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Is Restaurant Management an Extreme Job? How Restaurant Managers are Motivated to Work Intense and Excessive Jobs

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Is restaurant management an extreme job? How restaurant managers are motivated to work intense and excessive jobs

Restaurant management has a reputation for requiring excessively long work hours and the need to sacrifice work-life balance (Fine, 1996; Niu, 2010; Wildes, 2005). This is largely due to the nature of the restaurant work which can be unpredictable, fast paced and frequently understaffed (Davidson et al., 2009; Murphy et al., 2009). These characteristics are similar to those of an “extreme job” which requires high intensity and an excessive workload (Burke & Fiksenbaum, 2009). Based on past literature, a job can be classified as being extreme when it requires over 48 hours of work each week and job holders experience five out of the following ten extreme job characteristics: unpredictable flows of work, fast-paced work under tight deadlines, inordinate scope of responsibility that amounts to more than one job, work-related events outside regular work hours, availability to clients 24/7, responsibility for profit and loss, responsibility for mentoring and recruitment, large amount of travel, large number of direct reports and physical presence in the workplace at least 10 hours a day (Hewlett & Luce, 2006). With many of these extreme job characteristics focusing on the responsibilities of managing and overseeing a business, this research will look to classify restaurant management as an extreme job rather than the entire restaurant workforce. By classifying restaurant management as extreme, the research will be able to identify the characteristics of the job that need to be improved in order to provide decent and dignified work for restaurant managers.

The research also needs to explore how restaurant managers are motivated to work hard in an extreme job setting. Self-determination theory can be used to address how an extreme job can support or thwart a restaurant manager’s motivation, engagement and well-being (Deci et al., 2017). Extreme jobs provide external pressure due to the fast-paced and unpredictable nature of the work, as well as the amount of responsibility that is required. External pressure can cause workers to feel like they are being controlled to work excessively rather than doing their job out of enjoyment, interest and satisfaction (Stoeber et al., 2013). This produces a lower motivational quality which decreases job satisfaction, organizational commitment and increases turnover intent (Rigby & Ryan, 2018).

This study aims to determine if restaurant management can be classified as an extreme job; to explore how restaurant managers are motivated to work excessively; and to identify how extreme work could be reduced for managers. As this research is exploratory, data will be collected by conducting semi-structured interviews with experienced restaurant managers from across Canada. Interviews will include questions aimed at understanding each of the 10 extreme job characteristics and the motivational quality influencing each. In addition, the research will explore how restaurant managers think that the intensity of their job could be reduced. The interviews will be analyzed using a deductive thematic analysis approach to identify patterns in the data that follow extreme job characteristics and self-determination theory (Yin, 2017).

The findings of this research will build on the current knowledge and understanding of the extreme work concept by applying it to a profession that has yet to be studied. Further, this research will fill the gap left by the dearth of research that explores what drives restaurant managers to be willing to work long and intense hours. Lastly, the findings of this study can aid human resources departments and restaurant management teams to better shape work policies or restructure restaurant management jobs to reduce the need to work excessively. The findings may also support a humanistic management approach whereby focusing on the satisfaction, well-being and self-actualization of workers can lead to greater organizational success (Melé, 2016).

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