Motivating Apprentice Chefs to Stay the Course: Understanding Expectations

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Abstract

This paper draws upon new data compiled from interviews with successfully completed apprentice chefs and their nominated supervisor or vocational trainer as to the experience of their apprenticeship and training. The starting point of the research was developed through the analysis of data taken from a research project on early attrition in hospitality industry and training and the consequent skills shortages. One of the key findings supported by the empirical evidence was that their learning experience and relationship with their supervisor and workplace is foremost when choosing to either stay or drop out from their apprenticeship.

The research proposes that successfully completed apprentices were afforded learning and work experiences that met both their intrinsic and extrinsic needs. This was affected, in no small part, by a clearer understanding from their trainers and supervisors that current apprentices are now more knowledgeable of the industry, than their predecessors, prior to commencing an apprenticeship. This has been affected primarily through the electronic media, vocational courses in hospitality at school and far more exposure to a broader range of food and dining experiences than at any time in history. Therefore it would stand to reason that a young individual now entering the industry would bring a lot more ideas and expectations as to the content and structure of their apprenticeship when choosing it as a career.

Vroom's Expectancy Theory of Motivation has been utilised to explicitly link the qualitative responses of ten successfully completed apprentices and responses from their elected supervisor/trainers to Vroom's model to effect a comparative analysis of the work motivation and job satisfaction of the apprentices.

Introduction

Apprentices dropping out early in their apprenticeship and vocational education and training (VET) or electing to discontinue employment in their trained field after qualifying is a key concern for employers (Snell & Hart 2008). Skilled employee shortages of qualified chefs, in the hospitality industry, amongst many other industries (ACTU 2004) and the decline in 'traditional apprenticeships' (Toner 2003) have impacted on industry as employers have had to adjust their employment strategy to include more casual staff with less investment in training. However Toner (2005) highlighted the fact there has been a notable rise in the rate of new apprentice inductions (Toner 2005) but anecdotal evidence has shown that Australian apprentices, in general, are leaving their apprenticeships at an '*alarming rate*' (Gow et al. 2008)(pg. 100). The impact of this early attrition is not only on the workplace with the loss of skills and training invested in that apprentice but also the toll on apprentices who may feel they failed to make a success of an eagerly anticipated career choice so early in their working life. This is of particular concern for apprentice chefs, in an industry that has had a protracted

reputation for apprentices being disappointed that their expectations fell far short of reality (Theage.com.au 2003). Also the mutual disappointment felt by both apprentice and employer when a potentially creative and productive individual is lost to the industry (McDermott 2008).

The research literature also demonstrates that conditions for learning in the workplace are where there are opportunities for participation in new work and technology, interaction with colleagues, taking responsibility, professional growth, gaining feedback, management support for learning, and being rewarded for proficiency (Skule & Reichborn 2002). A learning environment is also accomplished through mutual support and co-operation from the workplace community(Billett 2002b). There is considerable research on the development of an apprentice which finds that an essential component of their job satisfaction is manifest via a close participatory association between an employee and their employer or supervisor (Billett 1993; Billett 2000; Kolb 1984; Smith, Oczkowski & Selby-Smith 2008). An environment in which the individual feels they are learning and growing is a key component for the employee when deliberating whether to stay or leave their employment (Smith, Oczkowski & Selby-Smith 2008). However commercial kitchens are often busy, stressful environments where exact timing and perfection are the aims of the staff and a new apprentice can often get lost when the focus is on the food and customers.

Research Method

The genesis of this research was to inquire as to what positive influences affected apprentices to retain their tenure and once identified could those characteristics, of a successful apprenticeship, be transferred to afford others to stay the course (NCVER 2001).The research also sought to identify aspects of an apprenticeship that were of concern but were able to be tolerated due to the overriding intrinsic and extrinsic motivation of the apprentice to accomplish their goal. The focus of this research was on successful outcomes and the actions and influences that achieve those positive outcomes for the apprentice in as much, what works. There is a plethora of qualitative and quantitative research data on early attrition available (Ball 2004; Ball & John 2003; NCVER 2000; Snell & Hart 2008) which has studied to assist the development and analysis of the project on the early attrition of apprentice chefs.

With that in mind, young recently qualified apprentice chefs, employed by a group training organisation and independent sources were approached anonymously in 2010 and asked if they were willing to participate in this research, on the basis that they were identified as having successfully completed their training. The questions were open and semi-directed to elicit information rich, qualitative responses, developed from the research on their workplace pedagogic practices(Billett 2002c, 2005) and their response to those practices.

The scope of the questions for the apprentice inquired their workplace activities and their reactions to those activities;

- The range of activities they were expected to undertake.
- The degree to which their work activities are routine or non-routine.

- The degree of discretion they have in your work.
- The degree to which individuals are responsible.
- The intensity of the work tasks in which they engage.
- The knowledge required for their work practice.
- The degree to which their work is premised on interactions with others.
- The ease with which they can participate fully in the workplace.

At the end of the interview they were requested to nominate and give permission for the author to interview, a supervisor chef or commercial cookery teacher, from their apprenticeship, who had positively affected their professional life. I transcribed and analysed each interviewee's response in order to gain an insight into the history and attitude to that particular individual's apprenticeship in order to understand more fully why they stayed. The questions for the manager/supervisors and VET practitioners were centred on recollections of their apprenticeship and observations of the current state of the industry. They were asked to respond as to what was expected of an apprentice and what they believed an apprentice expected from the industry.

- Industry challenges and expectations
- Skills development in both a formal and non formal environment
- Socioeconomic challenges for both employer and apprentice
- Developments in training in both VET and workplace

At a later point in the analysis it was then possible to compare and contrast all responses but initially each case represented was to be understood as a distinct manifestation of their evaluation of the situation. I then embarked on a ground cross-case analysis of the individual studies to identify cross-case patterns and themes with all the final reports in an endeavour to distinguish convergence and divergence in coding and classifying. This analytic enquiry was to seek out where aspects of the responses fit together by looking for recurring regularities in the data to reveal patterns that can be sorted into categories of internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity. The first criterion concerning the extent to which the data belongs in a certain category and coheres in a meaningful way.

Current Findings

Early findings of this research has exposed an industry where many employers and supervisors use prescriptive instruction as a process to communicate and manage their staff, generating an unnecessarily authoritarian working environment for the young apprentice chef

> ..... *I also find that the majority of chefs that I've found it's almost like you're taught at school to scream at people. You get these things done by screaming. You've got to be loud, you've got to shout. I understand people have got to be heard, people can be loud but it's the way it's said. Their idea of being loud is being aggressive. And I think a lot of chefs in the industry have gone that way.........people who have just lost all confidence and aren't happy in the job anymore. If you're an apprentice and*

you're a young kid and somebody screams at you on a daily basis, and you're doing long hours, usually for low pay, what are you going to do? **Third year apprentice**

But ongoing analysis has indicated that employers who have high expectations of the apprentice to learn and participate in a community of practice, afford them the ability to perform to the required standard, trust them to show initiative will more often retain highly motivated individuals.

"I was always encouraged to try new things and try new skills and work with different ingredients and if I couldn't, like we didn't have the budget at work, a couple of chefs bought me cook books. They would come in with different ingredients and say have you used this before and I'd say no. Buying things, we'd go through it together and sit down after work and go through recipes and books and ingredients just to show me new things I probably wouldn't see if I wasn't in the industry or if I hadn't worked in places like that. I wouldn't get that at home, they are only things you would get working in a commercial kitchen." **Third year apprentice**

This paper proposes that to retain motivated apprentices an employer needs to endeavour to take into account their expectations and the value they place on particular tasks. The current generation of apprentice chefs are knowledgeable individuals with a strong identification as to their role and progress in the workplace. That is not to say that there will be individuals who are more focused on the extrinsic rewards of money and others who are just 'testing the water', but the focus of this research is concerned with retaining 'passionate,' enthusiastic individuals. Initial analysis of the data has shown that a supportive and inspiring employer with a willingness to pass on authentic knowledge and skills affords an environment for an apprentice to be motivated to maintain their apprenticeship.

Workplaces as Challenges

The workplace can be a complex site to navigate where the skills and knowledge needed to be learned to help cope with a maze of practices can be daunting and sometimes conflict with initial expectations, particularly with individuals who arrive with explicit expectations concerning their career choice (Fuller & Unwin 2003b; Harris et al. 2001; Snell & Hart 2008). An apprentice's notion of their new workplace may be tested, as the expectations of an apprentice and their employer may diverge greatly from a pre-conceived idea acquired prior to their applying for a position (Snell & Hart 2007). An enthusiastic individual, applying for a position, may anticipate the workplace as an exciting experience, working and learning with fellow members of their workplace (Billett 2002a, 2006; Hager 2004). This pre-conception may have had its genesis through an ontogeny of many experiences available to young people today, such as a school pre-apprentice program or familial or cultural interests in food or more probably the innumerable programs and articles on food and wine, now available, in the electronic and print media (Billett 2006; Dumbrell 2007; McDermott 2009b; McDermott & Carter 2010). The research with employers and supervisor chefs' experiences revealed a distinct relationship between an intense drive and 'passion' from the apprentice at their initiating a career as a chef and their subsequent retention in the industry,

when their apprenticeship fulfilled or surpassed their expectations (Gow et al. 2008; McDermott 2009a; McDermott 2009b). The benefits for the employer retaining an apprentice are as they attain proficiency they increase productivity, take on multiple tasks and duties, work with minimal supervision and assist in the training and supervision of younger apprentices thus offering an unassailable return on the time and effort expended on their training (Ball 2004; Harris et al. 2001; McDermott 2009a; Theage.com.au 2003 ; Toner 2003).

But the research also revealed many cases of disappointment with their employer or career choice and withdrawing from the industry and training altogether when reality diverged greatly from initial expectations (McDermott 2009a; Richardson 2007). The enthusiasm of a young apprentice to embrace or at least continue the early stages of this new environment is, in part, dependant on both apprentice and employer engaging in a discourse of mutual understanding and co-participatory work practices (Billett 2002a, 2006). It is at this conjunction that the employer will have a greater appreciation of the apprentice's potential contribution to the workplace and the apprentice will be able to more fully understand their responsibility to the employer and the workplace community. This research finds that support and encouragement, from all members of the team lessens much of the doubt and anxiety expressed by young apprentices when facing the challenges of an unknown environment, such a busy kitchen. However many apprentices find there is little opportunity to take the time to absorb new information and they are often 'pushed in the deep end,' perceived by some employers as positive learning experience but often for economic expediency.

Situating the Apprenticeship

Research has shown that economic rationalism has affected the modern apprenticeship to evolve into a narrower and more constrained form than its historical predecessor (Snell 1996; Streeck 1989) where 'learning a craft' has been incrementally reduced over time (Cornford 2004). That is not to say that the long-established apprenticeship system of the past, had little or no connection to industrial organisation or capital investment but a broader framework of the training was also concerned with the social or 'professional' development of the individual and their 'membership' within that community, as well as the continuance of skills and knowledge for the future (Snell 1996). However many apprentices, today, have very different work lives to their predecessors, when employment in large organisations often afforded them extensive opportunities for development and practice in their learning. Current neoliberal work practices often mean that many workplaces now operate with a much lower percentage of qualified persons to apprentices thus affording less time for 'proximal guidance' (Billett 2002c). Furthermore many workplaces now require the apprentice to be a more independent, productive member of the team far earlier in their training. Indeed, the young chefs interviewed, for this research, were often asked to take more responsible roles in the kitchen, such as looking after a section that really should have gone to a more experienced individual. However much depended on the task how it was perceived by the apprentice, as tasks that were seen as perfunctory and of low level status imparted the feeling that they were not learning and just being used as 'cheap labour' But where the apprentice felt trusted to rise to a challenge or opportunity to attain an intrinsic sense of achievement or

the extrinsic approbation of the team, then they felt that they really were a member of their 'community' (Harris et al. 2001; James & Hayward 2004; McDermott 2009a; McDermott 2009b; NCVER 2001).

From Novice to Expert

Early research on workplace learning (Lave & Wenger 1991) positioned the apprentice or '*novice*' on a clearly defined and bounded linear journey in which old timers train and mould their successors, thus ensuring a continuation of skills and knowledge. This model has a strong tradition going back many centuries when knowledge was exclusively held by the '*expert*' and only disseminated through highly controlled forms of training over a specific period of time. There are still elements of this process of learning to be found in the modern trainee/apprenticeship as after the successful completion of discrete, atomised VET competencies they attain a trade certificate. However the concept of '*novice*' and '*expert*' which lies at the heart of Lave and Wenger's early model has been redefined to acknowledge the co-participatory nature of individuals in the workplace when authentic, applicable skills and knowledge is acquired through engaging with other workers (Billett 2002c; Fuller & Unwin 2003a; Senge 1990a). The practices of the workplace also evolve through the agency of the members as ways of working are changed, what is sacrosanct to one generation may be changed by the next (Brown & Duguid 1991; Fox 2000). Furthermore the pace of change in industry, as current knowledge is superseded through innovation and experimentation, particularly in the food and restaurant business, means all members of the community are at some point a '*novice*' and individually, '*expert.*' Earlier research bears out the proposition that employers who affect a more participatory model for their employees and honestly attempts to build and maintain authentic work practices for them, affords enhanced opportunities for their retention (Billett 2002b; Billett, Barker & Hernon-Tinning 2004; McDermott 2008).

Expectations, Job Satisfaction and Motivation

The intention of this research paper is to suggest that there is a direct nexus between an individuals purported expectation, motivation and job satisfaction leading to their willingness to retain their employment. Although job satisfaction may be perceived as a single variable, most theories treat it as a rather complex set of variables (Eccles & Wigfield 2002). For example, individuals in this research reported that they were satisfied with their work but very dissatisfied with their wages, or they enjoyed the demands of the job but found the unsociable hours too difficult when trying to sustain relationships outside the workplace. It is these intrinsic, extrinsic motivators that help us to understand the drives of the individual and possibly offer a better insight into their levels of satisfaction or their lack thereof (Bandura 1986). Intrinsic motivation is an internal response to a given situation where the individual takes pride and satisfaction in their achievement, especially when they attribute their success to their ability and effort. They would primarily find the task itself interesting and people who are highly intrinsically motivated try to seek work that provides this motivation (such as allowing the use of creativity or developing new skills) and they see their work environment in terms of the support of these motivators (Amabile et al. 1994). On the other hand extrinsic

motivation is defined as the motivation to work primarily in response to the receipt of external rewards, such as money or position status. However the constructs can work in conjunction with each other and that it would depend on the situation and the degree to which the individual attributes the reward attained from attempting, and successfully completing the task (Amabile et al. 1994) (pg. 103). The most important distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation is on the basis of whether the driving force for an action originates from inside or outside the individual (Deci, Koestner & Ryan 2001; Sansone & Harackiewicz 2000) (pg. 104).

Looking Forward

One of the more respected and motivational theories, supported by empirical evidence (Tien 2000; Vansteenkiste et al. 2005) is Expectancy Theory,(Porter & Lawler 1968; Vroom 1964) which is a theory explaining the process individuals use to make decisions on various behavioural alternatives. Expectancy theory is a form of calculative, psychological hedonism in which it states that the ultimate motive of every human act is asserted to maximise pleasure or to minimise pain and an individual will always choose the option with the greatest motivation force. It is also a theory of the process of motivation (Chiang & Jang 2008) which in effect is a theory for understanding the decision making process that individuals use in order to determine whether they are motivated to pursue or sustain a level of motivation towards a given situation or task. It does not define what motivates the individual, who may have at their source a multiplicity of expectation variables, each dependent on the situation of the workplace and pre-conceived ideas of role (status), effort, response, and reward. Process theories help describe and explain how behaviour is directed, energised, sustained, or stopped. Thus this paper seeks to identify the link between one facet of the attrition cycle, for apprentice chefs, that has initially surfaced from the empirical data as to whether expectations and the resultant motivational force play a key role in the individuals drive to complete their apprenticeship.

Expectancy theory asserts that the motivational force for behaviour, action or task is a function of three distinct perceptions: expectancy, instrumentality and valence (Vroom 1964) It is purported that in order for an individual to feel motivated they must believe that if they exert enough effort that they will be able to achieve whatever level of performance is required. This relationship is referred to as expectancy. They must also believe that their performance will result in a particular outcome and the link between performance and outcome is called instrumentality. The final condition needed for an individual to feel motivated is for them to positively value that, which they will receive for their performance which Vroom refers to as valence. The theory is commonly known by its acronym VIE which translates to: Motivation force = Expectancy x Instrumentality x Valence (Vroom 1964) It gained popularity and was the subject of several empirical studies (Campbell & Pritchard 1976; Mitchell 1974; Wahba & House 1974) Based on these studies there is a general empirical support for the three individual components of expectancy theory in that it requires that an individual be able to assess; (a) the likelihood that working hard will result in her satisfaction of her employers performance requirements, (b) recognising the correlation

between meeting her performance requirements and receiving job related rewards and (c) the value of these rewards.

Porter and Lawler (1968) developed one of the best known refinements of Vroom's VIE expectancy theory, which came about because they believed Vroom left a number of questions unanswered. The most important of which is the origin of valence, instrumentality and expectancy beliefs, and the nature of the relationship between an employees attitudes toward work and job performance. According to (Porter & Lawler 1968) employee effort is jointly determined by two key factors; the value placed on certain outcomes by the individual and the degree to which the person believes his effort will lead to that valued outcome. These two factors interact and determine effort level. But that may or may not result in effective performance, which is defined as the successful accomplishment of a predetermined task expected of the individual, determined as that person's job. It is also the level of ability the person his to do his job and the clarity of understanding the person has as what his job consists of. To conclude Porter and Lawler's refinement to Vroom's theory; a person may be highly motivated but the effort will not necessarily result in what can be considered satisfactory unless he has the ability to perform that task well.

Conclusion

This research has revealed a history of training apprentices in commercial kitchens, reflected in their VET courses, which has often relied on a process of atomistic learning , eventually achieving 'full membership' of their community. The structure and process is often a generalised, prescriptive model that has been very effective and in the past has had much support. But increased career choices for employment and vocational education for school leavers means that there is a lot of competition for employers to attract and retain bright, motivated individuals to an exciting but demanding industry, such as a commercial kitchen. The research finds that successful apprentices have employers who acknowledge the contribution they make to the workplace early in their career, where 'novice' is a descriptive stage in the knowledge and skill of any worker within the community, to a specific task, rather than just an attribution of the apprentice. The use of expectancy theory emphasises the belief that the rewards the organisation is offering align with the needs of the apprentice, to maximise his or her expected satisfaction. It is also the attractiveness of those rewards, which requires an understanding and knowledge of what value the apprentice puts on the reward that he or she values positively, and emphasises expected behaviours in that the apprentice should know what is expected and how it is to be appraised. The theory is concerned with what is realistic or rational or irrelevant as an individual's own expectations of performance, reward and goal satisfaction outcome will determine his or her level of effort, not the objective outcomes themselves. The key to the theory working is in the understanding of the employer as to the apprentice's expectations and their alignment with the needs of the workplace. Chefs now acknowledge there are major changes in the industry from the time they began their career as well as acknowledging enormous generational changes in young people entering the workforce for the first time (Barron et al. August, 2007; McCrindle 2006, 2008). These changes will require them to look for more innovative solutions for retaining an

apprentice, not only for economic expediency but to support and encourage an acknowledged productive, contributing member of the workplace.

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