

Development of occupations in the new entrepreneurial working life situation: an example of a chef's profession

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Abstract

Nowadays, working life has changed, demanding a more entrepreneurial attitude. For this reason, the European Commission and national governments are demanding an increase of entrepreneurial spirit in European countries. Like many other professions, the chef's profession has changed as well: ordinary cooks of the socialist era who made food according to certain standards have become innovators, creative workers, entrepreneurs, actors in TV shows, front-line staff, instructors, sales persons, etc. Chefs have to be highly innovative in order to survive in the very competitive business environment. It becomes more difficult for restaurant practitioners to be creative with food products. The number of restaurants increases constantly, which means that competition grows rapidly. Therefore the "uniqueness" of a restaurant (e.g. cooking style) does not endure for long. The importance and consideration of hype and restaurant themes by the practitioners becomes increasingly important to excite the customers. Entrepreneurial spirit plays a key role as a driving force of innovation, speeding up the venture creation process, and producing new goods and services. In these changed conditions the questions have arisen, "How entrepreneurial are chefs actually?", "How important are entrepreneurial skills considered to be by chefs?", "What kind of knowledge is required by business starters?", "Can universities support acquiring knowledge and skills by organising short-term courses for business starters?"

This paper aims to identify the importance and necessity of entrepreneurial skills in the chef occupation nowadays in Estonia and the extent to which they evaluate themselves as entrepreneurs. It also aims to

find out what kind of knowledge is required by business starters and the impact of entrepreneurship training on starting a business, according to experiences of the Estonian Entrepreneurship University of Applied Sciences (EUAS).

The approach used mixed research methods, both qualitative and quantitative. The research on the chefs' study was qualitative, relying on semi-structured interviews with 11 outstanding chefs and experts in Estonia, while the research on entrepreneurship training was quantitative. The survey about the impact of entrepreneurship training was carried out by a phone questionnaire. The total number of people participating in the questionnaire was 160. The respondents for the telephone questionnaire were a subset of those who participated in the training, according to their gender and the county they came from. Research results indicated that all 11 respondents pointed out the necessity of entrepreneurial skills and consider themselves entrepreneurial-minded and open to innovation. The impact of the *Base Training for Starting Entrepreneurs* course on participants' activity in the labour market and in entrepreneurship was positive; 39% of participants of the base course had started their own business.

Keywords: Occupations, entrepreneurial skills, chefs, professionalism

Introduction

The changes that have taken place in professional life have led to changes in both the occupations and the social positions of professions. Professionals are not only good specialists in their field (in the field of their subject or activity), but they also have to be innovators, managers, team workers, salespersons, communicators, etc. The professionalisation of occupations often goes hand in hand with business-like imagery and business-like competencies (Noordegraaf, 2007). Professionals need to think and act as entrepreneurs, even if they are not the owners of the companies. That is, professionals not only need to know the working processes, but also the organisation processes.

As in the case of entrepreneurs, continual learning and development based on experience and action ("learning by doing") is characteristic of professionals. In the light of changes in society, the economy and the labour

market, countries have determined to integrate entrepreneurship in their school and education system. The number of courses, and the number of participants in entrepreneurship learning programs and training, has increased. Moreover, starting a business is supported by governments and funds. The increased interest in entrepreneurship education, as well as in supporting the start-up business, is motivated by the intended results of entrepreneurship: the creation of new sustainable businesses and economic growth.

But in spite of a considerable amount of money spent on these programs, there is very little research of the impact of programs on the macro level. There is still no precise knowledge which kind of entrepreneurship education gives which results (Rasmussen, 2013). The questions are, “What kind of competences are needed according to the opinion of professionals, and what knowledge or competences are actually taught?”, “What is considered to be the most useful knowledge in training programs by business starters?” “Can entrepreneurial competences be taught?”, “Is there any positive impact of short-term entrepreneurship courses on starting up your own business?”

Unfortunately, in Estonia, research about the outcome of entrepreneurship education and different types of entrepreneurship training is practically non-existent. Since 2008, many runs of the *Base Training for Starting Entrepreneurs* course have been carried out with the support of Enterprise Estonia (EAS) with a considerable number of participants. For example, in 2011 and 2012, approximately 100 runs of the course, with a total of 1,744 participants, were carried out.

The study addresses the gap in carrying out the training and getting feedback of the results of the training in the long term. This research has been designed as an example of the chef’s profession, and to generate findings and conclusions that can be used to educate and prepare starting professionals (i.e. students) for the hospitality industry, or maybe even other service-oriented industries.

Theoretical background

Changes in the professional life and skills in the work of chefs

It is possible to see horizontal development in the chefs' professional life. The study of 20 *haute cuisine* restaurant chefs by Surlemont, Chantrain, Nlemvo and Johnson (2005) showed that only 7 chefs out of 20 focused only on cooking, while the rest had other businesses as well, e.g. they ran restaurants at hotels, wrote and sold cookbooks, performed on television, cooking shows etc. Nowadays the chefs' roles (Roosipõld, 2011), in addition to food-making, are related to:

- management work and organisation: leaders, delegators, entrepreneurs, organisers, motivators of the employees, architects, members of the team
- marketing and service: salespersons, performers, product developers, communicators, customer relations administrators, service providers, head of international relations, diplomats
- culture: writers, actors, orators, artists, bearers of food's cultural values, creators of positive spirit
- organisational ethics: quality controllers, hygienists, assistants to colleagues, customers
- theory-based research: researchers, analysts, information technologists, lifelong learners

How do they manage these various roles?

Gehrels (2007) claims that the way a management position in the hospitality industry, i.e. in restaurant management, is fulfilled and the degree of success in fulfilling it is correlated to a combination of factors. In a formula it is presented like this:

$Eex + Edu + Wex + Cha = Pos$, where:

Eex = Early experiences relating to generating "hospitality awareness"

Edu = Education

Wex = Work experience

Cha = Characteristics of the particular professional (value systems and driving powers)

Pos = Position fulfilment and success

Managers are thus satisfied when they have early work experience in the field of hospitality in their life before study at the school. They appreciate

education that is bound to their work and inspiring learning experience related to the profession. They believe that they are successful if they have such values as “orientating to guests”, “enjoying work” and “having an urge to learn” (Gehrels, 2007).

Nowadays education does not mean only formal learning but it also includes informal ways of learning such as networking. Networking with customers was mentioned in the study by Ottenbacher and Harrington (2007), which showed that the chefs often get new ideas from the customers. Customers increasingly appreciate a good relationship between price and quality, the safety and healthiness of food, and ethical service. This trend indicates that the customer has become a co-expert who knows what healthy food is, knows different national cuisines, etc. This, in turn, requires the chefs to co-operate in the networking of competencies, and to co-operate with both clients and other professionals (nutritionists, doctors, cooks from other countries, etc.). The hotel and catering sectors have started co-operating more closely with tourism, entertainment, and commercial and social spheres. However, this involves crossing the borders, and makes the borders unclear. Chefs need to be specialists in interpreting the social reality. This is demonstrated by competences, such as public speaking skills, analytical thinking and willingness to travel (Birdir & Pearson, 2000).

The reading list for networks is very diverse. From social networks to organisational networks and beyond, networks are an emerging and developing research area which grasps many disciplines, for example, organisation theory and organisational behaviour, strategic management, economic studies, hygienic services, public management, sociology, communication, computer science, psychology, etc (Provan & Fish, 2007). The concept is not entirely clear and it is used differently. Some people who study business, social science or the like prefer the words *partnership* or *strategic union*, *inter-organisational relation*, *coalition*, *inter-business conclusion* or *concordance*. Despite the differences, almost all interpretations relate to social interaction, relations, connection, cooperation, collective activity, and trust (Provan & Fish, 2007). Networks are coordinated and organised cooperation mechanisms, which have risen beside hierarchy and marketing (Jackson & Stainsby, 2000). Networking appears in technical, economic, organisational, and cultural changes (Castells, 1996). Networks are purposefully formed cohesive forms of cooperation between two or more people. A network is

used as a measure to evaluate people's behavioural characteristics (Ostgaard & Birley, 1996). Participants in the networks are cooperative and coordinate service, solve problems, produce knowledge and innovation, and obtain resources. Network partners are equal, there is no hierarchy, and leadership is based on cooperation (Agranoff & McGuire, 2001). The research of Goerdel (2005) shows that company managers, who show initiative in networking, are more likely to perceive the success of the organisation than those who do not consider these contacts important.

Learning in networks from the organisation groups is like learning in a united group. If through interaction the group's behaviour or cognitive structure changes, then it is safe to say that this group is the "learner", not only the individual organisation inside the group. In this case, it is safe to say that the network has learned something. Learning in networks is achieved by individuals, groups or organisations, which belong to the network (Knight, 2002).

Koponen (2006) highlighted the changes that have taken place in the work of the catering industry. The most important one is increasing globalisation, which manifests itself in the influence of foreign catering trends and an increasing percentage of foreign customers. Thus, a chef's work is internationalising, which in turn requires such competences as knowing national cuisines, including knowing how to prepare, season and present different ethnic foods, and knowing different national cultures (Birdir & Pearson, 2000).

Koponen (2006) claims that chefs are required to have a wide range of competencies, because technological and digital progress in catering has made it possible to access data about previously ordered food in databases. Such data can be processed to provide the food preferred by the customer; the customer can also order food over the internet, and have it delivered at home or at the workplace. Using the internet as a research tool can also be regarded a new competency, e.g. for statistical processing of customer survey data (Birdir & Pearson, 2000).

Chefs not only need to know working processes but also organisation processes. This is shown by Birdir and Pearson (2000) in their research, which identifies the new competencies, like management skills (leadership,

delegating, organising, motivating employees, etc.). Balazs (2002) highlights that chefs are able to take on the dual role of entrepreneur and creator at the same time.

From different surveys conducted about chefs, it is possible to conclude that the open-context expertise necessary for a chef includes communication, language, and public speaking skills, creativity, innovation, creating a “good spirit” and putting it all into practice (Turpeinen, 2006), as well as flexibility, collaboration skills, readiness to change (Koponen, 2006), ability to help others and to keep one’s ego and emotions under control (Birdir & Pearson, 2000).

The knowledge of ancient craftsmen’s traditions may be considered one of the chef’s production-technical competencies (Balazs, 2002). At the same time, work management in a catering company requires a strict military system, which is related to normative competences, such as being knowledgeable about food hygiene and work safety. There are a thousand optimised details in the kitchen that are not related to improvisation and inspiration. The formalised and standardised phase follows the creative phase, and only after that an optimal product can be developed. On the other hand, the importance of aesthetic skills has increased, which can be seen in the style perception and appreciating the work environment (Turpeinen, 2009) and ethical knowledge (Jaszay, 2005). The study by Ottenbacher and Harrington (2007) shows that developing innovative dishes is very important in a chef’s work because it guarantees staying competitive and helps the restaurants to stay in business for a long time. Hegarty and O’Mahony (2001) call gastronomy an art, which means that chefs have to be innovative and have innovative competences. Knuuttila (2006) writes in her book *Art of popular cooking* that food preparation as an art has been constantly changing and it is related to the mutual impact of culture and nature, and people and meanings. According to Lévi-Strauss (1979), cooking is culturising the nature, as well as determination outside culture. The kitchen has a strong cultural significance, e.g. ethnic restaurants not only provide food, but the milieu, environment and music are important as well. The socio-cultural environment is also important: who you eat with, where you eat, who prepared the food (Mertanen, 2007). Thus the chef must be competent in interpreting culture. The chef’s role as an architect, described in the study by Balazs (2002), is related to designing the organisational structure, creating

control and reward systems; for that, production-technical, normative, as well as innovative competencies are necessary.

Koponen (2006) claims that predicting the need for training in catering will become important, which requires predicting the changes in professional life, since the training has to correspond to quick changes. It is necessary to continue adult education, and migrant labour force training; increasing internationalisation requires language skills, tolerance, teaching of tolerance, knowing different cultures, teamwork, self-conduct, problem-solving skills, entrepreneurial training, business management, product development (e.g. new products for elderly people), computer studies, IT training and, of course, teaching innovation. Continuing learning at the workplace becomes increasingly important.

To what extent can we talk about the chef as a professional? It was concluded from the study that the existence of a theoretical knowledge base is necessary in the chef's profession. In 2003, a project was carried out at Haaga Vocational College that aimed at exploring the development of teaching cooking at the school. The results indicated that chefs need to have good cooking skills, and they have to be able to use the basic knowledge in practice. In addition to practical experience, theoretical knowledge was also highlighted, because the chefs have to know the theoretical rules of cooking. Theoretical knowledge should be strong in dietetics, microbiology, chemistry, and physics (Turpeinen, 2006). The study by Heikkinen (2004) showed that many Finnish chefs have higher education in tourism, catering and housekeeping (restonome training), which confirms the value of the theoretical knowledge base in the chef's profession. Gehrels (2007) highlighted that furthermore an important responsibility would be put on schools' management, curriculum designers and educators to explicitly be aware of the responsibility they have to offer a realistic but also inspiring learning experience related to the hospitality manager profession.

Johnson, Surlmont, Nicod, and Revaz (2005, cited in Turpeinen, 2009) studied the restaurant management skills of 36 Michelin-star chefs in Belgium, France, Switzerland and Great Britain. Differences between two types of training – apprentice's training and academic training – emerged. It was concluded that apprentice's training provides more practical job skills, and academic training more managerial skills and business expertise. The study showed that the chefs, who had graduated from an academic school,

opened their own restaurant earlier than those who had undergone the apprentice's training. Maybe those who have completed the academic studies have more self-esteem and confidence to open a restaurant. The chefs, who had passed the apprentice's training, opened their restaurants 10–15 years later, after having gained strong culinary skills (Turpeinen, 2009). Contemporary chefs often work as members of teams, which can also include customers.

The results of entrepreneurial education and training (or courses) have been research objects for more than 20 years already. In 1986 Dainow (1986) published a review of entrepreneurship education. Ten years later, Gorman et al (1997) reviewed 29 theoretical articles and 63 empirical articles focused on entrepreneurial education (EE), enterprise education or education for small business management. All the articles were written during the period 1985 to 1994 inclusive. The results of the research indicated considerable consensus that entrepreneurship can be taught and that teaching methods can be enhanced through active participation. Goreman et al (1997) concluded that there was preliminary evidence that entrepreneurial attributes could be positively influenced by educational programs and that many entrepreneurship programs are able to build awareness of entrepreneurship as a career option and to encourage favourable attitudes toward entrepreneurship.

Dickson et al (2008) examined the literature published in 1995-2006. The review had a specific focus on empirical research linking either general education or specific forms of entrepreneurial education to either the creation of a new venture or some measure of entrepreneurial success. Similar to Johnson et al (2005), the findings of the review indicate a significant positive relationship between education and entrepreneurial performance. But the review highlights the lack of consensus in both definitions of entrepreneurial education and what should be the appropriate and measurable outcomes for entrepreneurial education. They identified two streams of research: one focused on the founding of ventures as the outcome of entrepreneurial education and the other focused on some outcome that serves as a precursor of selection into entrepreneurship. The evaluation of the results of entrepreneurship education is considered to be difficult mainly due to the short time span and the difficulty to estimate the number of prospective entrepreneurs (Seikkula-Leino et al, 2013).

Strand (2013) published a review addressed mainly to the problem of whether it is possible to measure the effect of entrepreneurship education on the likelihood of becoming an entrepreneur. Strand documents knowledge on three themes, one of which was the macroeconomic effects of entrepreneurship education. The increased focus on research on the actual outcome of entrepreneurship education comes from a broad spectrum of stakeholders. National governments are interested in more “evidence based” strategies for entrepreneurship education as well as in the documented effect of the various programmes.

The role and importance of entrepreneurs in society is increasing in Estonia as well as all over the world. In Estonia, remarkable change in attitude towards the importance of the educating and training of entrepreneurship was connected with economic recession started in 2008. Now, entrepreneurship is a national priority at all education levels in Estonia.

In these changed conditions, the special courses called *Base Training for Starting Entrepreneurs* have been carried out in Estonia. The aim of the base training was to raise the competitiveness of a starting entrepreneur for a successful start in business.

Background of *Base Training for Starting Entrepreneurs*

The training was ordered and supported financially by Enterprise Estonia (EAS). The purpose of the training was to support potential business starters with knowledge about entrepreneurship and developing their business ideas. Another important task was to draft a business plan for a starting business. The training ended with the presentations of the completed business plans.

The duration of the training was 56 academic hours (seven days) and the whole period for the training was approximately one month.

The main subjects dealt with during the training were entrepreneurship in general, legislation important for entrepreneurs, marketing, financial planning and accounting, and drafting a business plan together with practical examples from entrepreneurship.

The methods used in the training were lectures for introducing theoretical aspects combined with interactive study. Interactive study included different tasks for analysing participants' business ideas and drafting their business plans. The training was supported by an online course in a Moodle learning environment.

In 2011 and 2012, approximately 100 runs of the course with a total number of participants of about 1700 were carried out for starting entrepreneurs. As there was no feedback of the effect of training in the long term, a survey was considered to be necessary.

Methodology

Solving the research problem is based on the quantitative and the qualitative research method using the triangulation of methods and data. So, it was possible to better understand the research problem compared with what would have enabled the qualitative and the quantitative research separately. In the framework of the quantitative research method, a questionnaire was used as the method of data collecting, and an interview was used as the qualitative research method.

The study consists of two parts:

- Chefs' competences including entrepreneurial competences and intensions
- Impact of entrepreneurial training to starting of a business

The research on chefs' competences

The implemented methodology was qualitative as the intention was to explain how the chefs understand and interpret the changes to their occupation, and what meaning they attribute to those changes from the point of view of professionalisation.

The semi-structured interview was applied as the tool for data collection. Semi-structured interviews were chosen because this method offers the opportunity to meet with the key stakeholders face-to-face. Burton and Bartlett (2005, p.126) emphasise the strengths of this research method as being "adaptable to different situations and respondents, non-verbal clues can be picked up (other than in questionnaire research), unexpected lines of

inquiry can be followed which makes the method flexible, the qualitative data is expressed in the respondent's own words."

The interviews were conducted with nine chefs, of whom seven were male and two female, and with two experts in the field. At the first stage of data collection, the interviews were held with chefs. At the second stage, interviews with experts were conducted in order to better explain the factors related to cooperation with higher education and tendencies towards institutionalisation of the chefs' occupation. The interviews were recorded with a digital voice recorder and transcribed by the researchers.

The research of impact of entrepreneurial training to starting of a business

The total number of people participating in the questioning was 160 (60 men and 100 women). In the sample, the confidence interval 7.4% is stated at the 95% confidence level. The basis of the telephone questioning was the division of people who participated in the training, according to their gender and the county they came from. The majority (77.5 %) of the respondents were of ages 26-45 years.

The aim of the current survey carried out in 2013 was to find out the percentage of participants who really started their own business. On the other hand, the aim was also to find out the barriers of starting a business for those who had not started their own business. As the result of the survey, the best practices of the training and additional training needs were found out in order to make suggestions about changing training more effective. Considering the diversity of instruments used for measuring entrepreneurial intentions, the authors of the study focused on founding the venture for evaluating the impact of base training.

For carrying out the survey, a structured phone questionnaire was used. Both multiple-choice and open questions were used.

Results and discussions

This empirical paper studies the necessity of entrepreneurial skills on the example of a chef's profession. According to the research results, all respondents pointed out the necessity of entrepreneurial skills and the lack of entrepreneurial competences. It is in accordance with Balazs (2002), who

pointed out that some chefs fulfil the charismatic role but they have a shortage of entrepreneurial knowledge.

All nine chefs mentioned the importance of competences which related to management work and organisation (leadership, delegating, organising, motivating employees, etc.), also to organisational ethics (quality controllers, hygienists, assistants to colleagues, customers). Those results coincide with the results of Birdir & Pearson (2000) and Jaszay (2005).

According to the results of the interviews, skills related to technological and digital progress in catering need to be refreshed, as Koponen (2006) mentioned.

All interviewed chefs paid attention to the importance of innovative competencies as a key to survival. The same was confirmed by Hegarty & O'Mahony (2001) and Balazs (2002).

Estonian chefs felt the importance of globalisation mentioned by Koponen (2006), but they are not ready for that. They need more knowledge about different national cultures and religions. Four out of nine chefs emphasised the relevance of practising English language as well.

Some chefs told the interviewers about their future and career perspectives. While talking about their career, vertical development paths were emphasised. One common feature, however, was the desire to start or run their own business in order to realise their own vision. Some chefs have already run their own business and they considered this experience a very important one. Henderson (2011) highlighted the same trend: opening their own restaurants by celebrity chefs is popular all over the world.

Despite the huge range of different competences, yet the food-making competence is still very important for all chefs. It means that chefs' work remains a "boundary" work (Van der Scheer, Stoopendaal & Putters, 2008). It can be described as being involved with both worlds (managerial and professional), as a struggle between occupational and professional identities (Noordegraaf, 2007).

All chefs mentioned that they want to learn continuously, but only two of

them would prefer formal education. Another seven wanted to learn informally, preferring either studying in different networks or learning from books, from competitors etc. They also mentioned that they learned from customers, as found in international research (e.g. Ottenbacher & Harrington, 2007).

As chefs did not prefer formal learning, a possibility to teach the entrepreneurial competences and to support starting a business is carrying out short-term training. It was found from the research of the impact of entrepreneurial training to the starting of a business that 38.75% of the respondents started a business after the training. More than half (62.90%) of the business starters started the business in the six months after the training was completed and for others the period lasted from seven months up to two years. One third of those who had not started their own business were still making preparations for starting a business. They have not given up the idea of starting their own enterprise which means that the final percentage of the non-starters of a business may still decrease. In this connection, a longer period than the 10 to 34 months of the study is necessary for evaluation of the impact of the training. While the most direct measure of venture creation is the act itself, researchers have come to understand that there may be long time periods between the educational experience and subsequent behaviour (Dickson et al, 2008).

Another important detail found out as the result of the research was that the number of unemployed persons decreased after completing the training. At the time of the study, none of the respondents were unemployed in comparison to 19 unemployed respondents (12%) during training. According to Norheim and Strand (2013), through focused activities it is possible to build a culture that increases entrepreneurial attitudes. The involved individuals who have an increased entrepreneurial attitude will provide higher creative value to society, either through becoming entrepreneurs or offering new ideas and attitudes in already existing organisations.

The respondents' opinion of the utility of the knowledge of different fields (finance, marketing, business planning, entrepreneurship, legislation) was also studied. The highest evaluation was given to knowledge of drafting a business plan and lowest to practical examples and knowledge of entrepreneurship in general. The reason for the low evaluation of practical

examples can be related to different cooperation network activities, such as chefs' main cooperation partners: customers, employees of one's own establishment, organisations, other restaurants' chefs, guilds and sphere societies, televisions and other media (Roosipõld, 2012).

This research points out the necessity for entrepreneurship training. It would be good to match formal and informal study. The example of good practice is short-term training together with learning in cooperation networks. The competences they need are not related to only the entrepreneurial, management and organisation work, but also to innovation, culture and globalisation.

Suggestions for further research

Direction for further research is long-term monitoring of the investigated business starters in order to find out the long-term macroeconomic impact of the entrepreneurial training.

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