The Influence of Trauma and Tradition in Culinary Conformity and Chef Retention: Is Institutional Isomorphism Forcing Culinary Homogeneity Impacting Chef Retention?

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Abstract

For chefs, the kitchen is not merely a workplace. It is a complex socio-cultural domain shaped by history, tradition, and societal expectations, where a separate world view is shared, along with the ritual customs, artefacts and practices that define them as a tribe. Indeed chefs have a distinctive transformative power as role models, with the capacity to bestow symbolic meaning to food, the fabric of our memories, societies, and daily practices. The culinary domain, like any other institution, is defined not solely by its creations, but also by its perpetuated lived experiences including traumas, memories or traces, created and preserved by behaviours instilled through tradition, but also through the quest for perceived legitimacy. Fundamental to this description is the concept that the institution of chefs leaves lasting memories in our collective consciousness, our traditions, and in the evolution of our gastronomic institutions. Yet, while these imprints are diverse and multidimensional, certain underlying universal imperatives including the quest for legitimacy, tend to guide them towards convergence, a phenomenon encapsulated in Neo Institutional Theory by the construct of Institutional Isomorphism. This literature review attempts to link this theory to the issue of chef retention. Can chefs remain innovative and creative when homogeneity is subtly perpetuated, through coercive regulatory frameworks, mimetic emulation of perceived models of success, or normative cultural, societal, and industrial expectations? Could these isomorphic pressures be contributing to the poor retention of chefs?

Keywords

Chef; retention; institutional theory; isomorphism; hospitality

The retention of hospitality workers including chefs, is fundamental to the success of the sector (Dwesini 2019; Ghani, et al. 2022). Retention, however, remains a perennial and pernicious issue (Allen and Mac Con Iomaire 2016; Baum and Devine 2007; Goh and Okumus 2020) as the industry struggles to retain culinary talent (Mohsin, Brochado, and Rodrigues 2022). High staff turnover has in itself become a

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tradition within the hospitality sector (Mohsin, Brochado, and Rodrigues 2022). This tradition of losing human capital is especially damaging because it undermines competitiveness and reduces profitability (Ghani, Memon, et al. 2022). Furthermore, the problem is compounded, as it is more likely that the most talented and skilled employees leave first, since it is easier for them to gain alternative employment (Dwesini 2019).

Neo Institutional Theory (NIT) and its construct of Institutional Isomorphism (II) offers a perspective on how certain universal trends including the quest for legitimacy, guide institutions towards convergence, possibly contributing to poor retention rates. Drawing from Irish and international literature, this paper seeks to provide a viewpoint on how II might impact the intrinsic creativity and identity that drive chefs, and how this conflict between conformity and individuality can impact their long-term commitment to the profession. II provides a lens to examine how chefs might face pressures to conform to institutional norms, enforced regulations and perceived models of success, ultimately affecting their longevity. This review investigates the drive towards conformity, influenced by institutional isomorphic forces and expressed in the transfer of culture, symbols, rituals, practices and traditions of culinary institutions, which could suppress creativity and promote counterproductive behaviours, thus, furthering the loss of talent.

Previous papers have sought to investigate and understand the reasons for the transfer of culture and behaviour among professional chefs, (Alexander et al. 2012; Burrow, Smith, and Yakinthou 2015), through the lens of socialisation (Baum and Robinson 2018), and Role Theory (Kang, Cain, and Busser 2021). Likewise, studies have also investigated the reasons for the high staff turnover, including job satisfaction (Mobley 1977; Yang, Zhao, and Ma 2024; Zhao et al. 2020; Carrión, Romero, and Rosal 2020), bullying, harassment and incivility (Ariza-Montes et al. 2017; H. T. Chen and Wang 2019). Some have advocated alleviating the high turnover rates with recommendations such as fair compensation (Cole et al. 2022; Ghani, Zada, et al. 2022) and improving working conditions (Albattat et al. 2014).There has, however, been a dearth of research on the association between culinary attrition and homogenising forces which may influence retention, including the adoption of the rituals and traditions of culinary institutions.

Homogenising Culinary Symbols and Ritual Traditions

Symbols

The art of the chef is by its nature material and ephemeral, as once the food is consumed, it is only maintained in the memory of the eater (Madeira et al., 2022; Baum and Robinson 2018). The act of eating food more generally is regarded as a set of contextual and developing social practices, where food not only serves as nutrition, but also as a means of symbolising social, cultural, and political contexts

(Oosterveer 2006). The preparation and consuming of food is acknowledged to hold "symbolic" significance, functioning as a social status or class marker (Becuț and Puerto 2017; Chang, Kivela, and Mak 2010; Y. G. Kim, Eves, and Scarles 2009; Ma 2015; Bourdieu 1979; Cooper, Giousmpasoglou, and Marinakou 2017) or a means of learning about and experiencing other cuisines and cultures (Germann Molz 2007; Stajcic 2013). Thus, gastronomy is a visible component of culture and tradition (Dixit 2021). Gastronomic experiences leave unforgettable impressions and memories not only of food but also of time and place, while deepening one's appreciation of local culture (Pavlidis and Markantonatou 2020). It is important to consider that it is not only the consumers of the food who are shaped in this barter of social, and cultural commodities, but also the various other stakeholders, not least the cooks, who in many cases must meet the expectations of tradition and the demands of multiple interested parties.

The symbols of the professional chef can be both positive or negative, tangible or intangible, explicit or tacit. Restaurants and chefs, are deeply embroiled in the construction of symbols that promote conformity and suggest belonging in terms of regionality, ethnicity and nationality (Jönsson 2013). Palmer et al. (2010) found that chefs scars, burns, cuts and scalds are viewed as disciplinary stigmata, which, can be seen to symbolise the road to enlightenment, and convey a common appreciation of what becoming a chef demands. This shared understanding supports chefs' beliefs of their superiority, and that being a chef is sacred work (Palmer, Cooper, and Burns 2010). Symbols also exist in the language used in kitchens, and the use of French terms (Bloisi and Hoel 2008a). Similarly, displayed culinary related tattoos proclaim chefs as belonging to a shared philosophy with similar values and group culture (Meiser 2023). While tattoos signify belonging to the institution or tribe, Meiser also found that chefs endeavour to find individuality in this practice by emphasising the personal stories behind the body art, thus underlining the struggle between conformity and individuality (McCormack, 2006). Brewer (1991, 476) further supports this theory explaining that the contextual nature of social identity involves individuals being the same and different at the same time. Brewer suggests the centre of the diagram shown in Figure 1, represents personal identity which differentiate one form others, while the social identities are those "which depersonalise the self-concept, where I becomes we."

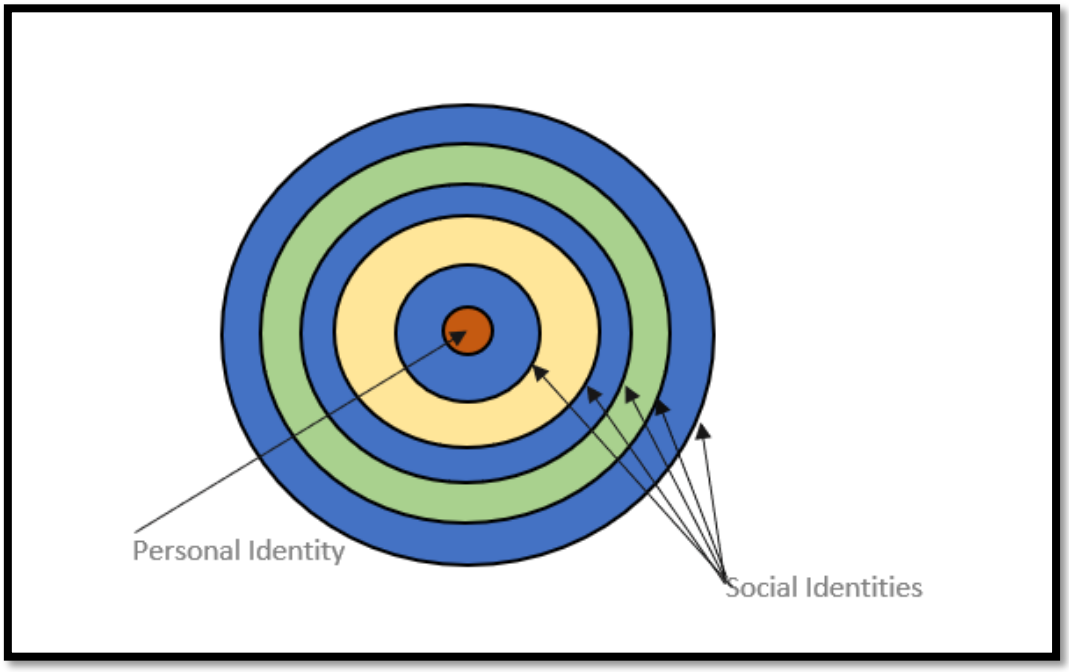

Figure 1: Personal and Social Identities. Adapted from Brewer, (1991)

Various traditions, or what Meyer and Rowan (1977, 335) describe in their seminal work, as "ceremonial rules transmitted by myth", have worked their way into the collective subconscious of the chef's institution. Some of these traditions have been perpetuated across differing cultures and economies in what could perhaps be described as isomorphic traditionalism. For example, traditionally, there has been a practice of working longer than normal shifts in the kitchen (Min, Kim, and Lee 2015; Park and Min 2020; Bloisi and Hoel 2008b). Indeed, chefs have been known to celebrate their sacrifice through boasting about working 80 hours per week (Bloisi 2018; Johns and Menzel 1999). However, are long working shifts performed because they are efficient or essential, or are they simply occupational and cultural traditions, hangovers from the time of Escoffier (Bloisi 2018), ritually expected and performed to signal legitimacy?

Ritual traditions embedded in culture are, however, difficult to change. Schein (2010, 80) suggests that among the most important and invisible elements of culture are the shared basic assumptions about how things should be done, and how the mission should be achieved. He goes on to explain that once processes have become taken for granted, they become the elements of culture that may be the hardest to adjust. This culture is further reinforced through the internal acceptance of the status quo, where the endurance of chefs is applauded (Whittle 2020; Bloisi 2018). The phenomenon of extended work shifts seems widespread in the industry, romanticised and culturally reinforced by elements of "the celebrity chef phenomenon" (Proesmans et al., 2023) and in popular literature (Bourdain 2013;

Simon Wright 2006). In the words of the late Anthony Bourdain, who vividly describes the long shifts and hard work,

> I was not and am not an advocate for change in the restaurant business. I like the business just the way it is (Bourdain 2013, xiii).

Bourdain writes as a promoter of the working conditions and helped normalise the tough and sometimes deviant characteristics of the industry (Robinson 2006). Bourdain has influenced chefs in contemporary professional kitchens. His vivid writings and entertaining descriptions have to many, legitimised the "Underground Chef" (Bergh 2016), who while in the kitchen, seems to operate free from the constraints of normal societal behaviour. The same can be said for Bourdain's contemporaries, Gordon Ramsay, and Marco Pierre White who have shown themselves to be "Tough Cookies" (Simon Wright 2006) and who have with other top chefs, celebrated the toughness required for professional kitchens (Bloisi 2012; 2018). Despite the fact that this legitimisation of suffering and poor behaviour is seen to negatively impact retention (Bohle et al. 2017). These and other celebrity chefs have cultural authority, not just in their exceptional food, but also as role models and influencers, who authorise their discourse through personal narratives (Proesmans et al. 2023), traditions and shared values. Some researchers have suggested that Ramsey's TV persona is not a true reflection of his behaviour as a head chef (Bloisi and Hoel 2008b). However, regardless of intention, his displayed behaviour may influence chefs, thus acting as a mimetic and normative authority, working to diffuse and normalise aggressive behaviour. Studies suggest that the tradition of abuse is viewed as "Natural Aggression" in professional kitchens. This promotes the acceptance and tolerance of bad behaviour (Bloisi and Hoel 2008b), both influenced and normalised by famous chefs (Scott Wright 2019). Furthermore, poor working conditions and toxic behaviour such as bullying and hazing (Giousmpasoglou, Marinakou, and Cooper 2018; Mishra 2023), creates a normative precedent and an opportunity for mimetic practice in the industry, which may increase employee turnover, thus creating and perpetuating the industry's reputation for poor chef retention. There are of course a growing number of exceptions as organisations experiment with work life balance strategies (Stephens 2023). Four day working weeks (Willems 2022; Mullens and Glorieux 2024) have been shown to positively affect general contentment and efficiency (Lewis et al. 2023) for workers, but also competitive advantage for the business in terms of recruitment and retention, and a substantial decline in absenteeism and resignations. Despite individual pioneers and organisations endeavouring to differentiate themselves from the norm, powerful counteracting institutional forces work to homogenise (DiMaggio and Powell 1983).

Institutional Isomorphism in the Culinary Context

Institutional isopmorphism (II), advanced by the work of Meyer and Rowan (1977) and DiMaggio and Powell (1983), describes how organisations or institutions within any given field become ever more alike over time. DiMaggio and Powell suggest that this phenomenon is owing to pressures which compel homogeneity. They continue that there are three institutional forces at work, which influence this convergence: mimetic, coercive, and normative isomorphism. Many studies have looked at the reasons behind poor retention of workers in the hospitality industry (Albattat et al. 2014; Abubakar et al. 2022; Asimah 2018; Yu et al. 2021), including employee satisfaction, burnout and stress among others. NIT has also been applied to the study of Human Resource Management (HRM) in the tourism industry (Lewis, Cardy, and Huang 2019) through the lens of institutional entrepreneurship (influential individuals) and institutional logics (guiding ideologies) (Zilber 2013). However, there is a dearth of inquiry into how isomorphic forces may specifically affect the retention of chefs. Therefore, this paper seeks to fill this gap in the research.

Mimetic Isomorphism

Mimetic isomorphism (MI) refers to the tendency of organisations or institutions to mimic or imitate the practices and structures of other entities operating in the same field, and is rooted in inherent uncertainty (Hambrick et al., 2004) about what the future holds, thus causing actors to search for direction from other perceived successful players in the same arena. This ultimately Leads to emulation of what is perceived as legitimate behaviour. Greenwood and Hinings, (1996) argue that this imitation of perceived successful practice is adopted in an effort to succeed in an ever changing and increasingly competitive environment. It is broadly acknowledged that chefs exchange concepts and develop novel ideas based on each other's innovations, without directly exchanging recipes (Madeira et al. 2022; Ottenbacher and Harrington 2007). Culinary styles and fashions are not the only element of the chef's institution which are subject to homogeneity. The adoption of behaviours or taken for granted practices (Chen et al. 2011) are likewise subject to mimetic forces. Ekincek and Günay, (2023) found that chefs inspiration had been significantly influenced by the work of other chefs who they perceived successful or legitimate. MI can be seen in the mimicry of a variety of gastronomic personalities and through various media channels, indeed there seem to be a universally recognised image of the more often than not, male, profane, aggressive, unpredictable, but artistic chef (Burrow, Scott, and Courpasson 2022; Cooper, Giousmpasoglou, and Marinakou 2017; Giousmpasoglou, Marinakou, and Cooper 2018; Harris and Giuffre 2020; Bloisi 2018). Johns and Menzel (1999, 104) sum up the legitimisation of wrongdoing in professional kitchens:

> There seems to be a deep-seated cultural acceptance of violence as part of the striving of a perfectionist or the legitimised whim of iconised individuality.

There are of course exceptions (Hade 2014), with many ethically behaved professionals, chefs such as Massimo Bottura, who presents himself as the antithesis to the despot chef. He advocates treating his employees as family members and rejecting the "traditional hierarchies", advocating for sustainability not just of the natural environment, but also human sustainability, where the focus is on taking care of the person working next to you (Bottura 2019). Bottura goes on to explain that his philosophy is based around demonstrating humility and respect for the world and the people around him. Undoubtedly chefs such as Bottura have some constructive influence in the hospitality industry, indeed the situation in relation to retention could be much worse without their positive example. Nonetheless the retention issues are serious, and the positive contribution of influential chefs seem insufficient to counterbalance poor retention. Furthermore, Lin-Healy and Small (2013, 692) reported the tendency of humans to view altruistic behaviour and prosocial acts as involving sacrifice, which precludes benefits to the self and suggest that "nice guys finish last," thus lessening their perceived legitimacy, consequently reducing the likelihood of emulation. Harris and Giuffre (2020) and Johns and Menzel (1999) describe how the artistic feature of the stereotypical chef was used as way of excusing poor behaviour and violence that would not have been accepted in other industries (Bloisi 2018). Moreover, chefs have been linked with drug and alcohol abuse, which, have been shown to be part of their occupational culture (Giousmpasoglou, Brown, and Cooper 2018) and not associated with any form of longevity. Numerous characteristics of a convergent occupational culture set chefs apart from other occupations and which are used to forge identity and establish hierarchies, inclusions, and exclusions (Baum and Robinson 2018). One of the most prominent mimetic inclusion or exclusion for top restaurants can be found in the quest to be included in the Michelin guide, where restaurants holding Michelin stars are viewed as Industry leaders who should be emulated. The constant pressure of imminent scrutiny from guide inspectors further adds to the already stressful environment, which in turn, could contribute to kitchen violence (Mac Con Iomaire 2008). Furthermore, Michelin stars are awarded on the basis of food quality and do not take kitchen culture into consideration, perhaps missing an opportunity to encourage positive change in relation to worker well-being.

Employee well-being is promoted in many hospitality businesses offering wellness programmes to their workers in an apparent effort to improve their physical and mental health and in turn enhance working conditions, but are these programmes is some cases simply examples of what Meyer and Rowan (1977) describe as myth and ceremony, where institutions seek to a appear legitimate? Furthermore, many organisations fail to identify mental wellbeing as a workplace issue, which could be alleviated by changing the workplace culture rather than trying to change the worker (Fleming 2024; O`Grady 2018). The realities of the work

for many chefs include staff shortages, time constraints, long hours, work overload and demanding customers (Seyitoğlu et al., 2023), which result in chefs being unable to participate in such activates (Zhang, Torres, and Jahromi 2020) and are factors that encourage high staff turnover (Lo and Lamm, 2005; Poulston, 2009). DiMaggio and Powell (1983, 185) describe this practice in organisations as loose coupling where organisations outwardly portray positive aspects of what they perceive as legitimate practice, while the reality of day-to-day life in the organisation may be quite different. A more sinister example of this phenomenon has been identified where an exclusive hotel in the south of France outwardly advertises their approach to recruitment of chefs,

> Our purpose inspires us to show care, day after day, to everyone with whom we come into contact. As we continue to expand around the world, we do not lose sight of what is most important to us: the well-being and fulfilment of everyone, customers, partners, colleagues, suppliers and members of the local community (Jönsson 2013).

This hotel, however, made the news in recent months after an alleged report of physical and sexual abuse of a young kitchen apprentice was widely reported in international newspapers, prompting the swift departure of the head chef (Mishra 2023).

Coercive Isomorphism

While MI forces convergence from within, Coercive Isomorphism (CI) on the other hand, results from external pressures, brought about through regulative influences such as laws, rules and regulations. In these cases, some form of reprimand would befall those who refuse to conform (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). An example of this mode of isomorphism in the culinary sphere can be seen in how food safety regulations forced the introduction of Hazard Analysis of Critical Control Points (HACCP) systems. Similarly, the requirement to include food allergens on menus are also examples of coercive forces which lead to convergence. Many hotels chains enforce coercive brand standards which can dictate the composition of menus, further contributing to homogeneity. Chefs have in recent times had to deal with the double edge sword that is social media and online review platforms, where they can readily view novel concepts (Vu et al., 2023), however, these platforms may magnify the pressure to conform to the accepted standards of the day, with the ever-present threat of negative online reviews. Online reviews in effect act as coercive forces, further pushing institutional and organisational conformity towards the rule of the day.

Coercive regulations also exist to protect workers from exploitation and abuse. Regulations such as the working time directive (Barnard 2023), the national minimum wage and health and safety authority rules (2023) have endeavoured to improved conditions and pay for many, however research suggests that every 10%

increase in minimum wage for accommodation and food workers, results in a 3-hour reduction in hours worked each week (Redmond 2020; Redmond and McGuinness 2023; O'Halloran 2024), thus eliminating much of the financial gain obtained through this regulation.

In recent times retention issues have been catalysed and amplified by the restrictions brought about due to the Covid-19 pandemic (Baum et al., 2020; Liu-Lastres et al., 2022; Ng et al., 2021; Ryan and McMahon, 2021).The drain of talent has been quickened and intensified by the coercive regulations which preceded what has become known as "The Great Resignation," "The Big Quit" or "The Great Attrition," and which began in several industries during the enforced lockdowns of the Covid-19 pandemic. The hospitality industry has been one of the most negatively affected (Liu-Lastres et al., 2022) in terms of resignations. In Ireland 56% of the Generation Z and 40% of Millennials indicated that they wanted to leave their job in the search for an improved work life balance, flexibility, and career development opportunities (Daunt et al., 2022). They continue that this poses a major challenge to employers, however, it also offers an opportunity to re-envisage the Great Resignation, as the Great Reimagination. Despite the existence of coercive work-related regulations, designed to protect the rights, conditions, pay and welfare of workers (ISB 2005), there exists a counterbalancing force, in the form of a long history and normalisation of poor practice (Roh, Tarasi, and Popa 2021) which steadily acts to negate progress.

Normative Isomorphism

Normative isomorphism (NI) similar to the aforementioned forces, quietly works to homogenise elements of the chef's institution. Damaging behaviour and cultural norms that exist in the industry are obscured and legitimised when accepted as normal (Ram 2018) behaviour or "natural aggression" (Scott Wright 2019). Furthermore, Larson (2017) argues that the self-concept of professionalism influences individual behaviours and identities, endorsing standards and norms defined by professional elites. This process involves assuming the values of the profession, leading to the alignment of personal conduct with the normalised ethics of the profession. The normalised ethics of the chef's profession may therefore influence high turnover in kitchens. If so, turnover is likely exacerbated when regularly hiring new staff, who are more vulnerable to harassment (Ariza-Montes et al. 2017). This can lead to a ripple effect, whereby, individuals who accept poor treatment and elect to remain, may subsequently go on to both mimic and further normalise abusive conduct with newer recruits, thus perpetuating damaging behaviour, while at the same time moving up in the hierarchy of the organisation (Bloisi and Hoel 2008b; Meloury and Signal 2014a; Bloisi 2018), into more senior roles where they can cause optimal damage. This ripple effect is supported by Holm et al., (2023) who found that workers use a variety of coping mechanisms to deal with workplace incivility, one of which includes joining in with the abuser in order to

avoid being targeted, a point further enforced by Robinson (2008) who suggests that deviant conduct is simultaneously cause and consequence of a caustic workplace culture.

Negative behavioural reputation among chefs includes incivility, bullying, mobbing, hazing, physical and sexual harassment and the prevalence of normalised aggression and violence (Bloisi and Hoel 2008b; Bloisi 2012; Alexander et al. 2012; Ariza-Montes et al. 2017; Bohle et al. 2017; Booth and correspondent 2021; Burnett et al. 2022; Burrow, Smith, and Yakinthou 2015; Chen and Wang 2019; Coffey et al. 2023; Falvey 2021; Giousmpasoglou, Marinakou, and Cooper 2018; Kim et al. 2020; Meloury and Signal 2014b; Mishra 2023; Scott Wright 2019; Holm, Torkelson, and Bäckström 2023; Johns and Menzel 1999). Aggression in professional Kitchens has been normalised through food media (Meiser and Pantumsinchai 2022) where verbal and physical abusive behaviour is all part of the Sisyphean nature of the work (Roh, Tarasi, and Popa 2021).

Furthermore, the normalisation of poor union representation (Curran, 2021; Marciniak, 2021) leads to lack of worker centric regulation, hinders the development of worker centric measures and recourse, which could see a reversal of chef resignations in the industry. According to Meyer and Rowan (1977) the overriding driver of these forces is the quest for legitimacy, as institutions strive to align themselves with the prevailing expectations and norms in order to gain support and acceptance. So, how does II influence retention? Put simply, if the isomorphic forces within the institutions of the hospitality industry work towards priorities of the institution, at the expense of the individuals, then negative retention may ensue. This postulation is supported in a study by Silva et al., (2019, p. 44) who found that elevated staff turnover rates are in particular influenced by "non-alignment of employees' interests with company objectives". As discussed earlier in this review the quest for the perception of legitimacy is not always the search for efficiency (Meyer and Rowan 1977). Similarly, this could be framed as, the search for the perceived legitimate way does not necessarily mean the search for the right way. Furthermore, the tendency for professional kitchens to standardise production, threads a fine line between maintaining standards and stifling creativity, which can tip over into the realm of deskilling (King 2016).Thus, further removing autonomy and creativity, both major part of what makes the work meaningful (Ghani et al. 2022; Carrión, Romero, and Rosal 2020) and which is viewed as antithetical to the existence of the creative and artist chef (Robinson and Barron 2007).

Many damaging practices have been adopted by institutions as a result of the search for legitimacy (Graafland and Smid, 2019). Working in a negative climate is likely to have a negative impact on organisation members' sense of legitimacy and stifle ethical culture within the workplace, where the normalised decoupling of policy from practice is commonplace, (MacLean and Behnam 2010) and where non-conformity with ethical behaviour is concealed behind a façade of acquiescence (Oliver 1991, 154). They continue to propose that this decoupling can have a negative

impact on how internal organisational legitimacy is perceived, allowing for the institutionalisation of wrongdoing and ultimately resulting in a loss of external organisational credibility and stakeholder trust. Organisations should think carefully about the ethical ramifications of their decisions and aim for true legitimacy rather than focusing on perception.

Conclusion

This review has explored the influence of isomorphic forces on retention and discussed the influence on chef's identity, behaviour, creativity and the possible link with commitment to the profession. The complex environment that results from the interplay of traditions and institutional factors may have a significant influence on retention rates. The construct of II has offered a robust framework to understand the forces that lead to homogenisation within the chef's institution. The shaping influences of institutional stakeholders including influential or celebrity chefs and the forces of culinary symbols and ritual traditions were examined. These influences are suggested to shape the various institutions in the culinary realm, through the mimetic, coercive and normative forces associated with NIT. Several rhetorical and unanswered questions have been asked of the reader, including:

> Are long working shifts performed because they are essential, or are they simply occupational and cultural traditions, ritually required and performed to signal legitimacy?
>
> Do some hospitality organisations implement wellness programmes that are, in practice, inaccessible to chefs because of their work commitments, thereby potentially rendering these programmes as mere exercises in legitimacy signalling?

The obvious next question is, can isomorphic forces push positive practices within the chef's institutions? The answer must be yes, this study has found that coercive regulations such as the working time directive, health and safety rules and minimum wage laws have helped to improve the lives of hospitality workers, furthermore this paper acknowledges that some examples of positive working environments exist, however the evidence suggests that these and other progressive results of isomorphic pressure, while mitigating, are currently insufficient in terms of reversing the retention trend.

DiMaggio and Powell's (1983) triad of coercive, mimetic, and normative isomorphism helps explain why certain practices, such as extended working hours (Min et al., 2015; Park and Min, 2020) or the normalization of aggression (Wright, 2019), and other behavioural traits persist. Institutional convergence tends to prioritise institutional goals and legitimacy over individual well-being, possibly contributing to poor retention rates (Silva et al., 2019) with a focus on perception over reality and in some cases perpetuation over solution.

It is critical to note that this complex web of social, cultural, and institutional norms shapes all of the players in the gastronomic ecosystem, including chefs. Even while they might legitimise the institution's reputation, they may not address the retention and well-being of chefs. This retention problem has been compounded by the Great Resignation, however, it presents opportunities for the sector to reinvent itself (Daunt et al., 2022; Liu-Lastres et al., 2022). In conclusion, chefs are bearers of rich social, cultural, and institutional legacies, and not merely culinary practitioners. Chefs must be recognised as creative individuals with distinct needs and goals. Not just parts of the machine of institutional compliance and culinary tradition, if retention rates are to be reversed.

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