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Long hospitality careers-a contradiction in terms?

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## **Long hospitality careers – a contradiction in terms?**

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## Introduction

This paper addresses career longevity in hospitality by focusing on the factors that encourage individuals to stay working for many years in the sector. Its key contribution is to connect the notion of belonging and social connectivity to employee retention.

Here, career longevity denotes an extended period of time, in this case more than ten years, occupied in one career – a concept not generally associated with hospitality.

Instead, research often concentrates on the high staff turnover at hospitality establishments (for example, Brown *et al.*, 2015). Although one in 11 jobs is provided by the global tourism industry (World Travel and Tourism Council [WTTC], 2014), regrettably, in many Western contexts hospitality employment is positioned as temporary, unsatisfactory and badly paid (Baum, 2015). Employment in the sector appears to be tainted with the perception of low status, even if some of its most highly regarded positions, for example, Hotel Manager or Chief Accountant, are well respected and generously rewarded in other spheres of business (Mooney, 2014). The paper, based on a New Zealand study, intends to address a significant research omission by revealing the factors that encourage workers to remain in long-term hospitality careers, although employees may move between individual properties. There is a need for qualitative research that explores the positive reasons why individuals remain in long-term hospitality careers; a limitation of many organisational studies is their focus on loyalty to the employing organisation, rather than employee loyalty to the industry (for example, Lee *et al.*, 2015). A further drawback of many hospitality employment and career studies is their focus on younger workers (for instance, Kong *et al.*, 2015).

Additionally, because such studies are frequently based on survey data, they may not give a complete or in-depth picture of employee career motivators in specific locations.

Suggested reasons why workers enter the industry include the ‘cool’ party atmosphere for young people (Choi *et al.*, 2013) and the possibilities for progression and a satisfying career (Bakkevig Dagsland *et al.*, 2015; Wang and Huang, 2014). A more critical perspective indicates that workers engaged in the poorest quality jobs in hospitality, such as entry level or contract cleaning jobs, which are often occupied by new migrants, have fewer options for alternative employment (McIntosh and Harris, 2012) and will accept work with low remuneration (Yaduma *et al.*, 2015). However, such explanations do not fully explain why satisfied employees remain for many years at lower positions in the hierarchy and the findings of this study hold significant implications for hospitality Human Resource managers. Talent shortfall remains one of the tourism industry’s most pressing human resource management issues (WTTC, 2015). This paper suggests that hospitality managers should systematically promote positive social connectivity between employees in order to retain productive and talented individuals, rather than losing them to other sectors.

Empirical and critical hospitality studies provided the contextual background for this New Zealand study. Hospitality career trajectories are especially challenging to monitor because they cross work-related or professional divisions, geographical borders and disciplines. A lack of consistent data across the sector stems from the fragmented and diverse nature of employment in tourism and hospitality organisations, as well as inconsistent demand or seasonal fluctuations in levels of business (Janta *et al.*, 2012; Okumus *et al.*, 2010). Consequently, although considerable vocational mobility occurs between different sectors of the industry (Duncan *et al.*, 2013; Ladkin, 2011), researchers tend to focus on specific areas, for example, the hotel sector (O’Neill, 2012). Critical hospitality scholars argue that the perpetuation of Western stereotypes have led to the prevailing (mis)perceptions about a homogenous unskilled hospitality workforce (Duncan *et al.*, 2013). The widespread view of hospitality employment as

temporary work (Guerrier, 2008; Wildes, 2008), rather than a career, contributes to the scarcity of empirical data on hospitality careers. Traditionally, in countries such as the United Kingdom and Germany, industry training centred on trade certification for chefs and waiters and vocational education focused on developing managers for the hotel industry (Felstead *et al.*, 2002; Riley, 1990). In common with other sectors, hotels use a competency approach to assess task proficiency or job aptitude and specific technical expertise appears to facilitate hospitality management careers in different contexts (Bharwani and Jauhari, 2013). Yet, Japanese hotel research indicates that excessive functional specialisation restricts opportunities, and workers must possess a breadth of experience across different areas to achieve senior executive positions (Yamashita and Uenoyama, 2006). Additionally, Chinese and Taiwanese studies emphasise how good social, networking and self-management competencies facilitate the moves which help individuals to achieve the required exposure to different roles (Kong *et al.*, 2012; Wang, 2013).

The paper is structured as follows: firstly, career theories framing the study are described and the rationale behind the choice of the intersectional methodological approach is explained. An outline of the methods used, memory-work, semi-structured interviews and multi-level analysis is then given. In the following findings and discussion section, a career longevity model illustrates key hospitality career constructs. It appears that long-term hospitality workers build their professional identities through strong social connections in the workplace. The paper concludes by highlighting the importance of relational rather than transactional employment practices for human resource managers in the sector.

## General career theory

The research drew on career theory for its theoretical underpinnings. Sullivan and Baruch's (2009, p. 1543) widely accepted definition of a career reflects current meanings: a career consists of "an individual's work related and other relevant experiences, both inside and outside of organisations that form a unique pattern over the individual's life span". The traditional linear view of a career has clearly defined organizational career structures, regulated by established workplace processes (Arthur, 2008). In contrast, contemporary career theory uses a variety of non-traditional career interpretations (for example, protean; boundaryless; frayed), or relational career models (e.g., Pringle and McCulloch Dixon, 2003), to reflect more uncertain employment arrangements and the increasingly diverse composition of workforces (Guest and Rodrigues, 2014).

Against the background of shifting career understandings, Inkson *et al.*'s (2012) perspective of the contemporary boundaryless career, as a career 'orientation' as opposed to a particular kind of career, gave the first entry point into hospitality careers. 'Boundary crossing events' or rites of passage in any career are important, as they highlight career progression points (Inkson *et al.*, 2012, p. 334). In hospitality careers, significant developments could be the first promotion to a position of responsibility or being transferred to a different department at a more senior level. However, workers' ability to negotiate boundaries is greatly affected by different societal and organisational contexts (Tams and Arthur, 2010). Gunz and Mayrhofer's (2011, p. 254) call for a "more contextualized view" of careers acknowledges the centrality of work, but insists that meaningful career research must "also consider its social boundaries and 'embedded-ness' in time, i.e. past experience". The significance of embedded career experience is reflected in the final theory chosen to interpret hospitality workers' career understandings. Savickas (2013) argues that people create their own individual

interpretations of their career choices and adaptations. Their career histories become a series of work-related events rather than being focused on climbing the organisational ladder.

### *Vocational mobility in hospitality*

The key characteristic of careers in the hospitality sector appears to be considerable job movement, either with one employer or between a variety of organisations (Baum, 2015; Rydzik *et al.*, 2012). A high degree of vocational mobility is required for career success, although, to what extent depends on local context. In the United States, hospitality executives achieve elite executive positions by frequent moves between separate organisations (Houran *et al.*, 2012). In contrast, promotion in Chinese hotel chains tends to take place internally (Kong *et al.*, 2011), a feature associated with traditional organisational careers. Generally, senior hospitality managers will stay with their current employer if they will not achieve a higher position or remuneration by switching employing organisations (Hausknecht *et al.*, 2009; Robinson *et al.*, 2014). Industry context also influences the subjective career constructs of hospitality workers, and movement for workers in lower positions may incur costs rather than any additional benefits. Many seasonal, contingent hospitality workers appear to experience non-traditional careers that do not progress to better paid or more prestigious positions (Heimtun, 2012; Joppe, 2012). The reasons why such workers choose long careers in hospitality are not clear, a gap that this study endeavours to fill. The methods used and the process of analysis are detailed in the following section.

### **Methodology**

The study used an interpretative social constructionist approach informed by intersectional theorising to capture individual interpretations of critical hospitality career events. An interpretative methodology allowed the researcher to explore

“multiple co-existing realities” (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2006, p. 379) in workers’ career histories. An intersectional approach further allowed interrogation of “the ‘black box’ of interaction” between individuals and organisations (Hancock, 2007, p. 253), when examining the experiences of individuals in diverse groups differentiated by socially defined categories, such as age, gender or class.

### *Data collection*

Data was collected by two methods, memory-work and semi-structured interviews, which were compatible with the intersectional theoretical framing of the study. Memory-work, the first of the two data collection methods used, involves the collective analysis of memories that have been individually written by group members before they meet to discuss each of them in turn (Small *et al.*, 2007). The superiority of memory - work compared to data collection methods, such as focus groups, is how it is simultaneously a data-collection and data-analysis tool. The rich insights and interpretations of the topic under scrutiny are grounded in the collaborative discussions about the individual written contributions (Crawford *et al.*, 1990). Here, the group members who discussed the topic of hospitality careers were academics who had experienced previous long hospitality careers at various hierarchical levels in clubs, bars, restaurants and hotels before they transitioned to hospitality education.

Semi-structured interviews were chosen as the second data collection technique suited to the theoretical framing of the study. It is a method favoured both by interpretative (DeVault and McCoy, 2003) and career researchers as it allows individuals to tell their own stories. Interviews took place with long-term employees in nine motels and hotels with a variety of quality classifications and number of bedrooms (65 to 350 rooms). Roles held at the time of interview included general manager, chef, assistant housekeeper, telephonist, kitchen porter and room attendant. Many participants



had work experience in Australia as well as New Zealand, seven had further hospitality work experience in Europe, Africa or Asia. The career length of participants was between 16 and 41 years, averaging 28.5 years. Questions focused on the details of individual career experiences and participants' reasons for remaining in the sector. A list of indicative interview questions appears in the Appendix. The first author's prior lengthy hospitality career (25 years), at various hierarchical levels across different European countries, helped to establish a good relationship with the interviewees. The interviews, which on average were an hour long, were recorded and transcribed by a professional secretarial service.

Purposive sampling allowed specific criteria to be established for selecting participants for the memory-work sessions and interviews (Merriam, 2009). Although a minimum career length of 10 years was required, in the actual study participants' careers averaged 25 years. In gathering data, saturation point is reached when further data collection fails to elicit new information or insights (Morse, 1995). Guest *et al.* (2006) observe that when the sample population and research scope are clearly defined, between six and twelve interviews are sufficient to achieve saturation point. In this study, following the three memory-work sessions, data saturation appeared to be achieved by the tenth interview. Nine further interviews took place to allow exploration of demographic differences at a later stage. Table 1 summarises the 31 participants' gender, age ranges and ethnicity.

TABLE 1 HERE

**Table 1.** Demographic background of participants

### *Data analysis*

In the study, data analysis was based on Winker and Degele's (2011) model of intersectional analysis. In the analytical process, the first step commenced with establishing common industry performance norms and values from the participant's accounts of their careers, reflecting the focus on organisational processes, rather than individual identities. Examples of workplace norms included how a hospitality career is normally expected to proceed, aged and gendered occupational standards, and hierarchical and social norms. In the participants' accounts, deviations, omissions and variances from the norms highlighted areas that merited further investigation (Mooney *et al.*, 2014). During the second stage of analysis, the social structures that affect hospitality careers (including entry barriers, development opportunities, promotional and transfer processes) were identified and coded. Extensive cross-referencing from the literature highlighted their relevance as critical 'markers' in career entry, development and longevity (Table 2).

TABLE 2 HERE

**Table 2.** Examples of social structures from the data analysis cross-referenced with hospitality literature

The third stage of analysis involved plotting the principal intersections between the occupational social norms in the workplace and institutional structures, such as promotional or transfer processes. The intersections that occurred most frequently highlighted critical career 'events', which potentially had a major influence on career longevity. These will be outlined and interpreted in the following section.

## Findings and discussion

The data analysis at structural and societal level exposed the boundaries that enable and constrain entry and progression opportunities in hospitality. The focus on how individuals “cross the boundaries” revealed the “social context” (Inkson *et al.*, 2012, p. 334) of hospitality careers. The findings indicated that lengthy careers consisted of three approximate phases:

- (1) Career entry
- (2) Career development
- (3) Career consolidation

A discussion on career longevity will follow an outline of the career phases, and a model (Figure 1) will support the conclusions drawn. Quotes from participants will accompany the findings and discussion (pseudonyms have been used to maintain subject anonymity) to illustrate the points being made.

### *Phase 1: Career entry*

During the first phase, participants suggested that the absence of entry barriers was a career enabler. People appeared to enter the industry because it was convenient, although differing meanings of ‘convenient’ emerged from individual accounts. For some it was the mere fact that a job (any job) was available, for others the job was nearby or fitted in with other commitments in their lives. A significant aspect of convenience was that previous hospitality experience was generally not required for work at the lower positions, for example, kitchen hand or room attendant. Participants considered such jobs to be freely available and not too challenging:

I think everyone went into hospitality because it is easy. Almost anybody can enter a hospitality career. It doesn't at the beginning of the career demand very much of anything ... and once you are in you can go anywhere. (James, memory-work discussion)

As long as you got there, it didn't matter what state you were in ... it's easy work – it's not too hard. (Dylan, memory-work discussion)

Participants considered work convenient for subjective reasons that suited their personal circumstances; for example, if it was available part-time or at night or located nearby. Sometimes, it was the only work opportunity available, for example, this business graduate:

I had tried all sorts of banks and whatever, but nobody was hiring. There was just no jobs until my friend, came along with this opportunity. By this stage, I thought "Oh, I'll sweep floors". I had no desire or drive to get into hotels but I got in and worked on the night audit. (William, Executive Assistant Manager, interview participant)

Reflecting the fact that the New Zealand part-time workforce is 74% female (Parker and Arrowsmith, 2012), the majority of women who were interviewed explained that they sought employment in the hospitality sector because it offered flexible working shifts that fitted in with their family commitments. Part-time work was available at non-standard working hours, early in the morning, late at night or during the weekend. One participant who had started working part-time as a cleaner explained how fulfilling it was to return to paid employment for a few hours each week:

It was about four hours Saturdays and Sundays cleaning, and I loved it. I loved the physical side too. (Molly, Operations Manager, interview participant)

However, although jobs at the lower levels were easy to find, lack of qualifications proved constraining for individuals who sought higher positions at career entry point. Interviewees indicated that once appearance and language criteria were met, specific skills, experience or basic qualifications were required for clerical or reception positions.

#### *Phase 2: Career development*

In the second phase, analysis revealed four career enablers that helped career progression: possessing or gaining qualifications; undergoing training and development; receiving the backing from influential mentors; and demonstrating flexibility (often through geographical mobility). Although it is possible to have a successful hospitality career without a degree in New Zealand (Cox, 2015), it is less common in other countries (Kong *et al.*, 2012). The majority of the staff in this study who did not progress beyond entry levels of hospitality work were not qualified at tertiary level and managers without a degree expressed anxiety about further progression. Training in hospitality is frequently lacking (Solnet *et al.*, 2015); therefore, access to training and development opportunities were significant enablers for promotion. Many participants believed that they received little or no formal training, they learned the skills that allowed them to advance from on the job training provided by co-workers and supervisors who were interested in pushing them to achieve.

Social competencies appeared to facilitate boundary crossing and access to developmental opportunities. In most careers, role models and mentors are important (Sullivan and Baruch, 2009), however, they are essential in the hospitality sector, due to

the high vocational mobility and varied career path options. Middle-level managers, such as Levi, explained how industry mentors controlled the career boundaries and assisted (or prevented) an individual's progression to the next level.

The General Manager hired me to work when I started my first hotel job. He put time and effort into me and made sure I got the training that I needed to start succeeding. (Levi, Operations Manager, interview participant)

Participants frequently described harsh managers who were controlling and exploitative, for example, Samuel reminisced about his experience as a junior manager:

My General Manager, had a number of nicknames, which I couldn't repeat to you – he was a complete and utter b\*\*\*\*\*d! ) Samuel, General Manager, interview participant)

Workers advance in their career if they can demonstrate their mastery of career competencies to mentors (Wang, 2013). Participants had a longer tenure in one place or moved to other properties within the same employing organisation, when mentors were encouraging and developed their subordinates. As observed previously, adaptability is a competency required in most industries, especially hospitality (Kong *et al.*, 2012) and participants' moves through different departments ensured flexibility. Participants who had worked variously in the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand considered geographical mobility was forced:

The career is just that whole pathway where you operate with different jobs within the hospitality continuum and I certainly believe it has a culture of deliberate transition [agreement from group]. "You've been here too long, you need to move", I've been told that – you got six to

eight to twelve months as assistant manager and then you need to move on, “go on try this”. (Luke, memory-work discussion)

Interviewees described accepting definite ‘hardship’ transfers to undesirable places that facilitated development opportunities:

I wanted to be growing all the time. I saw all these as suitable moves, maybe not always perfect moves but suitable moves. (Paul, General Manager, interview participant)

Participants unable or unwilling to move, when requested, found that their careers stalled. The following quote expresses the anxiety about staying ‘too long’ in one position:

In the seven years I’d been there, there had been seven changes of ownership. There’d been one every year and I felt like I’d really stayed too long in the one place. (Sophie, Front Office Manager, interview participant)

The constant moves of senior management also disrupted employees' mentoring relationships, reducing job security and development opportunities for many participants. Interviewees spoke of the changes caused by new management:

There are different General Manager styles, some come in and just change, change, and change. Everyone is unsettled. (Molly, Operations Manager, interview participant)

The hotel at that stage was losing quarter of a million a year and I said “there will be a different set of standards”. At the end of the first year, of the 70 original staff that were there, I’d replaced 46. (John, former General Manager/Consultant, interview participant)

The following memory-work discussion suggests how the lack of support for newly promoted managers became a considerable career boundary, leading to burnout and disengagement:

It is interesting how you talk about yourself. You seem to be saying that you got promoted to that position because you had the skills and you are then saying I had to discipline hire or fire and then provide leadership and that was the part you were uncomfortable with. (Dylan, memory-work discussion)

Oh you know – we had some good times but I’d do things differently, very differently. When you look back, you can say that there was no extra support there [for a newly appointed Head Chef]. You were on your own to do whatever you could do, and that was it. There was no extra training so you could come up to speed. (Sabastian, memory-work discussion)

### *Phase 3: Career consolidation and career longevity*

In this third phase, the findings suggested career consolidation occurred when workers decided not to seek employment opportunities outside the sector. Not all participants were satisfied with their status or remuneration; however, those factors were not sufficiently important to cause them to leave their hospitality careers. Three positive



elements emerged as highly significant for workers' career consolidation and, thus, career longevity: the achievement of professional respect and autonomy; the perception of variety and task complexity in their jobs; and thirdly, strong workplace social connectivity (Mooney, 2014).

### **Reasons for career longevity**

#### *Respect and autonomy*

The majority of participants considered that devotion to the job and a passion for hospitality work was necessary to gain respect from one's peers. In the organisational literature, the 'ideal' worker' (Acker, 2006) is totally committed to organisational goals. McDowell *et al.* (2007), in their London hotel study, consider the close relationships between management and long-term employees to be a political collusion, which pressures new entrants into achieving management's vision and goals. However, Poulston (2015) somewhat less cynically argues that passion is an integral part of the ideal hospitality worker's personality. The current study supports this premise, the findings suggest that respect from peers came when the participants' work contribution was deemed to be professional. The mutual regard is indicated by the next quote:

My boss said "I trust you"; I know I have the respect but also for my sense of humour and good personality. (Matthew, Kitchen Porter, interview participant)

The esteem offered by co-workers and repeat customers validated the workers' entitlement to a professional identity. To some extent it buffered the negative views about hospitality careers experienced by the great majority of participants. For example, one long term restaurant worker explained:

When I was waitressing, for most of my career, I found, in New Zealand particularly, that it's very undervalued, and people don't see it as a career. They don't see waitressing as a profession and then new people coming in to work don't see it as a profession too. (Lucy, Motel Receptionist, interview participant)

With respect came the freedom to make decisions, and well regarded workers in lower positions had a high degree of autonomy. Newcomers were not warmly welcomed and respect had to be earned. However, respect was not universally demonstrated to all long-term workers. Some participants felt that housekeeping or kitchen work was not well regarded. Workers from both departments frequently described warm bonds and altruistic behaviour between colleagues, supporting the findings of previous studies about the co-workers in 'dirty' jobs associated with physical or moral taint (Simpson *et al.*, 2012), for example, jobs such as room attendant that involve dealing with bodily waste.

#### *Occupational variety, complexity and mobility*

Hospitality workers' perception of control and variety can positively influence their desire to remain with their current employer (McPhail *et al.*, 2015). A significant insight gained from the study was that interviewees at all hierarchical levels considered their work to be multifaceted and interesting. This motivated them to remain working long-term in hospitality.

When I started here [as a waitress] I knew that I was going to stay here. I didn't want to do anything else, I didn't want to go to an office job, and I just needed to be out. (Andrea, Restaurant Manager, interview participant)

This is a significant finding because while interesting work is associated with managers' job satisfaction (Mkono, 2010), it is not generally linked with what are perceived to be the lowest quality jobs in hospitality at entry level, such as room attendant (Santero-Sanchez *et al.*, 2015). In this study, positive interaction with co-workers, surmounting complex challenges and in guest-facing departments, the management of dynamic customer relationships, all contributed to workers' job satisfaction. Workers engaged in diverse kinds of work described the motivation they gained by enacting their professional identify. Lauren, who had worked variously as cleaner, room attendant and kitchen assistant, before changing to her current position over many years explained:

I think the laundry is my best opportunity – my best job. Because it is a demanding job, that is what I like. I like the demanding. Yes, I like the challenge from other people. (Lauren, Laundry Supervisor, interview participant)

The opportunity to change job function contributed to the perception of variety. Participants changed their lower level jobs for purposes other than advancement. Their positive perception of opportunities, developmental or otherwise, contributed to career longevity.

You've got more opportunities, you know what I mean? You've got rapport with the kitchen. I can transfer to another department, even porter- I can do Front Desk Porter! (Matthew, Kitchen Porter, interview participant)

*Relationships with co-workers, guests and managers*

A further significant finding of the study was the pronounced effect of positive workplace relations on career longevity. The social wellbeing of participants was complex – it involved interaction between diverse groups, teamwork, and respect from co-workers and guests. The perception among participants was that hospitality insiders had many acquaintanceships across the sector that spanned countries. Close relationships fuelled their decision to stay working in hospitality:

The industry is so small. I've never gone to a hotel, ever, that I haven't known someone either by default or worked with or know someone that knows them, even across countries. (Justin, Sales Director, interview participant)

How long we've been here together working with other staff as well, we are just so bonded together, we are as a family in here. (Grace, Assistant Housekeeper, interview participant)

The literature confirms the importance of emotional labour for meaningful guest/employee interactions. They are not only important for the employing organisation, but hospitality employees gain considerable intrinsic satisfaction from relationships with guests (Poulston, 2015; Wang and Huang, 2014), in particular meaningful relationships with repeat customers (Shani *et al.*, 2014). In the study, employees enjoyed their ability to create positive experiences for guests, which contributed to their sense of professional identity.

You need an ability to connect with people. I will stay until I retire, I keep saying they'll carry me out in a coffin, but I do hope I retire first. (Scarlett, Motel Receptionist, interview participant)

For back of house staff and managers with little or no guest contact, validation from guests declined in significance as indicators of their own professionalism. Tensions between management and employees on how to treat guests professionally emerged from the findings. Disagreements caused people to leave individual properties, though not the industry, as this quote reveals:

I haven't left because I hated the job or what I do. I've left because I hated the people I've worked with. I've always gone and become a chef somewhere else, and I get back to the passion part of it. (Daniel, Executive Chef, interview participant)

#### *The hospitality career longevity model*

As observed in the introduction, career boundaries are fluid and dynamic. Occupational characteristics profoundly influence career boundaries in specific sectors (Gunz and Mayrhofer, 2011). In this study, the multi-level analysis was particularly valuable as it revealed the relationships between societal structures and organisational procedures, which influenced individuals' decisions to remain in hospitality careers. The Career Longevity Model (Figure 1) indicates how the three phases of a hospitality career contribute to long-term careers in New Zealand. In Phase 1, there are few entry barriers and the absence of skills or qualification requirements make it a convenient career to enter. In Phase 2, career enablers and boundaries regulate career development. Barriers are lack of training opportunities and the absence of influential mentors; where these are lacking senior managers can block development opportunities and fail to facilitate geographical development for competent individuals. Fixed location creates a boundary in isolated areas, as there are fewer career possibilities than in urban centres. In Phase 3, interviewees who remained in hospitality careers accepted their career boundaries. Promotional opportunities were the catalyst for many moves; however, life-style

reasons also prompted boundary crossing. Close social bonds, a professional identity, autonomy, and the belief that their jobs held variety and challenge ensured people remained in hospitality careers long-term.

FIGURE 1 HERE

**Figure 1.** Hospitality career longevity model (Mooney, 2014)

### **Conclusions**

As observed in the introduction, the hospitality workforce is not homogeneous (Duncan *et al.*, 2013), yet the contemporary concept of a ‘successful’ hospitality career remains stubbornly associated with the Western notion of a traditional, linear career trajectory. The previous discussion indicates the prevailing occupational norms in the New Zealand hospitality sector, which encompassed hospitality career progression, human resource management (HRM) processes and working conditions in the sector. The findings indicate that the pronounced vocational mobility of hospitality workers render occupational boundaries more fluid than in other sectors and suggest the career structures of the geographically isolated New Zealand hospitality sector are similar to those in other contexts (for example, Hausknecht *et al.*, 2009; Houran *et al.*, 2012; Kong *et al.*, 2012; Wang, 2013; Yamashita and Uenoyama, 2006). A principal finding of this study is that career longevity in hospitality is *not solely* dependent on career progression, thus contradicting the perception that only managers have careers and workers at entry-level positions undertake a succession of temporary jobs. Individuals in supportive environments enjoyed complex satisfying careers even when working at what are considered to be the lowest positions in hospitality. Workers who did not seek promotion remained in workplaces where they had respect and autonomy, occupational variety and good relationships with management and co-workers. It would be

misleading to suggest that career progression and development are not important factors; however, they do not fully explain career longevity.

### *Theoretical implications*

The previous discussion suggests that strong social connectivity is a significant contributor to an individual's lengthy hospitality career. The conclusions of this study are not unique to hospitality; there are wider sociological implications. This paper emphasises the importance for employees in the service sector to feel they 'belong' and are socially included at work. Here, the concept of 'social connection' is distinctly different from social and networking career competencies (Gunz and Mayrhofer, 2011) that enable individuals to attain higher positions in the hierarchy. Strong social connection is created by a fusion of complex relationships with managers, co-workers and guests, ultimately creating the sense of a respected professional identity and job satisfaction. It is significant that all participants considered their jobs complex and rewarding. As observed previously, job complexity is associated with managers' job satisfaction (Wolfe and Kim, 2013), but not often linked with entry-level positions in the service sector. In New Zealand, the combined effect of low entry barriers for new entrants and low financial compensation for positions below executive level confers an inferior status on hospitality careers. Therefore, workplace relationships assume great importance in validating workers' sense of professional identity.

High trust relationships between management and employees are linked to the delivery of superior service and higher job satisfaction (McPhail *et al.*, 2015). In this study, guest-facing participants in the study gained intrinsic reward from their long-term relations with regular guests. Shani *et al.* (2014) suggest that supportive management relationships are particularly important for employees who regularly deal with repeat customers. Such authentic service encounters require greater emotional labour from

employees, but ultimately motivate employees to remain in the hospitality sector. For non-customer contact workers, the findings illustrate how a positive social connection with direct supervisors and co-workers reinforced workers' sense of professional identity, particularly in departments or jobs regarded as morally or physically tainted or 'dirty' (Simpson *et al.*, 2012) by those outside the sector.

### *Practical implications*

The study findings that hospitality jobs can be complex and satisfying at all hierarchical ranks holds practical implications for HR managers in the service sector. The benefits of a stable and motivated workforce are well documented: increased work engagement, sense of autonomy and job satisfaction for employees, with associated productivity benefits for the employing organisation (Davidson *et al.*, 2011; McPhail *et al.*, 2015). However, the norm of high managerial mobility appears to negatively affect career longevity at organisational and individual level; the frequent moves of functional and general managers disrupt social connectivity and development. Solnet *et al.* (2015) warn that the both the reduction and outsourcing of the HR role across the sector has profound negative implications for coaching, training and mentoring – all elements which significantly influence career longevity. Increasingly, coaching and mentoring responsibilities will fall upon junior managers, who not only lack the experience necessary to deal with complex HRM issues (Minett *et al.*, 2009), but themselves fail to develop the 'soft' management skills required to support employees with jobs that include a high emotional labour content (Shani *et al.*, 2014).

To increase career longevity, hospitality employers should focus on stable workplace arrangements that recognise employees' skills and professionalism. The global trend to reduce labour costs by employing contingent minimum wage workers, for example, in Australia (Knox, 2014), rather than skilled employees, reduces social



connection among co-workers and dilutes the hospitality professional identity. This study suggests that in New Zealand long-term employees frequently arrive into a hospitality career by default, as hourly paid workers. The industry needs to improve the induction and socialisation process for such new entrants, as the dismissive attitudes shown to new entrants by management and employees has considerable negative repercussions for career longevity. Undoubtedly, many hospitality organisations in New Zealand demonstrate good HR practices, but the study suggests that long shifts, excessive workloads, and exploitative rates of pay, were frequently experienced by participants. The lack of consistent training for entry level workers demonstrated across the sector (Luo and Milne, 2013) replicates poor United Kingdom and Australian hospitality orientation practices (Solnet *et al.*, 2015). Many hospitality undergraduates decide on alternative career if their initial work encounters are negative (Wang and Huang, 2014), however, induction and socialisation programmes facilitate the smooth assimilation of newcomers (Song *et al.*, 2015). Managers should realise that the psychological need of new entrants to feel socially included is as important as basic task training in the introduction phase. This study indicates that undecided newcomers persevere because convenient working hours and helpful employers support their lifestyle, study or caregiving choices. If Human Resource Managers focus on building, and measuring high levels of job satisfaction among their employees (McPhail *et al.*, 2015), workers are more likely be retained long-term in the service sector.

#### *Limitations and future research*

The study contributes detailed empirical knowledge about hospitality career paths in New Zealand. A limitation of this qualitative and local research is the small sample size and participants' experiences should be generalised outside this context with caution. However, the study findings support previous quantitative hospitality research in other national contexts and fill in some of the acknowledged gaps in survey-based data (Wang

and Huang, 2014). The majority of participants spent lengthy periods of their hospitality career in countries other than New Zealand (Table 1) and their career histories support the notion of similar hospitality career paths in other Western locales, such as the United States or Europe. The complex variables influencing career progression outlined in the career longevity model (Figure 1) could possibly be further tested by quantitative investigative research. The full qualitative analysis revealed that socially ascribed meanings about age, gender, ethnicity and occupational class, influenced hospitality career progression and career longevity in New Zealand, but are beyond the scope of this paper to explore. Additional qualitative and quantitative research on age, gender, and ethnicity dimensions is required to fill in the remaining gaps in our knowledge about careers in the service sector.

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## **Appendix**

### **Indicative interview questions**

1. How long have you been working here?
2. What was your first position in your hospitality career?
3. What were your motivations for entering a hospitality career?
4. Can you please explain to me how your career in hospitality has developed?
5. Why do you remain in a hospitality career?
6. What aspects of your career in hospitality are the most and least enjoyable?
7. What are your future career intentions?

Table 1.  
Demographic background of participants

Demographic characteristic		Number
Gender	Female	16
	Male	15
Ethnicity	NZ European	14
	Other European ethnicity origin	10
	NZ Maori	1
	Pasifika	5
	Asian	1
Age group	21–30 years	1
	31–40 years	3
	41–50 years	12
	51–60 years	12
	61–70 years	3
Average length of hospitality career	Years	25
Countries where participant was employed in hospitality	New Zealand only	9
	At least two different countries	15
	Three different countries	6
	Four or more different countries	1

Table 2.

Examples of social structures from the data analysis cross-referenced with hospitality literature

Hospitality organisational process	Literature	Prevailing themes
Hierarchical structure	Adler and Adler (2004) Hausknecht <i>et al.</i> (2009) Kensbock <i>et al.</i> (2013) Ladkin (2011) Minett <i>et al.</i> (2009) Onsøyen <i>et al.</i> (2009) Sherman (2007) Solnet <i>et al.</i> (2015)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bureaucratic hierarchical structure</li> <li>• Occupational segregation /stereotyping based on age, gender, ethnicity</li> </ul>
Hospitality compensation and conditions	Baum (2007, 2013, 2015) Davidson <i>et al.</i> (2011) Kusluvan <i>et al.</i> (2010) Marco-Lajara and Úbeda-García (2013) McPhail <i>et al.</i> (2015) Minett <i>et al.</i> (2009) Poulston and Jenkins (2013) Santero-Sanchez <i>et al.</i> (2015) Wildes (2008)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poor pay at lower levels</li> <li>• Gendered wage gap</li> <li>• Contingent work</li> <li>• Poor working conditions</li> </ul>
Hospitality operational structures	Choi <i>et al.</i> (2013) Cleveland <i>et al.</i> (2007) Joppe (2012) McDowell <i>et al.</i> (2007) Okumus <i>et al.</i> (2010) Ryzik <i>et al.</i> (2012) Yaduma <i>et al.</i> (2015)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unsocial work hours</li> <li>• Flexible hours</li> <li>• Seasonality aspects</li> </ul>
Joining process	Akrivos <i>et al.</i> (2007) Buonocore (2010) Chang and Tse (2015) Kong <i>et al.</i> (2015) Lub <i>et al.</i> (2012) Wang (2013) Song <i>et al.</i> (2015)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low entry barriers</li> <li>• Presentational labour requirements for front line jobs</li> <li>• Qualifications, experience required for above entry level jobs</li> </ul>
Promotional structure	Akrivos <i>et al.</i> (2007) Buonocore (2010) Cleveland <i>et al.</i> (2007) Clevenger and Singh (2013) Kong <i>et al.</i> (2011, 2012) Luo and Milne (2013) McDowell <i>et al.</i> (2007) Ryzik <i>et al.</i> (2012) Wang (2013) Yamashita and Uenoyama (2006)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Norm of vocational mobility</li> <li>• Career progression linear</li> <li>• Networking competencies required for progression</li> <li>• Breath of experience across functions required for progression</li> <li>• Self-directed career competencies</li> <li>• Mentors required for career progression</li> </ul>

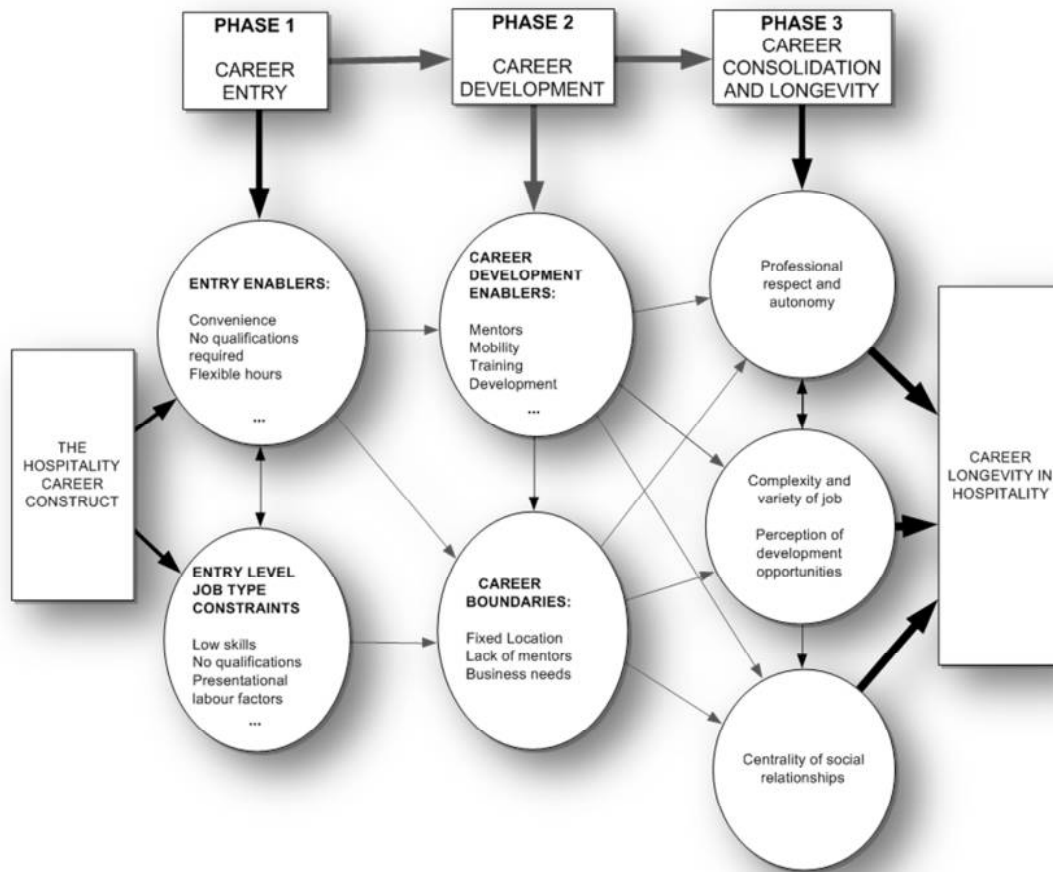


Figure 1. Hospitality career longevity model