conditions in the commercial kitchen is undoubtedly a part of the occupation's package, which a chef would look at before entering a job post carefully. These work conditions might be critical for the second category of chefs because they would easily change direction if unsatisfied.

On the contrary, as the study showed, the first category of chefs who aim to make a career around food and kitchen management would be ready to resiliently find ways to overcome those difficulties of the work conditions by taking the initiative to make it happen. These are people who believe that they are responsible for the future that they draw, not others, demonstrating the characteristics of internal LOC. Organisations must keep the opportunities for career prospects and personal development open to them by offering regular training on up-to-date culinary knowledge to feel they are always on top of their game, because these employees look for ways to develop in their domain continuously. Aiming to establish a development climate of mastery, instead of high performance alone, would actively support chefs to develop an identity of a specialist (Zhang et al. 2022) that they claim keeps them on the job.

Additionally, restaurant owners and investors should manage to respond on time to their chefs' needs to have resources and a capable team in the kitchen with the required quality and numbers. That is a strategic decision to be made which weighs the benefits of investing in the tenure of chefs (and their kitchen brigades) or a tight budget to keep finances under complete control, or in an efficient combination of the two, depending on the market conditions of each period.

In summary, the chef's selection and development strategies should shift focus. The research findings suggest that hospitality decision-makers should spend more time, effort and resources to develop the ones who meet the selection criteria for chefs who are likely to stay. Ultimately, more efficient management of chefs based on their expected long tenure in the occupation would mean more significant returns on the investment (Edger and Hughes 2016).

The study did not meet any research participants who accidentally got in the job without feeling a strong desire for food and cooking, without listening to an internal call that they would perform well in the kitchen (Allen & Iomaire 2016). That is why the above

recommendations focus on employee selection at the very early stages of the process. This concern may not mean that unless employees who join the kitchen show from the outset the intrinsic selection criteria described earlier will not develop long-term careers as chefs. That may well happen too, as it reflects the temporal characteristic of P-E fit (Vleugels, et al. 2022) but the nature of this research did not provide that information; it would require a much bigger sample of chefs to demine the extent of that possibility. If that was a possibility, then deliberate and consistent observation of the retention drivers during chefs' performance in the kitchen might be a way to discover more chefs who would tend to stay on the job. As a next step, organisations could seek to develop them in the same way as the former category of chefs who show critical signs of retention from the beginning of their careers.

### 7.4 Limitations of the work and implications for future research

The use of qualitative methods has many research advocates and critics, and the present study is no exception. Some may argue that this research does not finally firmly confirm or reject an initial research hypothesis. Therefore, there is no positivist response to the topic in question. Although the nature of qualitative research is interpretivist and not a positivist approach to the situation, it is a powerful claim to be made. The difference between the two methods refers to the debate between realists and relativists (Yilmaz 2013) in which the former can reliably verify and hence replicate their findings. In contrast, the latter would always need their interpretation of the context of a situation to reconfirm their findings. That may be considered a disadvantage of qualitative approaches, but the research context is the key.

The research method adopted in this study makes the findings mentioned above less generalisable to the corpus of chefs collectively. Idiosyncratic methods, like the repertory grids used in the study, do not produce generalised results. Notwithstanding this limitation, this work offers valuable insights into the reasons chefs stay in their jobs. The sample of research participants was limited, coming only from England. Given that the commercial kitchen is a culturally sensitive domain, the research project results have a more localised effect than a broader European, let alone universal. However, the study could play the role of the foundation for other similar studies in various geographical locations where the cultural

aspect plays a significant role in the attitude and behaviour of chefs. The benefit is that research findings of this study have set the foundation for broader research on the critical areas for retaining chefs using quantitative methods. That would give the researchers access to a much bigger sample of chefs making the findings more representative of their long-term retention. Therefore, a promising future direction of the study would be creating and testing a selection assessment tool that could predict chefs' retention and a development tool to contribute to the gradual appetite of cooks and young chefs to make a career in the commercial kitchen.

The study focuses on a particular occupation, chefs with distinct characteristics that are not met in many other occupations. There is no research on the impact of context and national culture in chefs' retention. Park and Min (2020) attempted to conduct a meta-analysis on voluntary turnover with some implications on employee retention in hospitality and compare it with other similar ones that refer to all other industries. However, the poor numbers of research publications on the matter did not manage to be a reliable guide to the distinctiveness of hospitality. They found that role stressors and emotional labour contribute to job strains more than in other industries, echoing previous findings of Karatepe and Aleshinloye (2009), but that was the result of a limited secondary and not empirical primary research. Therefore, their findings give some indications for further investigation. Similarly, this study included participants from specific segments of the commercial kitchen (casual/ upper casual and hotel restaurants). It has been argued that different variations in the perceptions of their roles and the semantics in their workplace exist among different types of restaurants where the culture shows distinctive characteristics (Cooper 2012; Cooper, Giousmpasoglou and Marinakou 2017). Therefore, it should not be claimed that what works for the chefs in the restaurant types of this study works for all types, too.

Focusing on a particular occupation limits the ability of the findings to move beyond the remit of chefs and generalise the research outcome. However, the benefit of this research is that it would attempt to recognise the personal meanings that individuals with similar qualities to chefs give to their decisions to stay in their careers for long. These employees can be those who are perceived as highly skilled and talented, as chefs are, and who possess knowledge and capabilities that are not seen in many other jobs. That could serve as a platform for

understanding the conceptual maps of highly skilled role occupants, similar to the characteristics of chefs, regarding their career retention.

Following the contextual impact of the research on the study's results, additional attention must be placed on national cultures, too. Since the research was conducted in England, its findings refer to the national culture of England alone and not others. The chef occupation is nevertheless highly influenced by culture, reflecting the personalities, attitudes, and work behaviours of chefs from various countries of the world. Dimensions of national cultures affect how they manage the difficulties of the job in the commercial kitchen (Park and Min 2020). For example, individualistic cultures, predominantly represented by western countries, seem to think that negative emotional experience in the kitchen may risk their well-being, therefore are more likely to consider leaving the occupation. However, that attitude may not occur in collectivistic cultures, mainly represented by countries of the east (Hofstede 2001), perhaps because of the stronger psychological bond they develop with their employers (ibid: 4). The study may have tried to tackle the issue of cultural influence by including participants from various cultural backgrounds (England, India, Italy, Spain, Australia, Greece, Canada, Germany) however, this diversity must be filtered by the prism of the acculturation process that all foreigner professionals go through when working in a country for long. It has been found that this affects individuals' JE (Allen 2006) as well as LOC (Skaff and Gardiner (2003), hence the results of this study must take the above cultural concerns into consideration.

Based on the above, researching the retention of chefs can be looked at from the perspective of researching talented employees of the more general category of those who are considered highly skilled. Employing highly skilled employees makes their retention critical for the competitiveness and sustainability of high performance in an organisation. This study has been one of the few attempts to thoroughly understand why highly skilled talents, such as chefs, stay in their occupations (Kourtidis 2022 – appendix 9). The research findings contribute to the current literature on this topic. The emphasis on the intrinsic drivers of retention found in this study coincides with the findings of other studies, which suggest that highly skilled employees who mainly show psychological ownership of their organisations, tasks, and field of expertise remain in their jobs (Olckers and Du Plessis 2015). Consequently,

the decision to stay derives from a strong foundation of intrinsic drivers in chefs and maybe in other highly skilled employees like them. That is a promising area for further exploration.

### 7.5 Concluding remarks

The thesis is the first attempt to cognitively map chefs who have served the occupation long-term and hence had the desire to stay on the job. The research concluded that intrinsic drivers are fundamental for chefs' retention based on their personal constructs. They are so firmly embedded that they give reasons to individuals to build resilience against the adversities of the job and consistently tolerate the difficulties they face in the commercial kitchen. Work conditions, career opportunities, and other extrinsic drivers can shake the construct of retention but are not adequate causes to demolish it. Organisations that understand the value of investing in chefs with the internal characteristics that foster retention in the commercial kitchen and develop the right strategies to facilitate their needs will have significant returns.

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# Appendices

## Appendix 1

*Questions about 'What makes you stay in the chef's occupation'*?

*Give your answers in the boxes below*

1. Can you think of a couple of conditions that drove you into the chef's profession?

2. Can you think of a couple of conditions that could have driven you out of the chef's profession?

3. What is it that you like most in your job as a chef?

4. What is it that you don't like at all (or the most) in your job as a chef?

5. What would make your job ideal in the future?

6. What would make your job unattractive hence wanting to leave in the future?

**Which 3 of the ones listed below would you also consider important to keep you in your job as a chef?**

| | **Elements of retention to the job** | **Tick 3 of them** |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Unexplained personal attraction to the work of a chef | |
| 2 | Admiration of the skills of my best friend/-s in the kitchen | |
| 3 | Loving the challenging work of servicing demanding customers | |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 4 | I naturally fit in the atmosphere of the commercial kitchen | |
| 5 | Living with watching a close family member performing in the kitchen | |
| 6 | Inspiration by the behaviours of the owner of the restaurant (n/a if you are the one) OR your restaurant manager | |
| 7 | Wanting to be like my role model (either from the chef's occupation or different) | |
| 8 | Wanting to be the best and beat anyone in my domain | |
| 9 | I have no other alternative as good as this one | |
| 10 | An incident or person that has "shocked" me and turned me into a chef | |
| 11 | Living my legacy behind to make my family proud | |

# Appendix 2

## Detailed analysis of the categorisation of personal constructs

**Complete List of Constructs**

| | ID | LHP - Explicit | RHP - Implicit | Note | Occurrence | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | **Participant 8** | Need to have work-life balance | Being a chef is all about ambition | **Balanced** | 12 | 26 |
| 2 | **Participant 9** | All my life is about cooking | Time to disconnect to gain energy | | | 16.56% |
| 3 | **Participant 10** | Lack of control over my contract - Uncertainty - Unfair | Fairness - to affect my personal life (e.g. reflect on my holidays) | | | |
| 4 | **Participant 10** | Not having stable hours of work a week makes me vulnerable | Have work / life balance | | | |
| 5 | **Participant 10** | Not on me to control my pace of work | Choose how many hours of work/ a contract that allows it | | | |
| 6 | **Participant 5** | Personally responsible for the profession | Company is responsible for my profession | | | |
| 7 | **Participant 12** | Good work-life balance balances the difficulties of the job | Being immersed into the job becomes stressful | | | |
| 8 | **Participant 14** | Work conditions do not allow you to spend time with yourself and family | The positive side is the love for the environment of the kitchen | | | |
| 9 | **Participant 17** | Negative aspect of the job - pay and team | Positive - fit in my family time | | | |
| 10 | **Participant 17** | Challenge and a big team would stretch my ability | Relation to my family life | | | |
| 11 | **Participant 21** | Many opportunities in the profession | Demanding operations in the job | | | |
| 12 | **Participant 22** | What I would like to be working in is a kitchen with work-life balance | The past was more negative than the present | | | |
| 13 | **Participant 9** | Conditions of the job - out of control | Personal moves in the job | **Sensibility & Pragmatim** | 11 | |
| 14 | **Participant 8** | Traditionally chefs are respected by their trainees | Mental & physical illness related with the job | | | |
| 15 | **Participant 4** | Things that you can control in the job | Things that you cannot control in the job | | | |
| 16 | **Participant 1** | Walk before you run | Not standing on your legs (mentally & physically) | | | |
| 17 | **Participant 16** | Being young & junior often still at home or just from school | Management concerns about costs and operations | | | |
| 18 | **Participant 16** | Cannot explain it but gave me reason to leave home | As professional you think more of the everyday work | | | |
| 19 | **Participant 17** | Big challenges require the right atmosphere | The bigger the challenge the longer it takes - effect on the family | | | |
| 20 | **Participant 19** | Loving the challenge and being creative are something you can control | Pay, work conditions and balance are not necessarily controlled by you | | | |
| 21 | **Participant 20** | Negative conditions make you unhappy at work | Random events in life may turn out positive | | | |
| 22 | **Participant 20** | Improving a situation is positive | Some conditions (work hours) cannot be changed | | | |
| 23 | **Participant 20** | Things you cannot control may help you in the job | Things you can control can make things better | | | |
| 24 | **Participant 1** | Doing a good job right | Need to keep the machine running | **Consistency** | **2** | |
| 25 | **Participant 1** | Do my job right | I don't know why | | | |
| 26 | **Participant 2** | Being ready mindset (prepared) | Driven by money | **Organised** | 1 | |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 27 | **Participant 4** | Looking up to somebody is stressful | Lack of stress means you don't follow your role model | **Resilience** | 20 | 20 |
| 28 | **Participant 5** | Hard work is a reality | Need to love it as a choice | | | 12.74% |
| 29 | **Participant 5** | Personal negative feelings | Organisational policies & issues | | | |
| 30 | **Participant 6** | Fast track the reality of hospitality | demoralised being a number - not feeling part of the team | | | |
| 31 | **Participant 7** | Work hard - play hard captures the enthusiasm of chefs | Job is not for everyone | | | |
| 32 | **Participant 7** | Hard conditions mentally and physically | Extra step to make customers happy | | | |
| 33 | **Participant 7** | Fitting in the pain & stress of the work it becomes day-to-day routine/ institutionalised | alternatives as a way to have ''normal" life | | | |
| 34 | **Participant 7** | Pressure on performance | leave this stuff behind - move forward | | | |
| 35 | **Participant 8** | Bad working conditions drive low skill level | If it's broken, it needs to be fixed | | | |
| 36 | **Participant 9** | Conditions that make your job difficult to deliver | Not able to control your emotions | | | |
| 37 | **Participant 7** | Enjoy the job and bear the long hours | there are alternatives to school to enjoy | | | |
| 38 | **Participant 1** | Pride | [It's a] Weakness to complain | | | |
| 39 | **Participant 11** | Positive feeling for the job | Not getting the expected reward | | | |
| 40 | **Participant 12** | Hard condition in the job | More relaxed environment cooking with family | | | |
| 41 | **Participant 14** | Self-regulation to find time for you | Internal combat with the buzz of the restaurant | | | |
| 42 | **Participant 15** | Cannot describe the joy of what the work is about until you do it | Work conditions are not pleasurable | | | |
| 43 | **Participant 16** | Adverse conditions affect your willingness to do your job | An escape is a positive thing | | | |
| 44 | **Participant 19** | Challenge of the work to serve customers and the competition (also with yourself) go together | Natural draw into the job | | | |
| 45 | **Participant 19** | Internal pressure to make everyone you work with happy (internally driven) | Stress may be expected, but lack of appreciation not (externally driven) | | | |
| 46 | **Participant 22** | Challenging environment makes the job difficult | Youth and inexperience of life help you make unpredictable decisions | | | |
| 65 | **Participant 3** | High end food come out of high training | Without discipline you won't get high end food | **Personal Devlp-Training** | 19 | 19 |
| 66 | **Participant 4** | Naturally fit & constantly Learning/ Teaching | Working following standard menus | | | 12.10% |
| 67 | **Participant 4** | Emulate the top menus | Follow what is standard | | | |
| 68 | **Participant 7** | Training may bring you closer to expectations | Unable to meet your expectations | | | |
| 69 | **Participant 9** | Your background determines who you are as a person | Keep being more professional & learn | | | |
| 70 | **Participant 10** | Try to achieve my profession as best as I can | No constant flaw of guests to cook for | | | |
| 71 | **Participant 8** | Speaking the language of the kitchen makes you more adaptable | just knowing something about the kitchen doesn't make you specialist of the kitchen | | | |
| 72 | **Participant 8** | Part of the creative thing is not part of the school curriculum | Strengthening apprenticeship or NVQ would keep standards high | | | |
| 73 | **Participant 3** | Service is exciting and dynamic | Without training there is no service | | | |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 74 | **Participant 11** | Feel of using nature in food | Develop education as a complete package | | | |
| 75 | **Participant 12** | Do what my dad did | Look after yourself - personal development | | | |
| 76 | **Participant 13** | Efficiencies & non efficiencies that people do not understand | Nothing to prepare an exec Chef and also give the right picture to others | | | |
| 77 | **Participant 13** | Growing knowledge by society leaders can facilitate the occupation | Passion is there from a very young age - love to learn | | | |
| 78 | **Participant 15** | Being the best is down to the quality of the training received | Only thing to put me off is health and age | | | |
| 79 | **Participant 15** | What you produce with hard work makes customers happy | Softer training does not make customers happy - lack of discipline | | | |
| 80 | **Participant 15** | The more I learn from the variety of the job the better teacher I become | Being the best brings more customers in | | | |
| 81 | **Participant 15** | Politics in quality training and work conditions are ineffective | Develop yourself and others | | | |
| 82 | **Participant 22** | My life is made easier by self-development and development of others | My life is made difficult by not finding the numbers and quality of staff | | | |
| 83 | **Participant 23** | Enjoy what I do - always learning something new | Need of a different mindset to constantly be organised, work smartly | | | |
| 47 | **Participant 2** | Family experience | Make own rules and divide family | **Inspiration(Fam-Work)** | 18 | 18 |
| 48 | **Participant 2** | Family atmosphere creates success | Lose family | | | 11.46% |
| 49 | **Participant 6** | Lucky to work with top teams/ top operations | Love working hard in the kitchen | | | |
| 50 | **Participant 7** | inspiration by others as a motive to continue | negative consequences of success | | | |
| 51 | **Participant 11** | Kitchen creates a bonding like family | Selfishness - highly competitive colleagues | | | |
| 52 | **Participant 11** | Disadvantages of the job (long hours, low pay, etc) | A good feel working with your colleagues in the kitchen | | | |
| 53 | **Participant 12** | Positive attraction to who would benefit you and rely on | My family is important to me | | | |
| 54 | **Participant 13** | Inspirational leader makes an engaging kitchen environment | bureaucracies make the job more difficult | | | |
| 55 | **Participant 13** | The restaurant manager can make serving customers easier | Bad conditions/managers make serving customers difficult | | | |
| 56 | **Participant 13** | Creativity, togetherness stems from my first head chef (role model) | Learning as you go affects liability - companies may be vulnerable | | | |
| 57 | **Participant 13** | If legislation is badly managed could be dangerous for customers etc | You look up to your role model to be like them | | | |
| 58 | **Participant 14** | Getting that vibe of pleasing customers you think you can beat the world | Budget reasons and bad management inhibit your work and create a mental challenge | | | |
| 59 | **Participant 15** | Will always work to make my family proud | As you grow older family becomes more important to you so work conditions matter | | | |
| 60 | **Participant 16** | Mental thing to think of - Strong bonds because of the environment of the kitchen, not characters | Work conditions is a tangible thing to think of | | | |

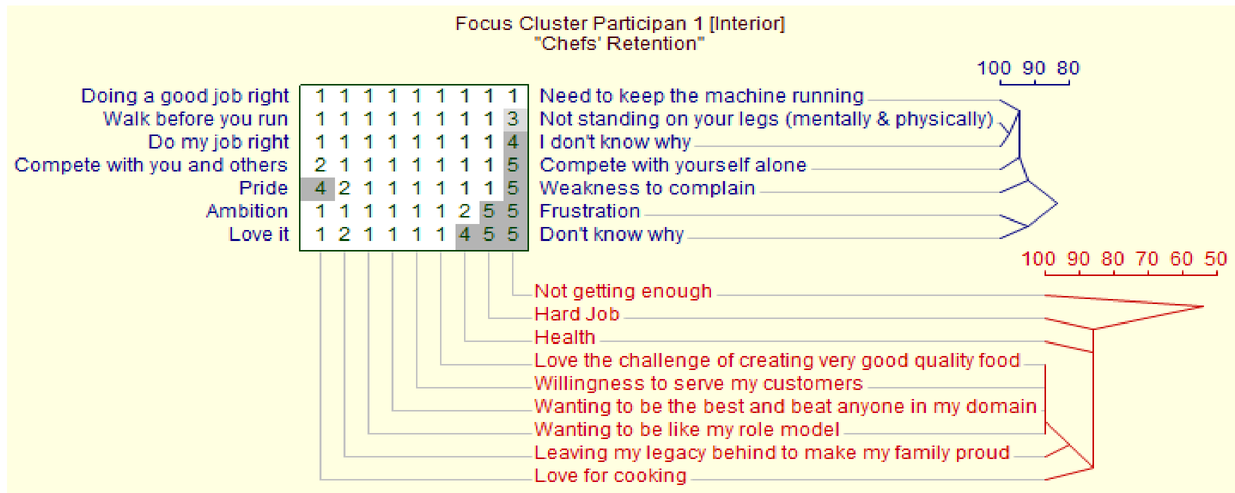
| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 61 | **Participant 17** | The atmosphere of the kitchen can drive you in the kitchen | The job relates to the customer | | | |
| 62 | **Participant 17** | A family member in the kitchen makes you feel proud | Low pay is not everything | | | |
| 63 | **Participant 17** | My job satisfaction (children) keeps me enthusiastic and alert | Working without a team can exhaust you | | | |
| 64 | **Participant 20** | Negative consequences from things that are out of your hands | Motive deriving from others in the profession | | | |
| 84 | **Participant 2** | Just following my internal instinct | Obstacles (like physical ones) | **Intrinsic Drive(Fit in)** | 18 | 18 |
| 85 | **Participant 2** | Personal attraction to the job | Negativity (by reviews/ customers) | | | 11.46% |
| 86 | **Participant 5** | Passionate personality | Work in the right organisation | | | |
| 87 | **Participant 5** | Coming from within | health issues affect your character | | | |
| 88 | **Participant 5** | Right character as a chef | Choice to distinguish yourself | | | |
| 89 | **Participant 11** | Personal feeling that I belong to the kitchen | Take happiness out of me and put it on others | | | |
| 90 | **Participant 12** | If you fit in hard work becomes easier | If you don't fit in work can be stressful | | | |
| 91 | **Participant 18** | Need to have strong drivers for performing and achieving | Love is not quantifiable easily | | | |
| 92 | **Participant 18** | Completion and belonging | Self-driven - not team based | | | |
| 93 | **Participant 18** | Searching for my feeling to be valued | Stagnation is a personal feeling | | | |
| 94 | **Participant 19** | Feel-good situation to fit in and feel creative and appreciative | Stress and lack of appreciation for my efforts makes me feel bad | | | |
| 95 | **Participant 19** | Being in the kitchen is a natural feeling | Using variety of skills are needed but not always necessary | | | |
| 96 | **Participant 20** | Strong personal motivation to the work | Situational drive into the job | | | |
| 97 | **Participant 21** | Support by someone as necessary | Personal attraction to the job | | | |
| 98 | **Participant 22** | Personal career choice that I fit in | Conditions of work can become better | | | |
| 99 | **Participant 18** | Feeling of wanting and belonging to something meaningful | Aggressive and strategic | | | |
| 100 | **Participant 22** | Environment of the kitchen has become better because there are less old school chefs | The job is my positive thought of freedom | | | |
| 101 | **Participant 23** | Working in the kitchen feels a natural thing | Give something to my family, not necessarily the kitchen | | | |
| 102 | **Participant 1** | Ambition | Frustration | **Ambition** | 5 | 17 |
| 103 | **Participant 10** | Hopefully open something on my own - put my heart on it independently | Fail to leave my name behind | | | 10.83% |
| 104 | **Participant 5** | Ambition | Lack of ambition leads to stress | | | |
| 105 | **Participant 12** | Have impact on the industry based on own performance | Teamwork keeps the work-life balance | | | |
| 106 | **Participant 18** | Reward from completion of targets | Career goals feel more personal | | | |
| 107 | **Participant 7** | Success brings more success & keeps you going | unable to enjoy other things in life | **Set goals-ambition** | 8 | |
| 108 | **Participant 2** | Got a target, a goal | Not achieved a goal | | | |
| 109 | **Participant 1** | Compete with you and others | Compete with yourself alone | | | |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 110 | **Participant 12** | Always go beyond - do best that I can | Someone the skills in someone else | | | |
| 111 | **Participant 14** | I see myself in the kitchen with the whole package | Consultant chef changes picture and meets with more people | | | |
| 112 | **Participant 18** | being in a team and adding value makes me happy | Keep setting future goal | | | |
| 113 | **Participant 16** | If you can't do what you want, you don't fit in | Mentoring is rewarding element of the job | | | |
| 114 | **Participant 23** | Negative aspects of the kitchen: bad management doesn't promote goodness | Have future dream: making money for myself | | | |
| 115 | **Participant 3** | Quick results | Believing in what you do and living it | | | |
| 116 | **Participant 4** | Be happy to work in the Kitchen and pass on skills | Be unhappy in the kitchen | | | |
| 117 | **Participant 12** | Succeeding is down to me | In senior positions need to make hard decisions | **Assertive** | 4 | |
| 118 | **Participant 22** | What I am about and what I like about the job go together | Things I don't want to see in my job I try to change them from the top | | | |
| 119 | **Participant 1** | Love it | Don't know why | | | 16 |
| 120 | **Participant 2** | See passion - something you love | Problems (financial) | | | 10.19% |
| 121 | **Participant 3** | Lack of qualification | Skill and Passion - Desire | | | |
| 122 | **Participant 4** | The Reason [for performing] being the Passion not Money | Just the job to earn money | | | |
| 123 | **Participant 4** | Look for the challenge of the kitchen | Just a role to be fulfilled | | | |
| 124 | **Participant 10** | Passion of the work - keeps the enthusiasm | No pleasure - do it for so long | | | |
| 125 | **Participant 6** | High quality of ingredients - freedom to buy & use them | Passion, dedication, ethos assesses the restaurant setting easily | | | |
| 126 | **Participant 11** | Passionate young person who wants to create new things | Crisis would transform my passion | **Love** | 16 | |
| 127 | **Participant 13** | Passion would lead to becoming a role model - in my control | Demanding customers are out of my control | | | |
| 128 | **Participant 13** | With passion you move to creativity & togetherness | bad conditions may affect your health | | | |
| 129 | **Participant 14** | Passion drives you in and keeps you in | Politics in the kitchen pushes motivation away | | | |
| 130 | **Participant 16** | Salaries and costs are a concern for the sustainability of the job | The challenge and the adrenaline of the job is what I love | | | |
| 131 | **Participant 21** | Very satisfied by the job unless there are health issues | The job is more than just cooking - more passion and love | | | |
| 132 | **Participant 21** | Rewarding job always - learn from others | Without passion there is no job | | | |
| 133 | **Participant 21** | Lack of love is out of the zone | Love for cooking comes from home | | | |
| 134 | **Participant 23** | Do what you love to do | Long hours wouldn't matter if it was to work for me | | | |
| 135 | **Participant 3** | Way of expressing artistic ability - family encouragement | Already achieved high | | | 9 |
| 136 | **Participant 4** | Repetitive and generic | Creative | **Creativity** | 9 | 5.73% |
| 137 | **Participant 5** | Be unique and creative | Loose focus | | | |

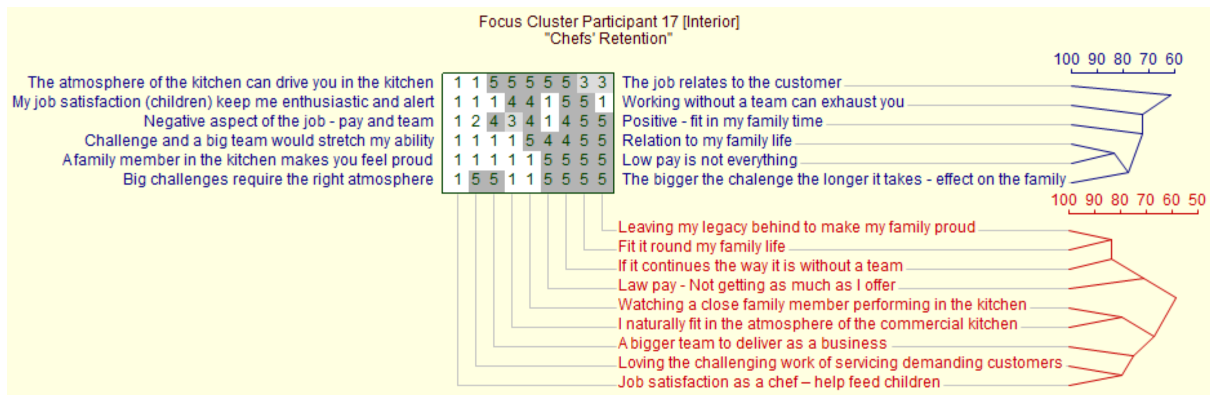
| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 138 | **Participant 8** | Experimentation until you perfect your skill | No push and repetition -> no creativity | | | |
| 139 | **Participant 10** | Discovery of new techniques | Not enjoying cooking, lost passion | | | |
| 140 | **Participant 11** | Combination of creativity and good materials is the advantage of being a chef | Keeping out of good products due to hardships in the industry | | | |
| 141 | **Participant 16** | The challenge is that you have to work with what you have | Personal satisfaction to create the dish you want instead of being told to | | | |
| 142 | **Participant 19** | More pressure you have the higher the expectation to get more pay | Being creative brings you closer to the job | | | |
| 143 | **Participant 21** | The reward and attraction to the job is artistic creativity and challenge | Only health issues can stop me from doing the job | | | |
| 144 | **Participant 3** | Pleasing people (being artistic), making them happy | Not here for our egos | **Top Service** | 7 | 7 |
| 145 | **Participant 9** | Everything is about customers | Job is based on skills and personality | | | 4.46% |
| 146 | **Participant 9** | Give guests best experience | Not equally good conditions of the job | | | |
| 147 | **Participant 11** | Underpaid & low education - unattractive | Love for happy customers - attractive | | | |
| 148 | **Participant 14** | Personal gratification from making others happy | Feel guilty for my family due to the nature of the job | | | |
| 149 | **Participant 15** | Being the best makes customers happy | Bad work conditions may have an effect on you and your customers | | | |
| 150 | **Participant 20** | Being able to provide best experience to others | Deal breaker not to be allowed to cook my food | | | |
| 151 | **Participant 3** | Mentoring others to teach others from experience | Do your job - get on with it | **Mentoring** | 4 | 4 |
| 152 | **Participant 8** | Develop others to play key roles in their careers | show by example; be mindful of the work-life balance - work to live | | | 2.55% |
| 153 | **Participant 15** | What I know I want to pass them onto others | Carry on the legacy to the family | | | |
| 154 | **Participant 16** | Hard work and conditions directly affect your personal life | Mentoring others is a positive thing | | | |
| 156 | **Participant 2** | Uninterrupted cooperation with staff to meet dream | Luck of resources | **Human Resources** | 2 | 2 |
| 157 | **Participant 6** | Ingredients and kitchen brigade goes together | Entire team of restaurant does not understand the production process | | | 1.91% |
| 155 | **Participant 3** | Chefs are being paid better today | Pressure from the owners to achieve unrealistic things | **Extrinsic Drive** | 1 | 1 |
| | | | | | **Total** | **157** |

# Appendix 3

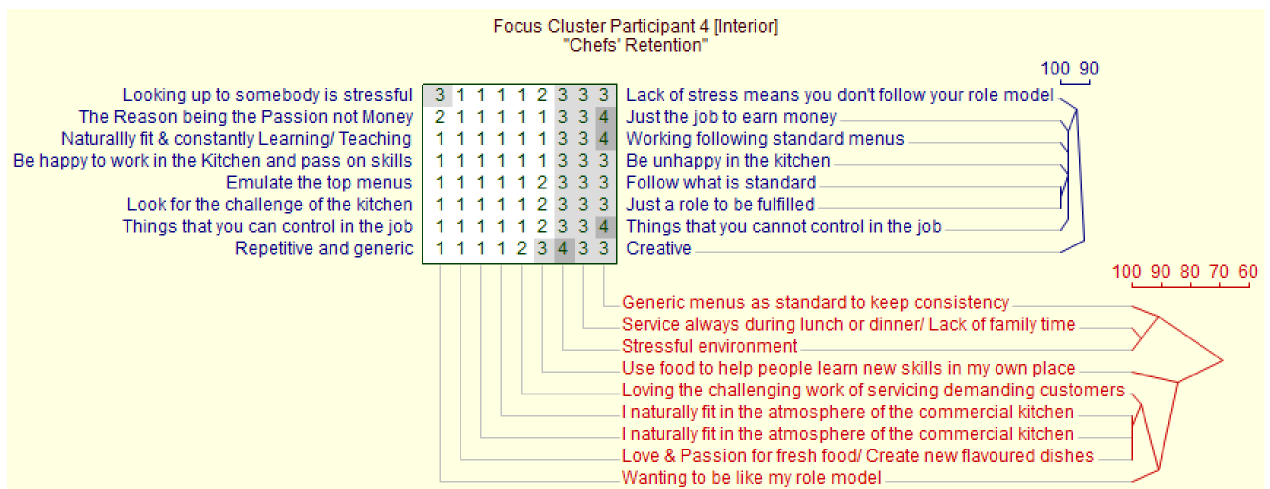
## Dendrograms of the FOCUS cluster analysis



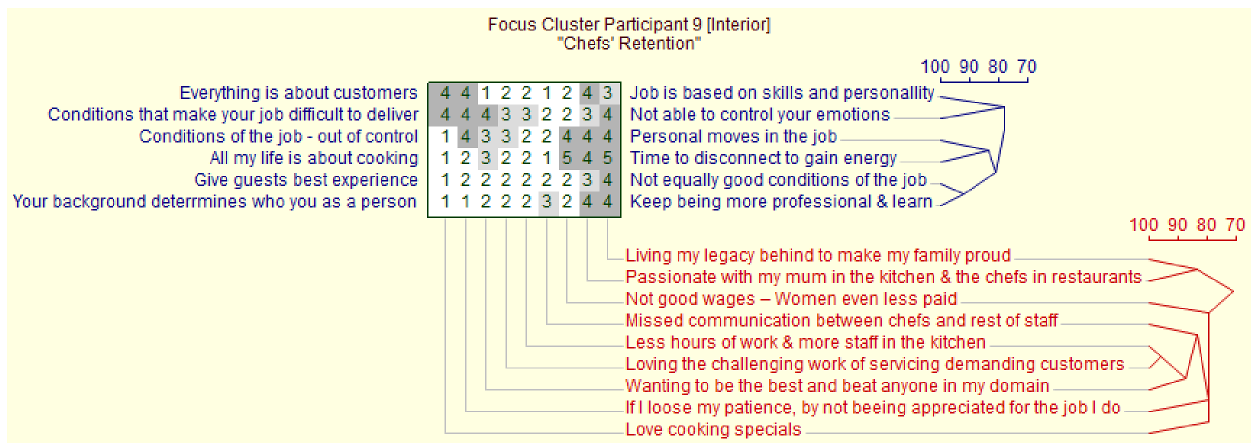

*(Diagram 1: FOCUS Cluster Analysis of Participant 1)*



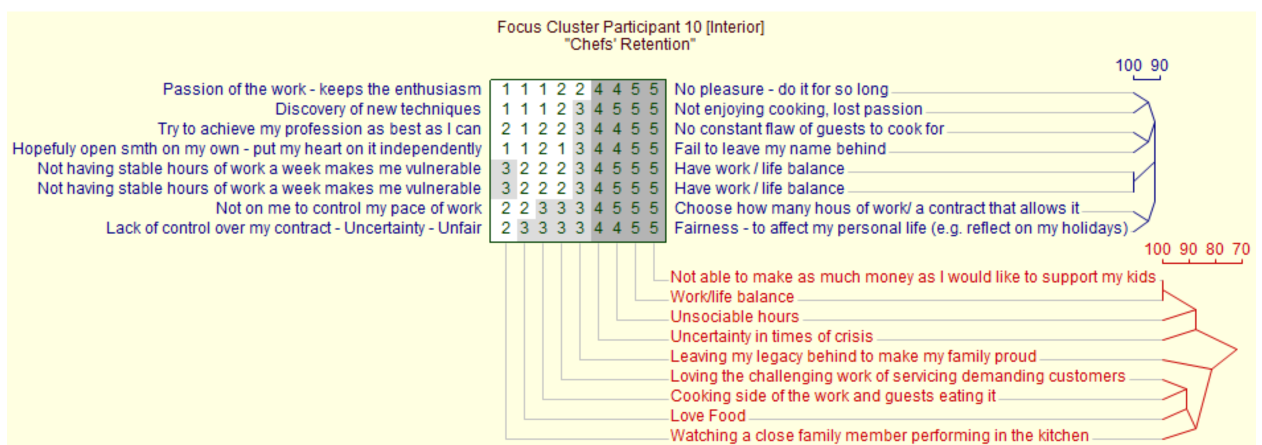

*(Diagram 2: FOCUS Cluster Analysis of Participant 17)*



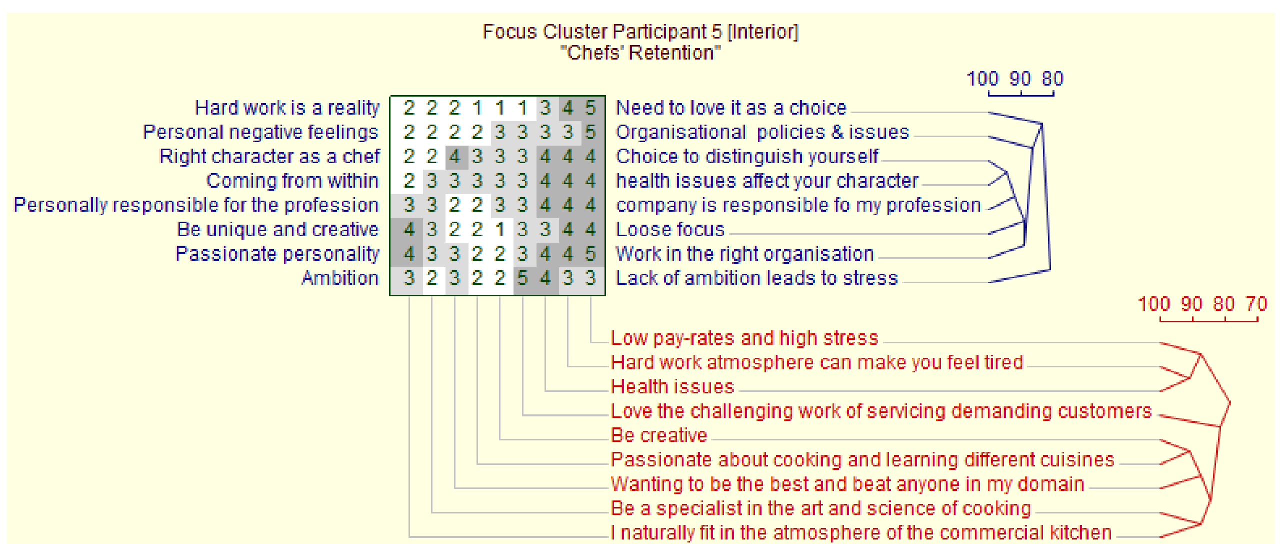

*(Diagram 3: FOCUS Cluster Analysis of Participant 4)*



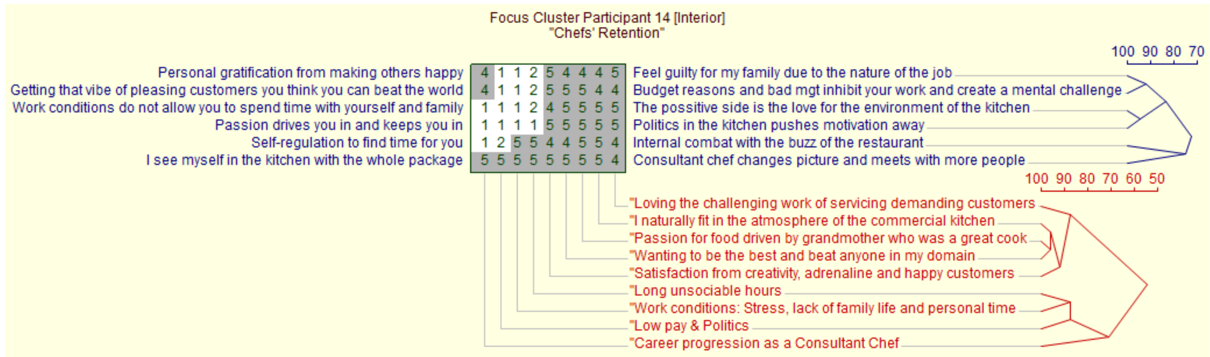

*(Diagram 4: FOCUS Cluster Analysis of Participant 9)*



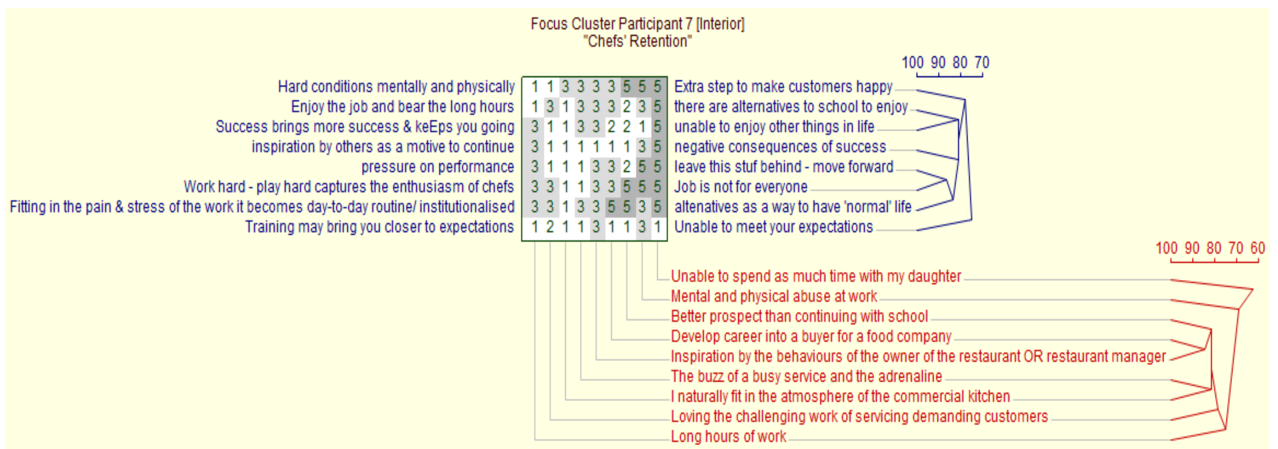

*(Diagram 5: FOCUS Cluster Analysis of Participant 10)*



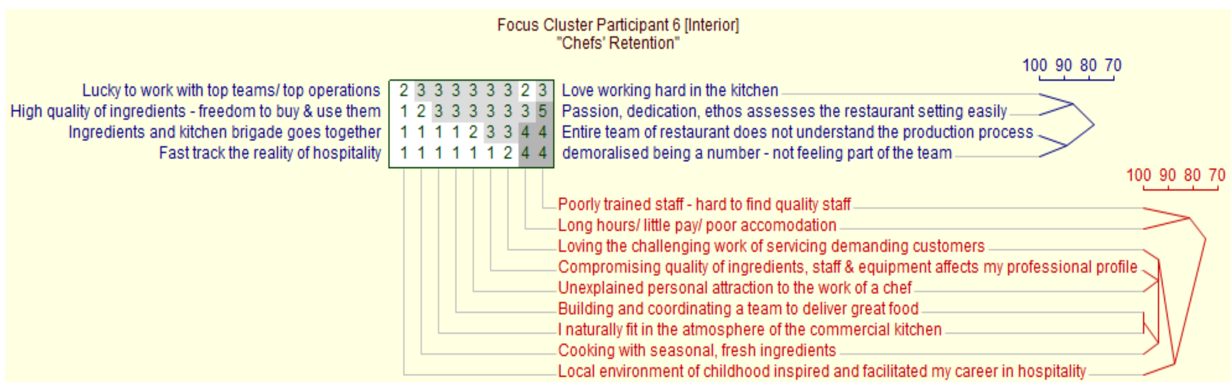

*(Diagram 6: FOCUS Cluster Analysis of Participant 5)*



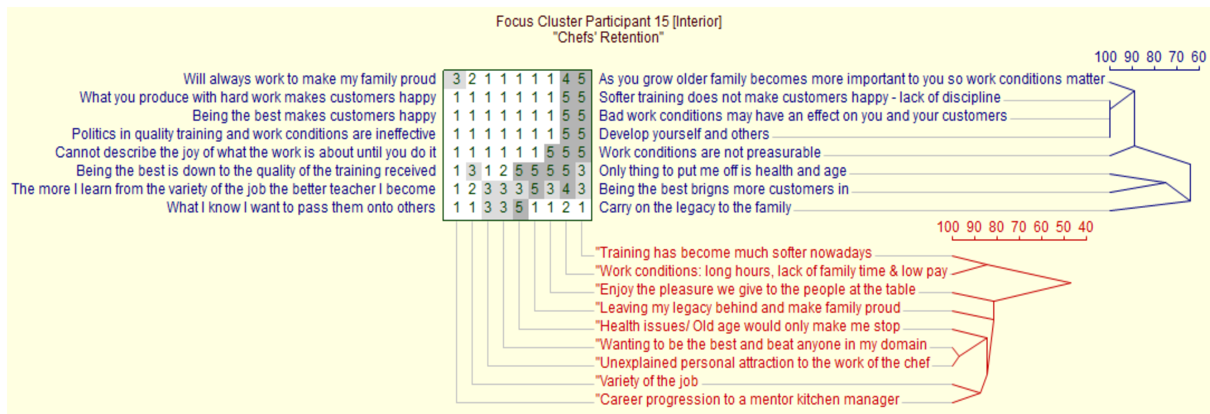

*(Diagram 7: FOCUS Cluster Analysis of Participant 14)*



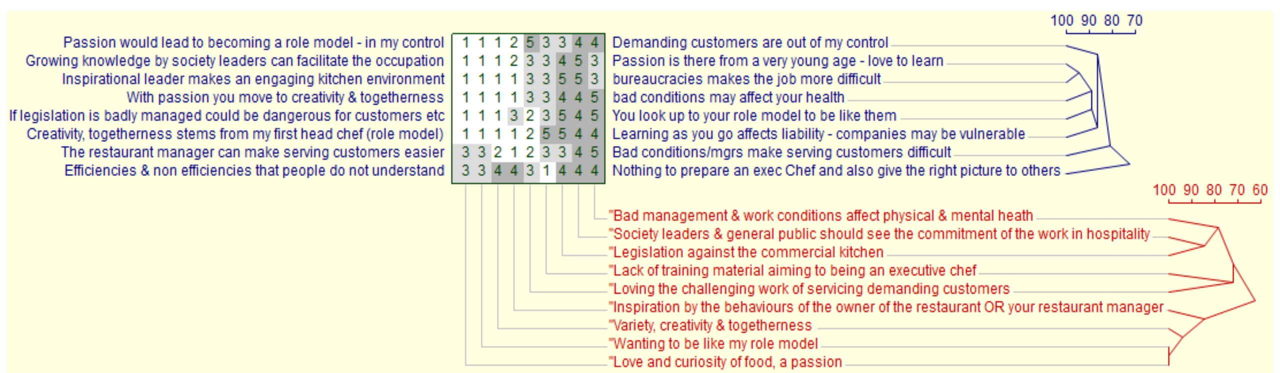

*(Diagram 8: FOCUS Cluster Analysis of Participant 7)*



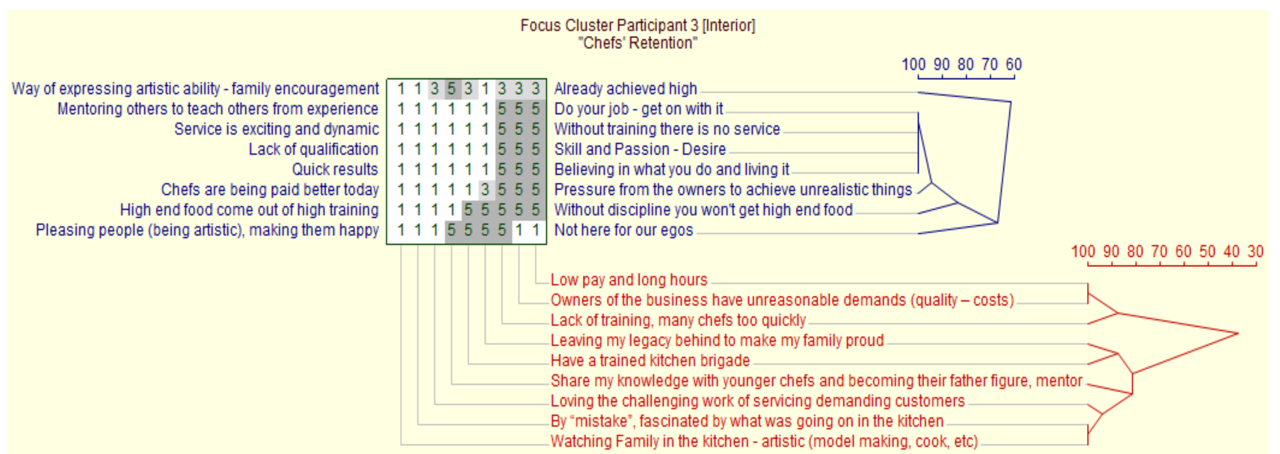

*(Diagram 9: FOCUS Cluster Analysis of Participant 6)*



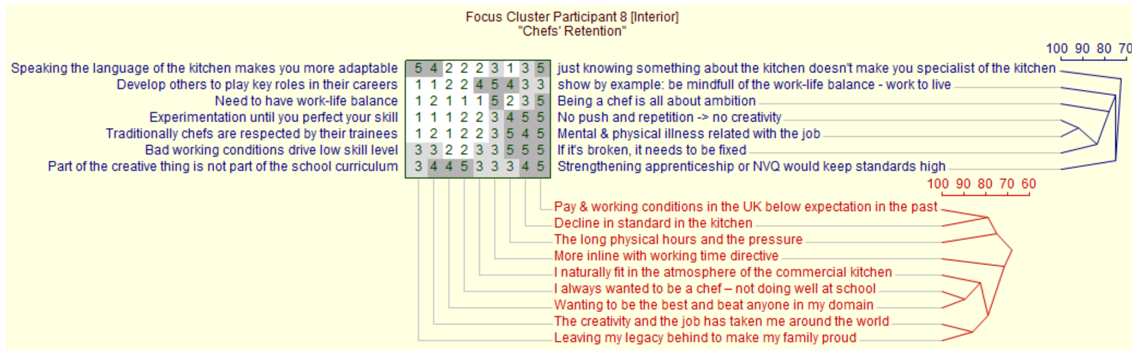

*(Diagram 10: FOCUS Cluster Analysis of Participant 15)*



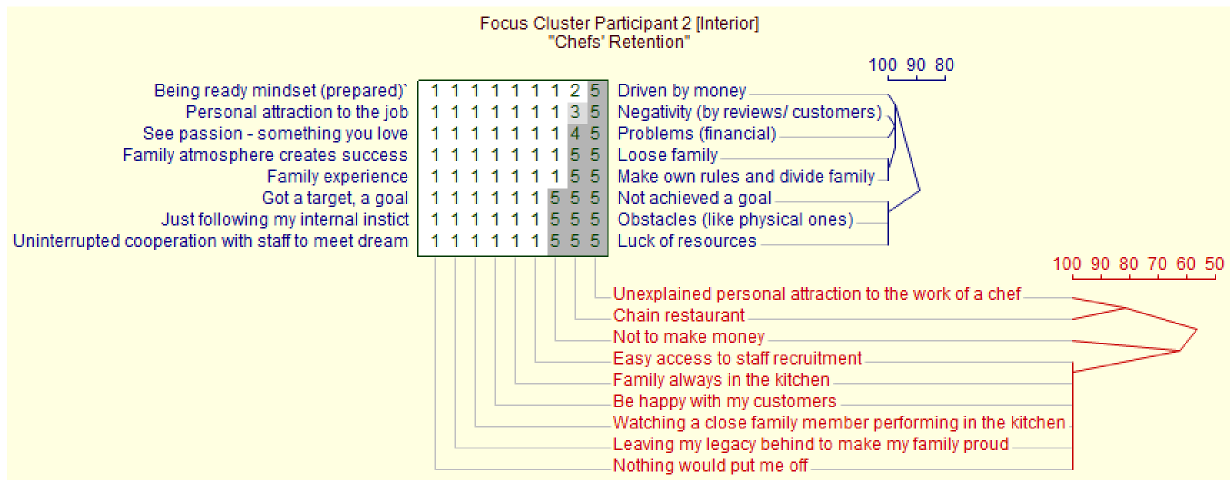

*(Diagram 11: FOCUS Cluster Analysis of Participant 13)*



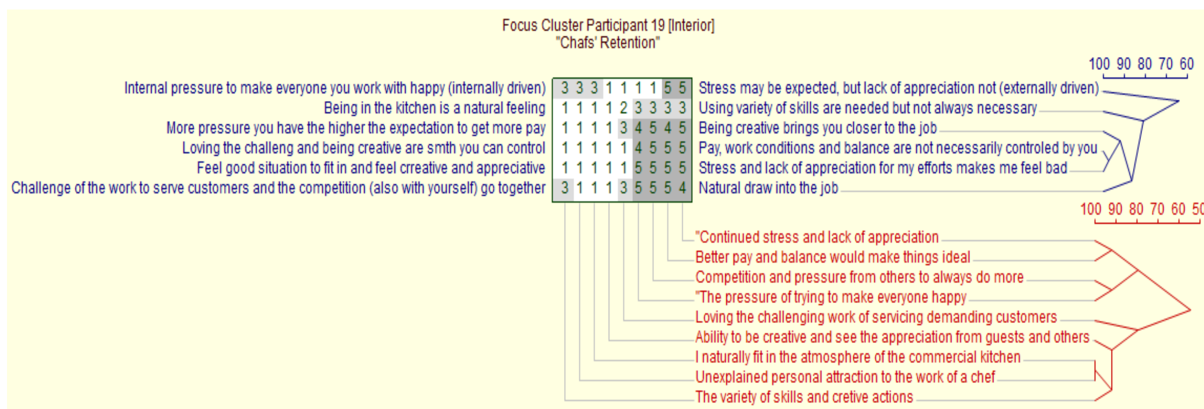

*(Diagram 12: FOCUS Cluster Analysis of Participant 3)*



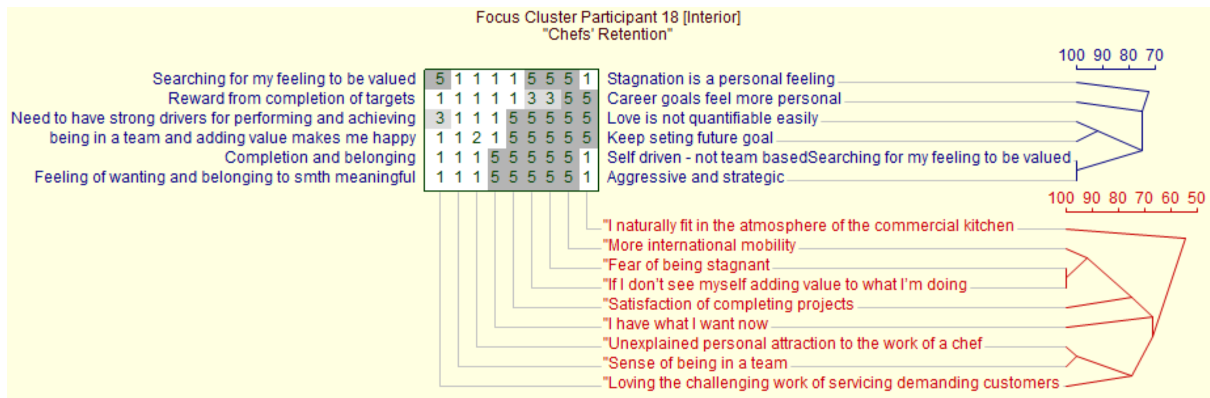

*(Diagram 13: FOCUS Cluster Analysis of Participant 8)*



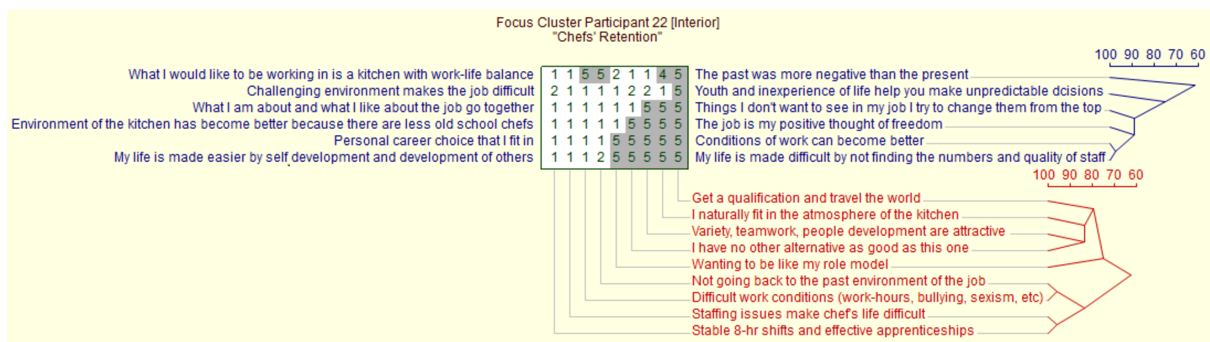

*(Diagram 14: FOCUS Cluster Analysis of Participant 2)*



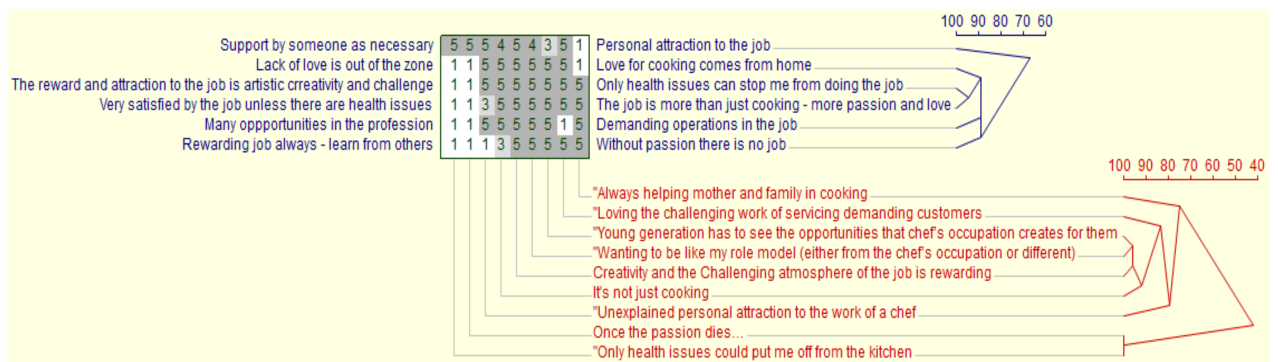

*(Diagram 15: FOCUS Cluster Analysis of Participant 19)*



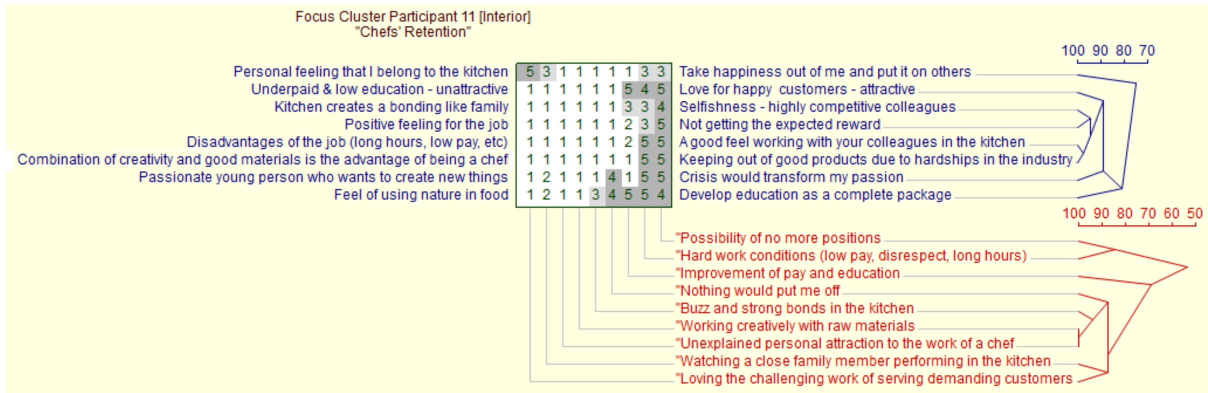

*(Diagram 16: FOCUS Cluster Analysis of Participant 18)*




*(Diagram 17: FOCUS Cluster Analysis of Participant 22)*




*(Diagram 18: FOCUS Cluster Analysis of Participant 21)*




*(Diagram 19: FOCUS Cluster Analysis of Participant 11)*

## Appendix 4

**Calculation of saturation point of interviews based on generated elements, according to Guest et al. (2020) method**

**Exercise 1:**

| **Interview number** | **1** | **2** | **3** | **4** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| New elements per interview | *9* | *8* | *2* | *5* |
| **# Base elements** | | | | ***24*** |

The base size of elements in the study is 24. That will be the denominator in the equation which follows to calculate of the saturation point of interviews taken for the needs of the research. The run length for this exercise is set to two interviews each time and the new information threshold is set to ≤4%, adopting the assessment parametres and levels of confidence saturation reached claimed in Guest et al (2020) method.

The following step requires the review of the new elements introduced in the next set of two interviews (with the first one of them overlapping the second interview number of the previous step each time: e.g. 5-6; 6-7; 7-8; etc.).

| **Interview number** | **5** | **6** |
|---|---|---|
| New elements per interview | *3* | *2* |
| New elements in run | | *5* |

| # New elements/run | = | 5 | = | 20% |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| # Base elements | | 24 | | |

The new information threshold is ≥4%, therefore testing must continue to the next two interviews

| **Interview number** | **6** | **7** |
|---|---|---|
| New elements per interview | *2* | *4* |
| New elements in run | | *6* |

| # New elements/run | = | 6 | = | 25% |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| # Base elements | | 24 | | |

The new information threshold is ≥4%, therefore testing must continue to the next two interviews

| **Interview number** | **7** | **8** |
|---|---|---|
| New elements per interview | *4* | *1* |
| New elements in run | | *5* |

| # New elements/run | = | 5 | = | 20% |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| # Base elements | | 24 | | |

The new information threshold is ≥4%, therefore testing must continue to the next two interviews

| **Interview number** | **8** | **9** |
|---|---|---|
| New elements per interview | *1* | *1* |
| New elements in run | | *2* |

| # New elements/run | = | 2 | = | 8% |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| # Base elements | | 24 | | |

The new information threshold is ≥4%, therefore testing must continue to the next two interviews

| **Interview number** | **9** | **10** |
|---|---|---|
| New elements per interview | *1* | *2* |
| New elements in run | | *3* |

| # New elements/run | = | 3 | = | 12.5% |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| # Base elements | | 24 | | |

The new information threshold is ≥4%, therefore testing must continue to the next two interviews

| **Interview number** | **10** | **11** |
|---|---|---|
| New elements per interview | *2* | *1* |
| New elements in run | | *3* |

| # New elements/run | = | 3 | = | 12.5% |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| # Base elements | | 24 | | |

The new information threshold is ≥4%, therefore testing must continue to the next two interviews

| **Interview number** | **11** | **12** |
|---|---|---|
| New elements per interview | *1* | *0* |
| New elements in run | | *1* |

| # New elements/run | = | 1 | = | 4% |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| # Base elements | | 24 | | |

The new information threshold is ≤4%, it meets the metric set in the beginning of the calculation, therefore testing stops at this point and the saturation point is set to the 12th interview.

**Exercise 2:**

| **Interview number** | **1** | **2** | **3** | **4** | **5** | **6** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| New elements per interview | *9* | *8* | *2* | *5* | *3* | *2* |
| **# Base elements** | | | | | | ***29*** |

The base size of elements in the study is 29. That will be the denominator in the equation which follows this time to calculate the saturation point of interviews taken for the needs of the research. The run length for this exercise is set to two interviews each time and the new information threshold is set to 0, adopting Guest et al (2020) the method.

The following step requires the review of the new elements introduced in the next set of three interviews (with the first one of them overlapping the second interview number of the previous step each time: e.g. 7-8-9; 9-10-11; etc.).

| **Interview number** | **7** | **8** | **9** |
|---|---|---|---|
| New elements per interview | *4* | *1* | *1* |
| New elements in run | | | *6* |

| # New elements/run | = | 6 | = | 20% |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| # Base elements | | 29 | | |

The new information threshold is ≥0%, therefore testing must continue to the next three interviews

| **Interview number** | **9** | **10** | **11** |
|---|---|---|---|
| New elements per interview | *1* | *2* | *1* |
| New elements in run | | | *4* |

| # New elements/run | = | 4 | = | 14% |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| # Base elements | | 29 | | |

The new information threshold is ≥0%, therefore testing must continue to the next two interviews

| **Interview number** | **11** | **12** | **13** |
|---|---|---|---|
| New elements per interview | *1* | *0* | *1* |
| New elements in run | | | *2* |

| # New elements/run | = | 2 | = | 6% |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| # Base elements | | 29 | | |

The new information threshold is ≥0%, therefore testing must continue to the next two interviews

| **Interview number** | **13** | **14** | **15** |
|---|---|---|---|
| New elements per interview | *1* | *0* | *0* |
| New elements in run | | | *1* |

| # New elements/run | = | 1 | = | 3% |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| # Base elements | | 29 | | |

The new information threshold is ≥0%, therefore testing must continue to the next two interviews

| **Interview number** | **15** | **16** | **17** |
|---|---|---|---|
| New elements per interview | *0* | *0* | *0* |
| New elements in run | | | *0* |

| # New elements/run | = | 0 | = | 0% |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| # Base elements | | 29 | | |

The new information threshold is 0%, it meets the metric set in the beginning of the calculation, therefore testing stops at this point and the saturation point is set to the 17$^{th}$ interview.

# Appendix 5

| Participant No. |
| --- |
| |

## INFORMED CONSENT FORM:
## Retention of the Professional Chef

You are invited to take part in this research study for the purpose of collecting data about the reasons professional chefs might decide to stay in their profession for long.

Before you decide to take part, you must **read the accompanying Participant Information Sheet.**

Please do not hesitate to ask questions if anything is unclear or if you would like more information about any aspect of this research. It is important that you feel able to take the necessary time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

If you are happy to participate, please confirm your consent by circling YES against each of the below statements and then signing and dating the form as participant.

| | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **1** | **I confirm that I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions** | **YES** | **NO** |
| **2** | **I understand my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw my data, without giving a reason, by contacting the lead researcher and the Research Support Office at any time until the date specified in the Participant Information Sheet** | **YES** | **NO** |
| **3** | **I have noted down my participant number (top left of this Consent Form) which may be required by the lead researcher if I wish to withdraw from the study** | **YES** | **NO** |
| **4** | **I understand that all the information I provide will be held securely and treated confidentially** | **YES** | **NO** |
| **5** | **I am happy for the information I provide to be used (anonymously) in academic papers and other formal research outputs** | **YES** | **NO** |
| **6** | **I am happy for the interview to be audio recorded** | **YES** | **NO** |
| **7** | **I agree to take part in the above study** | **YES** | **NO** |

**Thank you for your participation in this study. Your help is very much appreciated.**

| **Participant's Name** | **Date** | **Signature** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| | | |
| **Researcher** | **Date** | **Signature** |
| | | |

## Appendix 6

## Retention of the Professional Chef

## PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

You are being invited to take part in research on *Retention of the Professional Chef*. Michalis Kourtidis, Doctorate Researcher at Coventry University is leading this research. Before you decide to take part it is important you understand why the research is being conducted and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully.

**What is the purpose of the study?**
The purpose of the study is to reveal the reasons behind the decision of chefs to remain in their profession. Given that being a chef can be one of the most stressful occupations in the world, this research will try to answer the question of why people remain within such a challenging work environment.

**Why have I been chosen to take part?**
You are invited to participate in this study because you are a professional chef, have served the profession for more than 3 years, have some managerial responsibilities, hence you have good personal experience of the conditions of working in a professional kitchen.

**What are the benefits of taking part?**
By sharing your experiences with us, you will be helping Michalis Kourtidis and Coventry University to better understand why chefs would decide to stay in their occupation. This will also be a good opportunity for you to reflect on your choice of profession and what keep you working as a chef.

**Are there any risks associated with taking part?**
This study has been reviewed and approved through Coventry University's formal research ethics procedure. There are no significant risks associated with participation.

**Do I have to take part?**
No – it is entirely up to you. If you do decide to take part, please keep this Information Sheet and complete the Informed Consent Form to show that you understand your rights in relation to the research, and that you are happy to participate. Please note down your participant number (which is on the Consent Form) and provide this to the lead researcher if you seek to withdraw from the study at a later date. You are free to withdraw your information from the project data set at any time until the data are fully anonymised in our records three months after their collection. You should note that your data may be used in the production of formal research outputs (e.g. journal articles, conference papers, theses and reports) prior to this date and so you are advised to contact the university at the earliest opportunity should you wish to withdraw from the study. To withdraw, please contact the lead researcher (contact details are provided below). Please also contact the Research Support Office (email researchproservices.fbl@coventry.ac.uk; telephone +44(0)2477658461) so that your request can be dealt with promptly in the event of the lead researcher's absence. You do not need to give a reason. A decision to withdraw, or not to take part, will not affect you in any way.

**What will happen if I decide to take part?**

You will be asked a number of questions regarding your perceptions of some significant factors of your profession and the professional kitchen. It will take place in a safe environment at a time that is convenient to you. Ideally, I would like to audio record your responses (and will require your consent for this), so the location should be in a fairly quiet area. The interview should take around 60 minutes depending on the detail of your responses.

**Data Protection and Confidentiality**

Your data will be processed in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation 2016 (GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018. All information collected about you will be kept strictly confidential. Unless they are fully anonymised in our records, your data will be referred to by a unique participant number rather than by name. If you consent to being audio recorded, all recordings will be destroyed once they have been transcribed. Your data will only be viewed by the researcher/research team. All electronic data will be stored on a password-protected computer file in the repository of Coventry University. All paper records will be stored in a locked filing cabinet at the researcher's office desk. Your consent information will be kept separately from your responses in order to minimise risk in the event of a data breach. The lead researcher will take responsibility for data destruction and all collected data will be destroyed on or before a year has passed from completion of the study.

**Data Protection Rights**

Coventry University is a Data Controller for the information you provide. You have the right to access information held about you. Your right of access can be exercised in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation and the Data Protection Act 2018. You also have other rights including rights of correction, erasure, objection, and data portability. For more details, including the right to lodge a complaint with the Information Commissioner's Office, please visit www.ico.org.uk. Questions, comments and requests about your personal data can also be sent to the University Data Protection Officer - enquiry.ipu@coventry.ac.uk

**What will happen with the results of this study?**

The results of this study may be summarised in published articles, reports and presentations. Quotes or key findings will always be made anonymous in any formal outputs unless we have your prior and explicit written permission to attribute them to you by name.

**Making a Complaint**

If you are unhappy with any aspect of this research, please first contact the lead researcher, Michalis Kourtidis, email: kourtidm@coventry.ac.uk. If you still have concerns and wish to make a formal complaint, please write to:

Dr Danielle Talbot
Director of Study
Coventry University
Coventry CV1 5FB
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In your letter please provide information about the research project, specify the name of the researcher and detail the nature of your complaint.

## Appendix 7

## *Content Analysis of constructs – Core categorisation*

| Categories of Constructs | Content | Definition | Frequency- Number of statements (% out of 157) |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Suit of Balance (Being balanced, consistent, sensible and pragmatic)** | Need to have work-life balance VS Being a chef is all about ambition;<br>Traditionally chefs are respected by their trainees VS Mental & physical illness related with the job;<br>All my life is about cooking VS Time to disconnect to gain energy;<br>Lack of control over my contr–ct - Uncertainty – Unfair VS Fairn–ss - to affect my personal life (e.g. reflect on my holidays);<br>Not having stable hours of work a week makes me vulnerable VS Have work / life balance;<br>Not on me to control my pace of work VS Choose how many hours of work/ a contract that allows it;<br>Personally responsible for the profession VS company is responsible for my profession;<br>Good work-life balance balances the difficulties of the job VS Being immersed into the job becomes stressful;<br>Work conditions do not allow you to spend time with yourself and family VS The positive side is the love for the environment of the kitchen;<br>Negative aspect of the –ob - pay and team VS Posit–ve - fit in my family time;<br>Challenge and a big team would stretch my ability VS Relation to my family life;<br>Many opportunities in the profession VS Demanding operations in the job;<br>What I would like to be working in is a kitchen with work-life balance VS The past was more negative than the present;<br>Conditions of the –ob - out of control VS Personal moves in the job;<br>Things that you can control in the job Things that you cannot control in the job;<br>Walk before you run VS Not standing on your legs (mentally & physically);<br>Being young & junior often still at home or just from school VS Management concerns about costs and operations;<br>Big challenges require the right atmosphere VS The bigger the challenge the longer it ta–es - effect on the family;<br>Loving the challenge and being creative are something you can control VS Pay, work conditions and balance are not necessarily controlled by you;<br>Negative conditions make you unhappy at work VS Random events in life may turn out positive; | The condition in which chefs continue to be passionate about cooking, creative and happy, and at the same time keep a balance with their personal life, not allowing their work to occupy their life completely. That was perceived as critical because the opposite exposes them to career uncertainty and makes them vulnerable in the market. Therefore, chefs need to distinguish the things they can control and the ones they cannot; be open to opportunities but take sensible and pragmatic approach to what they choose to do; think of what is feasible; and take ownership of their positive actions that outweigh the negatives of their work. | 26 (16.56%) |

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| | Improving a situation is positive VS Some conditions (work hours) cannot be changed;<br><br>Things you cannot control may help you in the job VS Things you can control can make things better;<br><br>Doing a good job right VS Need to keep the machine running;<br><br>Do my job right VS I'don't know why;<br><br>Cannot explain it but gave me reason to leave home VS As professional you think more of the everyday work;<br><br>Being ready mindset (prepared) VS Driven by money | | |
| **Resilience** | Looking up to somebody is stressful VS Lack of stress means you'don't follow your role model;<br><br>Hard work is a reality VS Love it as a choice;<br><br>Personal negative feelings VS Organisational policies & issues;<br><br>The reality of hospitality is a fast track process VS Being a number is demoralis–ng - not feeling part of the team;<br><br>Fast track the reality of hospitality VS Demoralised being a num–er - not feeling part of the team;<br><br>Work hard - play hard captures the enthusiasm of chefs VS Job is not for everyone;<br><br>Hard conditions mentally and physically VS Extra step to make customers happy;<br><br>Fitting in the pain & stress of the work becomes day-to-day routine/ institutionalised VS find alternatives to have a 'normal' life;<br><br>Pressure on performance VS leave this stuff behind and move on;<br><br>Bad working conditions drive low skill level VS I' it's broken, it needs to be fixed;<br><br>Conditions that make it difficult to deliver your job VS Unable to control your emotions;<br><br>Enjoy the job and bear the long hours VS There are enjoyable alternatives to school;<br><br>Pride VS'[It's a] Weakness to complain;<br><br>Positive feeling for the job VS Not getting the expected reward;<br><br>Hard condition in the job VS More relaxed environment cooking with family;<br><br>Self-regulation to find time for you VS Internal combat with the buzz of the restaurant;<br><br>Cannot describe the joy of what the work is about until you do it VS Work conditions are not pleasurable;<br><br>Adverse conditions affect your willingness to do your job VS An escape is a positive thing;<br><br>Challenge of the work to serve customers and the competition (also with yourself) go together VS Natural draw into the job; | Accepting that the hard work that the job entails is key to becoming a chef. The desire to follow this career path and tolerate the substantial hardships of the commercial kitchen must be driven internally. It is not a job for everyone, but only for those who have a passion for it, want to work hard to be like their role models and always keep learning. That implies three requirements: 1) build on what can be controlled and not get stuck by what cannot, 2) develop a feeling of belonging, work in teams and feel part of them, and 3) remember to find alternative ways to live a 'normal' life, because the hard work of chefs may have a detrimental effect on their health. | 20 (12.74%) |

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| | Internal pressure to make everyone you work with happy (internally driven) VS Stress may be expected, but lack of appreciation not (externally driven);<br><br>Challenging environment makes the job difficult VS Youth and inexperience of life help you make unpredictable decisions | | |
| **Personal development & training** | High end food come out of high training VS Without discipline you'won't get high end food;<br><br>Naturally fit & constantly Learning/ Teaching VS Working following standard menus;<br><br>Emulate the top menus VS Follow what is standard;<br><br>Training may bring you closer to expectations VS Unable to meet your expectations;<br><br>Your background determines who you are as a person VS Keep being more professional & learn;<br><br>Try to achieve my profession as best as I can VS No constant flaw of guests to cook for;<br><br>Speaking the language of the kitchen makes you more adaptable VS just knowing something about the kitchen doesn't make you specialist of the kitchen;<br><br>Part of the creative thing is not part of the school curriculum VS Strengthening apprenticeship or NVQ would keep standards high;<br><br>Service is exciting and dynamic VS Without training there is no service;<br><br>Feel of using nature in food VS Develop education as a complete package;<br><br>Do what my dad did VS Look after yours–lf - personal development;<br><br>Efficiencies & non efficiencies that people do not understand VS Nothing to prepare an exec Chef and also give the right picture to others;<br><br>Growing knowledge by society leaders can facilitate the occupation VS Passion is there from a very young –ge - love to learn;<br><br>Being the best is down to the quality of the training received VS Only thing to put me off is health and age;<br><br>What you produce with hard work makes customers happy VS Softer training does not make customers ha–py - lack of discipline;<br><br>The more I learn from the variety of the job the better teacher I become VS Being the best brings more customers in;<br><br>Politics in quality training and work conditions are ineffective VS Develop yourself and others;<br><br>My life is made easier by self-development and development of others VS My life is made difficult by not finding the numbers and quality of staff;<br><br>Enjoy what I–do - always learning something new VS Need of a different mindset to constantly be organised, work smartly | It is the only way to keep someone moving up as a chef, expand their horizons and help them stand out. That is a hard task that is achieved only through discipline, adaptation and modesty. Knowledge acquired through training should not only be kept by the chefs individually, but shared with younger chefs too, by practically showing from their experience and sharing the joy from developing in the job. That is also the responsibility of institutional training at all levels of the kitchen hierarchy. Constant development makes chef's life easier to adapt to changes and challenges. | 19 (12.10%) |

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| **Inspiration from others (family and work atmosphere)** | Family experience VS Make own rules and divide family;<br>Family atmosphere creates success VS Lose family;<br>Lucky to work with top teams/ top operations VS Love working hard in the kitchen;<br>Inspiration by others as a motive to continue VS Negative consequences of success;<br>Kitchen creates a bonding like family VS Selfishn–ss - highly competitive colleagues;<br>Disadvantages of the job (long hours, low pay, etc) VS A good feel working with your colleagues in the kitchen;<br>Positive attraction to who would benefit you and rely on VS My family is important to me;<br>Inspirational leader makes an engaging kitchen environment VS bureaucracies makes the job more difficult;<br>The restaurant manager can make serving customers easier VS Bad conditions/managers make serving customers difficult;<br>Creativity, togetherness stems from my first head chef (role model) VS Learning as you go affects liability - companies may be vulnerable;<br>If legislation is badly managed could be dangerous for customers etc. VS You look up to your role model to be like them;<br>Getting that vibe of pleasing customers you think you can beat the world VS Budget reasons and bad management inhibit your work and create a mental challenge;<br>Will always work to make my family proud VS As you grow older family becomes more important to you so work conditions matter;<br>Mental thing to think–of - Strong bonds because of the environment of the kitchen, not characters VS Work conditions is a tangible thing to think of;<br>The atmosphere of the kitchen can drive you in the kitchen VS The job relates to the customer;<br>A family member in the kitchen makes you feel proud VS Low pay is not everything;<br>My job satisfaction (children) keep me enthusiastic and alert VS Working without a team can exhaust you;<br>Negative consequences from things that are out of your hands VS Motive deriving from others in the profession. | The feeling of having members of your family in the kitchen or inheriting the family chef tradition is very strong and drives success. The kitchen brigade acts like a family too, which also drives success. Nothing should stay in between and break these bonds. In a top team with such strong bonding operations become easier, engagement levels raise, peers support and motivate each other, performance gets high and enjoyable, and ultimately everyone feels proud about the outcome of the work. | 18 (11.46%) |
| **Intrinsic drive (Fit in)** | Just following my internal instinct VS Obstacles (like physical ones);<br>Personal attraction to the job VS Negativity (by reviews/ customers);<br>Passionate personality VS Work in the right organisation;<br>Coming from within VS health issues affect your character;<br>Right character as a chef VS Choice to distinguish yourself;<br>Personal feeling that I belong to the kitchen VS Take happiness out of me and put it on others; | Derives either from the way chefs have been brought up by their parents and family or by the success experienced in the job. In either case, this drive is so strong that could lead them to their dreamed goals and successes, but also could absorb them in an environment of self-fulfilling continual success, where nothing else but work matters in life. This sometimes-unexplained draw | 18 (11.46%) |

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| | If you fit in hard work becomes easier VS If you'don't fit in work can be stressful;<br><br>Need to have strong drivers for performing and achieving VS Love is not quantifiable easily;<br><br>Completion and belonging VS Self dri–en - not team based;<br><br>Searching for my feeling to be valued VS Stagnation is a personal feeling;<br><br>Feel good situation to fit in and feel creative and appreciative VS Stress and lack of appreciation for my efforts makes me feel bad;<br><br>Being in the kitchen is a natural feeling VS Using variety of skills are needed but not always necessary;<br><br>Strong personal motivation to the work VS Situational drive into the job;<br><br>Support by someone as necessary VS Personal attraction to the job;<br><br>Personal career choice that I fit in VS Conditions of work can become better;<br><br>Feeling of wanting and belonging to something meaningful VS Aggressive and strategic;<br><br>Environment of the kitchen has become better because there are less old school chefs VS The job is my positive thought of freedom;<br><br>Working in the kitchen feels a natural thing VS Give something to my family, not necessarily the kitchen | into the chef's occupation stands opposite to the obstacles raised by the adverse work conditions and makes people overcome them. | |
| **Suit of Ambition (Ambition/ Goals/ Assertiveness)** | Ambition VS Frustration;<br><br>Hopefully open something on my –wn - put my heart on it independently VS Fail to leave my name behind;<br><br>Ambition VS Lack of ambition leads to stress;<br><br>Have impact on the industry based on own performance VS Teamwork keeps the work-life balance;<br><br>Reward from completion of targets VS Career goals feel more personal;<br><br>Success brings more success & keeps you going VS Unable to enjoy other things in life;<br><br>Got a target, a goal VS Not achieved a goal;<br><br>Compete with you and others VS Compete with yourself alone;<br><br>Always go beyond - do best that I can VS Someone the skills in someone else;<br><br>I see myself in the kitchen with the whole package VS Consultant chef changes picture and meets with more people;<br><br>Being in a team and adding value makes me happy VS Keep setting future goal;<br><br>If you can't do what you want you don't fit in VS Mentoring is rewarding element of the job; | A driving energy which pushes chefs to high performance and recognition. Ambition could refer to work targets, hence competing with others and self, but running after success alone can prohibit you from enjoying other facets of life. Therefore, creating an enjoyable environment or anything that is meaningful to the individual is also an ambition. Ambition in these terms is not perceived as stressful. On the contrary, lack of ambition could lead to stress. | 17 (10.83%) |

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| | Negative aspects of the kitchen: bad management doesn't promote goodness VS Have future dream: making money for myself;<br>Quick results VS Believing in what you do and living it;<br>Be happy to work in the Kitchen and pass on skills VS Be unhappy in the kitchen;<br>Succeeding is down to myself VS In senior positions need to make hard decisions;<br>What I am about and what I like about the job go together VS Things I don't want to see in my job I try to change them from the top | | |
| **Love and Passion for cooking** | Love it VS Don't know why;<br>See passion - something you love VS Problems (financial);<br>Lack of qualification VS Skill and Passion – Desire;<br>The Reason [for performing] being the Passion not Money VS Just the job to earn money;<br>Look for the challenge of the kitchen VS Just a role to be fulfilled;<br>Passion of the work - keeps the enthusiasm VS No pleas–re - do it for so long;<br>High quality of ingredients - freedom to buy & use them VS Passion, dedication, ethos assesses the restaurant setting easily;<br>Passionate young person who wants to create new things VS Crisis would transform my passion;<br>Passion would lead to becoming a role mo–el - in my control VS Demanding customers are out of my control;<br>With passion you move to creativity & togetherness VS Bad conditions may affect your health;<br>Passion drives you in and keeps you in VS Politics in the kitchen pushes motivation away;<br>Salaries and costs are a concern for the sustainability of the job VS The challenge and the adrenaline of the job is what I love;<br>Very satisfied by the job unless there are health issues VS The job is more than just cook–ng - more passion and love<br>Rewarding job always - learn from others VS Without passion there is no job;<br>Lack of love is out of the zone VS Love for cooking comes from home;<br>Do what you love to do VS Long hours wouldn't matter if it was to work for me | Very strong and intrinsic element of the job. Hard to explain where it derives from; it may come from home. Love and passion for cooking makes people focus on what they are passionate for and ignore other problems attached to the chef's occupation (e.g. low pay). Passion is something that can be controlled and may take different forms according to current conditions, but needs to exist to keep the enthusiasm high, keep being creative, ensure continuous personal development, become role model for others, and elevate the whole kitchen brigade's service performance to higher levels. With love for food chefs can endure anything; only health problems could stop them. Without passion, there is no job. | 16<br>(10.19%) |
| **Creativity** | Way of expressing artistic ability - family encouragement VS Already achieved high;<br>Repetitive and generic VS Creative;<br>Be unique and creative VS Loose focus;<br>Experimentation until you perfect your skill VS No push and repetition -> no creativity; | It is the way to express artistically at work and remove the monotony of repetition. Creativity is linked with passion for food and helps chefs experiment and discover new techniques and recipes. It is a necessary quality of the job either if all ingredients asked | 9<br>(5.73%) |

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| | Discovery of new techniques VS Not enjoying cooking, lost passion;<br>Combination of creativity and good materials is the advantage of being a chef VS Keeping out of good products due to hardships in the industry;<br>The challenge is that you have to work with what you have VS Personal satisfaction to create the dish you want instead of being told to;<br>More pressure you have the higher the expectation to get more pay VS Being creative brings you closer to the job;<br>The reward and attraction to the job is artistic creativity and challenge VS Only health issues can stop me from doing the job | for being provided in the kitchen or if having to work with limited resources; the challenge is rewarding. | |
| **Top customer service** | Pleasing people (being artistic), making them happy VS Not here for our egos;<br>Everything is about customers VS Job is based on skills and personality;<br>Give guests best experience VS Conditions of the job are not equally good;<br>Underpaid & low education – unattractive VS Love for happy customers – attractive;<br>Personal gratification from making others happy VS Feel guilty for my family due to the nature of the job;<br>Being the best makes customers happy VS Bad work conditions may have an effect on you and your customers;<br>Being able to provide best experience to others VS Deal breaker not to be allowed to cook my food | Important aim of the chef's role: to provide top service to customers and with the experience they get, leave the restaurant happy. Sometimes this aim makes the job attractive regardless of the difficult work conditions. The feeling someone gets from hearing 'thank you' from the guests is very strong. | 7<br>(4.46%) |
| **Mentoring** | Mentoring others to teach others from experience VS Do your job - get on with it;<br>Develop others to play key roles in their careers VS Show by example: be mindful of the work-life balance - work to live;<br>What I know I want to pass them onto others VS Carry on the legacy to the family;<br>Hard work and conditions directly affect your personal life VS Mentoring others is a positive thing | It is a personal need of some chefs to share knowledge with others and see them improve. Two aspects of mentoring are considered: skills and attitude against the work and personal life | 4<br>(2.55%) |
| **Miscellaneous (access to human resources – extrinsic drive)** | Chefs are being paid better today VS Pressure from the owners to achieve unrealistic things;<br>Uninterrupted cooperation with staff to meet dream VS Luck of resources;<br>Ingredients and kitchen brigade goes together VS Entire team of restaurant does not understand the production process | | 3<br>(1.91%) |

*(Content Analysis of constructs – Core categorisation)*

## Appendix 8

## Selective quotes from the repertory grid interviews

Participant 1

*"What I mostly love from my job is the challenge to create a very good quality food and keep customers happy. Every day there is a different challenge. …it's rewarding if you keep customers happy. …I love to satisfy customers, but I don't know why I'm doing it … Love and hate [laughing]".*

*"…in the past I tried to stop cooking and do something else instead, and I did it… but after a couple of years I was missing the kitchen and went back to it [laughing]. Why did I do it? I don't know…"*

Participant 2:

*"Both my parents were always in the kitchen; my father was a chef and just retired, my mother was not in the industry, but both had studied food. That's what drove me in the business, although I always wanted to do more than cooking; promote food as well" … "It's all about family experience…"*

Participant 3:

*"…my whole family was artistic, and it [cooking] was my own way of expressing my artistic ability by doing something completely different than my family."*

*"[I want to] leave my legacy and share my knowledge with younger chefs becoming their mentor… in the end of the day that's what any chef who works for me always comments on the fact that they've learnt so much, you know, I mentored them completely, was giving advice on absolutely everything because I have a lot of experience and many many different types of catering establishments."*

*"…you have to have a trained kitchen brigade, if you want to produce a high-end food, it's like anything…". "…most chefs would agree that if you're working in a business where owners or management companies are telling you to cut your costs per cost, they would say that …we saved £20,000 or £40,000 because we produced, you know, with wage lower… Yeah, but then look at the personnel we have [laugh]… you've hired untrained… untrained staff who they have no discipline and yes it's my*

*job to train them, but it's going to take more time and effort to do it than having a trained chef who may cost you 5 or 10,000 more, but is doing a better job than the other two that you're paying 15K. It's a short-sighted thing in this industry".*

*"…if you ask any chef what's the best part of the day, they always say service, always – always – always, because it's exciting, it's dynamic, it's… but if they're not trained by you as their leader, then that service won't be dynamic and exciting, it will be a disaster because they are not trained [laugh]! I suppose that colleges need to start doing more of it. I do work with colleges quite a lot, and I always put them in a realistic situation when I go there".*

*"…a lot of chefs don't mentor them, they lead them. …just do your job… get on with it… don't ask why…and they will leave, you know, they'd go to the next place where they are going to be mentored… [murmuring] do your job, just do what you get told to, do no more… We don't want that, you know, you want to show your personality, you want to show what you can do".*

Participant 4:

*"…Since I was a child, I was always preparing food and my spices for my granny… and selling them to others…". "…I worked with Gordon Ramsey for a year …and nearly survived [laughing]… you have to always look up to somebody…". "Being like my role model brings me closer to naturally fitting in the kitchen".*

*"I love tasting new dishes, new flavours, new smells…"; "Generic menus would lead to stressful environment …rather than being creative in the job".*

*Participant 5:*

*"The hard work can make you feel tired, but if you fit in the job you need to love it. …If you have passion for cooking, you will work hard, in the hard atmosphere of the kitchen to go from commis chef to head chef, from the low level to the high level".*

*"If you have the ambition you will get satisfaction; if you don't have ambition, you will get stressed".*

Participant 6:

> *"You only get teams like this [top performers] because you reward and look after them. …I once had one of the best breakfast chefs in London, I needed to keep paying him the most money …and those guys then respectively [would give back]… we had people with deaths in their family, with injuries, but going that extra mile to look after them, even when they're sick, down or not well, 1) you look after a member of your team, it's family, you know; 2) you look after him and his family because you want him to be at his best at work when he works with you; if he's got a problem or something happening at home or if his daughter is sick and needs to pay for a baby sitter because he's had to come to work and wife has got to go to work because she doesn't have much money and you say: take the next two days off on full pay, go on look after your baby, because you know he's going to give his 200% when he comes back, you know… that's for me one of the most important things".*

Participant 7:

> *"…being inspired by the behaviours of the manager of the restaurant, they make you wanna go to work, make you wanna work harder, be the best you can be…"; but "…my family used to think I'm crazy, you know, working all those hours…".*

> *"Becoming a chef was a better prospect than continuing with school. I left school when I was 16… even now, I kind of struggle, so unless the person who's holding the room is engaging, after about half an hour I'm just losing interest; it's not that I don't understand it, it's just that I don't learn very well that way I guess. …There are other alternatives to school to enjoy".*

> *"…broadening my skills set now being more responsible for coaching and development and huge sums of turnover, I don't want to be in a position when I've to go back into the kitchen full time. So, in the next 5 years do I want to still be on-call on Christmas day? I can't really enjoy it; don't want to be in on a Bank Holiday; can't take summer holidays because it's always busy. I'd rather take my skills and use them where I can still develop but also work on what I love but have a bit of a normal life as well".*

> MK: *"…in the food industry, in the same domain or field?"*

> P7: "*Yes, certainly in the things I feel passionate about. I was fortunate enough to have worked in a restaurant that had a farm about 7 years ago and the stuff that was coming from the farm …you could see the quality of the things that you were receiving from there compared to the things you would receive from a supplier and that kind of flipped a switch for me and I think it is really important in terms of ingredients, you should buy the best you can afford and I would like to work in a company to be in a position to do that".*

*"…The long hours are an issue, because you're having the best time, which would again lead me to not being able to spend time my daughter or do other things."* And later in the interview: *"…developing a career into a buyer for a food company would be the one that would go together first for me [for my personal life]. Because I mean, ultimately I'd rather spend time with my daughter than be working 90 hours a week, or 80 hours a week on low money, you know, in a horrible environment."*

*"I started cooking the time that Gordon Ramsay's 'boiling point' came out; we've all seen what character that was. And it made me think: Wow, I'm not up for that. The chef that I worked for at the time was really laid-back, a good guy which initially kept me in the kitchen. I think if I'd seen 'boiling point' and then worked with 'a Gordon Ramsay' I probably wouldn't have remained in the trade. However, I've experienced physical abuse at work, mental abuse, and bullying, etc. and definitely haven't dished out any physical abuse, but probably I'm guilty of some mental abuse in the past. I've contacted those people and apologised for my behaviour, because as I've grown up and moved on, I changed and developed my people skills. Fortunately, if I look back at myself 4 years ago, I'm not the same person and I react better".*

Participant 7: "*…success is a short-term thing, but it can also be a continual thing, because when you start being successful and you do that all the time, it creates more success and you're getting more of a buzz, more adrenaline, because the service is getting better and you're probably improving your food quality, trying this and that, etc… so the long hours are not an issue because you're having the best time, which again leads me to not being able to spend time with my daughter or do other things. But also, look at it from a different side, if you're not successful and you're not under an inspired leader or not working in a great place or you're working with a kind of …draining people around you, then the long hours become also as negative as being unable to spend as much time with my daughter or doing other things*".

*"if you don't enjoy serving the customers you wouldn't bear the long hours at work, …"*

Participant 8:

*"no one really goes to university to be a chef, …well there are, but people go to university to learn other things. You tend to find that in most of us. We didn't feel well at school, it wasn't for us, we find that a lot… part of the creative bit is the most, err… because you see in all artists, a certain attention span which we don't have a lot particularly in this industry, and this is not suited to the school. We see that in kids who*

*don't do well at school and want to get on with work, which is more of a craft, if you like. You can always leave school with that mentality and do really well in hospitality".*

Participant 9:

*"I mostly like cooking the specials of the day! That's enjoying cooking!"*

*"Sometimes communication between chefs and the rest of the staff in the kitchen is missed, which creates tension and mistakes …everyone in the restaurant must be trained… they're not".*

Participant 10:

*"What I like most… the cooking side of it [the job], cooking different types of food, hoping that I can transmit how much I enjoy cooking it into my guests eating it, so yes, that's a good feeling".*

*"Ideal? Err… mostly more balanced hours, more balanced work and life …yeah, work/life balance". "Unsociable hours, definitely, not being able to attend birthdays, social occasions that fall in the weekends, you know. For example, I'd miss my kids' birthdays, my other half's birthday, not be able to have a normal Christm…[interrupts suddenly] …besides people work 9 to 5. My other half wasn't a chef, so I think our divorce mainly went because after many nights out with her friends where I couldn't be there, she told me "Ohh, you know, I feel I am single, a single, because you're never there on a Friday, on a Saturday whenever my friends and I go out you're never available, or rarely available". That's something I do not enjoy about the trade; I have to be in always on Fridays and Saturdays and Sundays, it's almost a must, you know".*

*"…I will hopefully achieve to open my own …bistro and be able to cook the food I love, from my heart, erI. not having to cook what sometimes people want me to cook or having decisions, you know, from bosses or directors, who not necessarily know the industry as much as we know, but they are the bosses, so they decide what goes on the menu. So, hopefully I'll leave something behind so that my kids see what I did in my restaurant, that I was successful, that I worked hard for a reason, …know it was worth it. The opposite would mean that I failed to open my restaurant, if I never opened it, if I don't leave at least my name behind, or the name of the restaurant behind… That'd be sad".*

Participant 11:

*"I start thinking about this during the situation with COVID because now the market is getting really tight. A lot of people are unemployed [that I cannot explain]… less positions... so the only reason I could leave this job would be if I don't find a decent position for my skills or what I would like to do. Okey, then I would start thinking of changing careers".*

*"The buzz and strong bonds in the kitchen… They are reasons why I'm in this job… Two reasons that I like the job, I like being in this profession, in this environment."*

*"that is why I like the job,… in this environment, in the kitchen; because of all the situation [we face] with long hours, tough environment you know, it's hot, you might burn yourself, cut yourself, because you're in the same situation with the others regardless of the positions – it doesn't matter if you are the head chef or the commis – you feel a very strong bond. And watching a close family member [working in the kitchen] it's like… I have worked for example with a very good close friend, not a family member but we consider him as family, and the feeling that you build with somebody like this makes you feel like really strong and really good, like family."*

Participant 12:

*"I got into the trade because of that [cooking for my family, with my father]. That's very personal, right?"*

*"Teach others and watch them progress stands out. …Because it's all about my impact on the industry."*

*"The feel that I need to do more to feel good is my personal enemy. My personal behaviour in the kitchen is always going above and beyond, do the best that I can, that's how my mind works, which is not always the healthiest thing, but it has helped me in the industry so far."*

Participant 13:

*"It's the variety, creativity and togetherness that I like."*

*"There's no college course or anything like that, that would say that this is a course [to build on what you know] and it's going to build you up to be an executive chef. It's very much learning as you go. It's very much like one day you stepped out of being a sous chef to being an executive chef or head chef. And that's it. You're now in charge of finances, you're responsible of all assets, you're now in charge. There is liability, isn't there? There's the chance that things can go wrong. Companies would be vulnerable to that. But not only just from a legal standpoint, there's also the importance of your team and the engagement with your team. …to be honest with you, that's something you need to very quickly get on board with, otherwise you're not gonna have a team that follows you!"*

*"If it's badly managed, regarding the legislation, it could be detrimental to your business, it could be dangerous to your guests. And also, if you're an employee working in a badly run kitchen that doesn't follow legislation, or things like that, then that will also have a massive effect on your mental health."*

*"…the inspiration of a manager would make customer service …certainly a lot easier. That would make your love of the job, like I said, a lot easier".*

Participant 14:

*"Satisfaction from the adrenaline, creativity and the happy customers"*

*"…you get that satisfaction from seeing people that are happy and then I think it's personal gratification, I would say, because you start thinking 'well, I'm good!'*

*"[the opposite is that] I feel guilty that I work all these long hours… It's that internal conflict, but I'm doing what I love though I should be home with my kids. Unfortunately, this is the nature of the job…"*

Participant 15:

*"…the past type of quality of training was more effective, more successful! Because if I did something wrong and the chef was explaining in his way of… why I went wrong, and I kept interrupting or answering back, I'd have no chance. Basically, I'd be washing pots for a week. But if I was to do this nowadays… [sigh]. I'd say that the privilege of*

*being a boss has been taken away in the kitchen by the… by the modern-day offended nature of the youngsters."*

*"I would love to eventually have my own restaurant, make my family proud, and then leave that to my own family". "…as you grow older family matters more…".*

*Participant 16:*

*"[The kitchen] was an escape from home and school.*

*MK: was it a positive thing?*

*P16: Maybe it shouldn't have been with reflection now, but certainly it was then!*

*MK: Why are you saying that now? What would you wish to have done?*

*P16: What would I have wished to have done? That was the right thing for me to do at that time. It's a long story… without going into too many details, but if I look at, for example, my wife's family upbringing and how her home was …it probably did her better. But that was available for me."*

*"Mentoring junior chefs is a positive thing."*

*"As a junior chef, you don't worry about those things [lack of staff budget and resources to run the kitchen professionally], but as a manager, that certainly comes much more relevant. Now... it's completely different. I would put these two things [together]…."*

Participant 17:

*"a bigger team would encourage me to deliver more work and produce more…"; "…what I'm saying is that if it continues without a team, that would drive me out. But again, [laughing] I continued for so long without a team. But yeah, I'm still doing it!... It's quite a challenge, yes, sometimes it takes a lot to motivate, to keep myself motivated when it's quite exhausting… I wouldn't have to be so pressurized".*

Participant 18:

*"Satisfaction from completing projects… For the last six, seven years I've been designing, building concepts, and launching those. So, I got a lot of satisfaction for that."*

*"I'd like to get back to doing more international stuff. I don't want to be stagnant. More international mobility".*

*"[I fit in the atmosphere of the kitchen] when I have a feeling of wanting, and belonging… an emotional attachment to something that is similar to the top, where I add value, right? A feeling of wanting and belonging to something important, meaningful, valuable".*

Participant 20:

*"There have to be better operations and communications with the front of the house. These are conditions of the job that are controllable, they can be controlled and improved".*

Participant 21*:*

*"…always helping mother and family with cooking brings you in the zone"*

*"The challenging atmosphere and the love that chefs do is always rewarding."*

*" …the focus is about giving the opportunities and, you know, being the role model for the young generation of chefs, …showing there are many career opportunities as a chef to the new generation…"*

Participant 22:

*"I think [the kitchen environment] became better because there are less of the old school executive chefs. …I used to work in a kitchen where if somebody brought something new out of their own competence, we've learnt that you can't do that anymore. I don't want to sound sexist, but it is, but I have to be careful as well. …I see it from my experience… The bigger picture is your own development, and they kept the*

*knowledge [for themselves] and did not develop you. They did not want you to know things. I was a head chef for five years with an executive chef and he would not let me go to any HQ meeting or any kind of meeting when he wasn't there, in his absence. So, I didn't know things. So, I was good enough to work all the other hours, but…"*

*""My life has been made easier by self-development and by the development of other""*

# Appendix 9

**Poster presented at the International Symposium 2022 of BAM HRM SIG**

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## --- Retaining highly skilled employees: the case of chefs ---

The shortage of chefs has increased in the last few years dramatically. 'People 1st' report (2017) highlighted the problem even before the current pandemic; it recorded chefs' labour turnover of nearly 40% and annual drop out of the chefs' career of 20% which has taken a worrying trajectory presently.

**We know why chefs leave – Why Do They Stay?**

The majority of the research up to now is on their turnover instead of retention; it is focused on what companies do to avoid turnover. Little emphasis has been given on how individuals organise and direct their thoughts to stay in their job.

Focus predominantly on the **individual**, not organisation, positioning them next to already known theories of employee retention, **Job Embeddedness** and **Occupational Embeddedness** and shedding light to the **dynamics** that exist in chefs' decisions to stay.

### Who is the chef?

Highly skilful & versatile:

- Dexterity to combine ingredients & tastes, colours & textures, physical & artificial materials
- Management of challenging kitchen brigades
- Organisation of storage rooms meeting H&S protocols, supply kitchens with the right ingredients,
- budgeting controls, estimation of incoming numbers of customers, commercially savvy
- perfectionist
- creative as artist and at the same time improvise when things go against the plan

(Cooper, Giousmpasoglou, Marinakou 2017; Allen and Iomaire 2017)

To earn the title of a chef possible under meeting certain criteria:

- significant practical experience in commercial cooking;
- vocational accreditation in culinary studies from a vocational school or college;
- degree in management and culinary practice at a university level

(Allen and Iomaire, 2017; Zopiatis, 2010; Pratten, 2003)

No discrimination among chefs; recognition & respect derive from on-the-job performance, not level of education.

many leave
But
most stay…

### Things are more complex with chefs?

Retention of chefs is complex, directed not only by the relation between the individual with their organisation or community (JE), but also driven by drivers generated in the individual alone. Personal dispositions influence decisions to remain or not (emotional stability linked with turnover intentions - conscientiousness with actual turnover) (Zimmerman 2008).

**Internal Locus of Control** (LOC) (Rotter 1966) – individual's belief that they are mainly responsible for whichever direction things take in life – is related with their willingness to remain & bypass any difficulties of the job (Kang, Twigg, & Hertzman 2010; Huang 2006). People with external LOC are more sensitive to turnover intentions, materialised in actual turnover (Allen, Weeks and Moffit 2005).

JE and OE consider both organisational & individual factors (interchangeably) in predicting intentions to stay. However, in the case of chefs these do not always seem to apply (Robinson and Beesley 2010). There are cases where individuals act in a very **idiosyncratic** way.

**Internal LOC focuses on the individual perspective** against factors that may influence employees' decisions to stay. Therefore, both constructs (embeddedness and locus of control) **shape a framework** in which employee retention is understood in more depth. Internal LOC provides a channel to filter the personal experience chefs have from their job which **construes personal meaning/-s** to stay in the occupation long term. It is therefore considered a necessary addition to the already established frameworks of JE and OE that predict employee retention which refines the understanding of why chefs stay.

Independent studies → individual factors

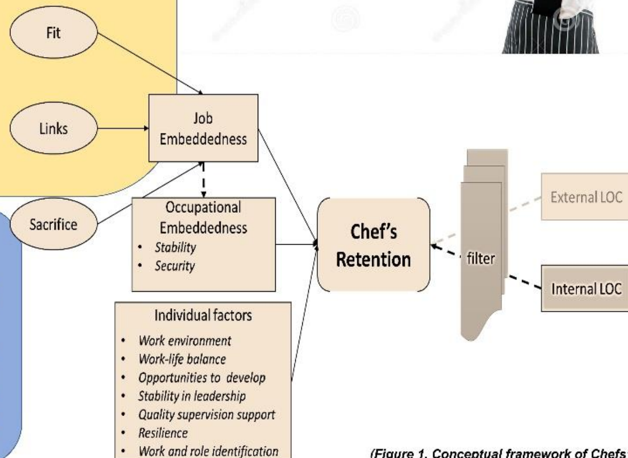
Job Embeddedness (JE)
(Mitchell et al 2001)

Occupational Embeddedness (OE)
(Ng & Feldman 2007)

### The future of the conceptual framework

The aim of this conceptual framework is to assist research which would identify the **cognitive map** of chefs who remain in the occupation long term instead of leaving to other occupations.

The right research approach to meet the above aim should be one that values the idiosyncratic ways people construe their reality, hence research of qualitative nature that uncovers the cognitive pathways of chefs' decisions to stay. This framework could set the foundations for future studies on the cognitive map of highly skilled employees too who show similar characteristics with chefs.




*(Figure 1. Conceptual framework of Chefs' retention)*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