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Becoming top global chef: What does it take to become a successful entrepreneur

Abstract

Reaching the pinnacle of professional life is the career target for many, certainly for the most ambitious. What does it take for entrepreneur to become a global celebrity in one's profession? Relying on the 'New Careers' literature and labor market ecosystem theory, we explore the career motivation, orientation, trajectory and outcomes of a selected group of close to 30 top global chefs who gain Michelin stars. Using qualitative data and applying grounded theory principles, we study what helped them to lead successful professional entrepreneurial careers. The findings revealed factors influencing their career choice and path to the top. We offer theoretical contribution by identifying the relevance and importance of 'new careers' for entrepreneurs. Factors that helped gain celebrity status were career orientation, perseverance and passion. We recognized three critical success factors: having a dual-step process to the top; the ability to exploit chance events; and training in a globally recognized domain that serves as the 'rite of passage' on the path to the celebrity status.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship, chefs' careers, New Careers

Introduction

The hospitality industry, in particular the restaurant business, is characterized by significant entrepreneurship activities. Individual entrepreneurs attempt to succeed in this highly competitive sector, where more business failures occur than in other sectors (Watson, 2007). To reach success in this business, the entrepreneur needs to combine entrepreneurship and artistic competence (Svejenova, 2005), in addition to factors that are relevant to any entrepreneur, like having professional knowledge and strong passion for the business (Cardon, Wincent, Singh, & Drnovsek, 2009).

The sector is large and expanding, being of high importance for individuals, regions and nations. The restaurant industry is significant in both revenue and employment: Revenue for the USA restaurant industry was estimated at \$799 billion at the end of 2017, up 4.3 percent from the previous year, and the trend for 2018 is similar (Griffith, 2018). The number of employees in the USA restaurant sector is 14.4 million and is growing steadily. In the UK, there are 614,100 people working in the restaurant industry in around 72,500 enterprises.

While large chains form a significant portion of the sector, most of the restaurants are small, and led by individual entrepreneurs, whose careers progress in parallel to the restaurant. Achieving career success is a desired aim for individuals, and being considered top in the field is a worthy accolade to aspire for (Ng & Feldman, 2014; Spurk, Hirschi, & Dries, 2019). The career literature well covered how people ascend to the top echelons of large enterprises, but the cover of entrepreneurs' is scant. For example, studying antecedents of entrepreneurs' career choices have been conspicuously missing from entrepreneurship research (Zellweger, Sieger, & Halter, 2011).

It is unclear what trajectory would lead individuals to the top of their profession. In many sectors, an indication for making it to the top is being considered a global celebrity, and

in the restaurant sector the litmus test for success is decided by ranking, the most prestigious of all is the Michelin categorization. Very few make it to gain Michelin stars, but those who do can become the celebrities of the sector. What factors that leads to this level of career success remain unknown. Is it the role of qualification system? of cash investment? of chance event? of career orientation and motivation? Similarly to other sectors, founders of successful businesses have higher entrepreneurial self-efficacy, independence and motives-related innovation characterize entrepreneurs (Zellweger, Sieger, & Halter, 2011). Yet, more is required to become a global celebrity.

The aims of the paper is to study the career trajectories of the most successful entrepreneurs, their motivation and the challenges they have experienced. We explore factors that enabled this unique and very restricted selection of individual people who have reached the status of global celebrity in their field – chefs who reached the accolade of Michelin three star restaurant or similar level of recognition. We studied a group of such selected global celebrities in the restaurant sector: chefs that are recognized as on top of their field, the majority features in the ‘World’s Top 50 list’ of restaurants.

We offer unique contribution to the study of entrepreneurship and careers, by extending the current knowledge of the so-called ‘new careers’ into this specific niche of global job market. The contribution is important as it extend entrepreneurship and career theory to under-studied realm, and yet one that is a center of attention for many individuals. Further, these successful individuals may serve as role model for a number of other entrepreneurs. We focus on the role of career orientation, career as a calling, chance event, and the environment as part of wider labor market eco-system (Baruch & Rousseau, 2019).

The rest of the paper is structured as follows: We present a cover of the literature – both entrepreneurship and careers, leading to our research questions. The methodology and our

approach to the data and the analysis follows. The results are presented, with supporting evidence, leading to the identified framework. We end with a discussion about the contribution to theory and practice, as well as setting future research agenda.

Literature review and theoretical underpinning

We start by outline of relevant theories and concepts that are relevant to the development of our research questions, focusing on both careers studies and entrepreneurship literature. Not much was conducted on careers of the few top individuals in their field. The career literature tends to focus on managers and professionals such as accountants, consultants, etc., less on craft or vocational individuals. Theories that can help explaining success for ‘conventional’ managerial and professional roles are Social capital theory (Seibert, Kraimer, & Liden, 2001), Conservation of Resources (Hobfoll, 1989) or Self-determination theory (Deci, & Ryan, 2011), to name a few. These theories, though, stop short in their explanatory power when it comes to the very top of entrepreneur and vocational professions (for an exception see Davidsson & Honig, 2003).

Entrepreneurial Careers as Business Venturing

Earlier studies explored individual factors that can predict success of restaurants entrepreneurship (Ramos-Rodríguez, Medina-Garrido, & Ruiz-Navarro, 2012), but not what are the factors that distinguish the most successful from the rest. Being in the restaurant business is not merely to feed people, but is also about professionalism and recognition. Transgressing symbolic and social boundaries can enhance the likelihood of gaining professional eminence or, if negative, sliding into relative obscurity (Jones, 2010). She tested the possible effects of boundary crossing as a step in the search for glory and revealed the importance of symbolic networks and expanding symbolic boundaries in search of recognition for securing eminence as a career goal.

Another factor is the will, readiness or ability to be self-employed, taking risks like questionable job security, and gaining autonomy, that account for successful entrepreneurship (Kolvereid & Isaksen, 2006). Alongside this, strong passion is critical ingredient for being successful in business (Cardon et al., 2009). Conversely, overconfidence and emotional unfitness of individual owners were the main predictors of restaurants' failures (Camillo, Connolly, & Kim, 2008).

Careers and new careers

Boundaryless, multidirectional protean and kaleidoscope career

Contemporary careers are depicted as dynamic, volatile and fast paced (De Vos, Van der Heijden, & Akkermans, 2018). Economic, technologic and societal developments present various market forces, changing organizational expectations, where individualization characterize life and careers in the 21st Century. Individuals choose and follow career path according to their own values and desires, such as following protean career (Hall, 2004) in a boundaryless career environment (Arthur, 2014). People aim to fulfil different needs (Kaleidoscope career, Mainiero & Sullivan, 2006) and can move in multi-directional career paths (Baruch, 2004). Individual entrepreneurs are not expected to follow a traditional, organizational career progress in a clear hierarchy, but see how they moved across boundaries – physical, psychological, and others (Sullivan & Arthur, 2006). It should be acknowledged that the theory or concept of boundaryless careers is not of a total lack of boundaries (Inkson, Gunz, Ganesh, & Roper, 2012), but a metaphor for a world where crossing various boundaries is a possible and even desired move. The needs of individuals vary across their career stage, and depends on other factors, like gender: The Kaleidoscope career provides another metaphor of three 'mirrors' for pursuing career – need for Authenticity, for Balance, and for Challenge (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2006), and we assume that for entrepreneurs, the need for Authenticity and for Challenge will be a priority. Earlier studies explore mainly managers and professionals

in relations to the ‘new careers’ (Arthur, Inkson, & Pringle, 1999). Yet, very few studied those at the top echelons of their profession, and these are usually CEOs or top executives – less so entrepreneurs of small businesses that nevertheless can become global celebrities when reaching the pinnacle of their profession.

Career success at the top

There are many ways to define and to reach career success (Heslin, 2005; Ng & Feldman, 2014), but when moving to the top of the top, more factors intervene. The current society, both in the West and in the East, glorifies the status of celebrity (Driessens, 2013). Reaching this level of global celebrity reflect the outmost level of success. Even global celebrity individual wish to be – and to be seen – as authentic (Tolson, 2001). Haute-cuisine is recognized as a highly institutionalized field (Gomez & Bouty, 2011; Gill & Borrow, 2018), where rankings conducted by experts (critics, being awarded Micheline star, James Beard awards or the World’s Top 50 list) have a determinate effect on the business

Career ecosystem

The nature of current business world leads to a career system that can be considered as *career eco-system* (Baruch, 2015). Eco-system is defined as ‘*a system that contains a large number of loosely coupled (interconnected) actors who depend on each other to ensure the overall effectiveness of the system*’ (Iansiti & Levien 2004, p. 5). Eco-system view offers innovative way to explore business phenomena (Jacobides, Cennamo, & Gawer, 2018). Eco-systems, including career systems, comprise of multiple actors that interact with each other and are interdependent. Individuals and institutions communicate, act, react, negotiate, engage, and develop. The actors evaluate and re-evaluate their multiple psychological and legal contracts, thereby enacting career-related decisions (Baruch & Rousseau, 2019). A career ecosystem operate under the law 'survival of the fittest', and only few can reach and maintain certain top

positions. Sub-systems co-exist, and the restaurant market verge on the border of food distribution and entertainment, serving the end-customers. This means that a number of stakeholder can influence career trajectory, and the impact for individuals for make-or-break career success would depend on multiple interactions across several levels.

Career as a calling and passion for entrepreneurship

Many people follow or wish to follow their career in search of a ‘calling’ (Duffy & Sedlacek, 2007). Career calling can be influenced by a number of factors (Duffy, Dik, Douglass, England, & Velez, 2018). For entrepreneurs, having entrepreneurial passion is a critical ingredient of calling (Cardon, Gregoire, Stevens, & Patel, 2013). Is it possible to attribute high success to a calling? It has been suggested that the role of ‘Calling’ is important in fulfilling career aims, and requires passion to the cause (Cardon et al. 2009). It was argued that most people consider work as one of three options: basically a ‘Job’ to perform, more broadly as a ‘Career’, or at the higher level of aspiration, a ‘Calling’ (Wrzesniewski, McCauley, Rozin, & Schwartz, 1997). By job, Wrzesniewski and colleagues meant having the focus on the practical aspects of financial rewards and necessity, not the positive aspects of pleasure or fulfilment. As for career, they refer to focus on advancement, and by calling, for focus on enjoyment of fulfilling, and on socially useful work. Earlier studies showed that passion is associated with entrepreneurial identity centrality (Murnieks, Mosakowski, & Cardon, 2014). Yet, these studies were not conducted in the hospitality industry, where restaurants are businesses that require multiple skills and competencies and are measured externally by the media and via external, public ranking systems like the Michelin.

When career follows a ‘calling’, there is higher chance of reaching psychological success (Hall & Chandler, 2005). Yet, if the calling is not fulfilled, the consequences for well being are very negative. Calling is not a unidimensional construct, and can be formed of several

elements, three of the most prominent being (a) Identification & Person-Environment-Fit (IP), (b) Transcendent Guiding Force (TGF), and (c) Sense and Meaning & Value-Driven-Behavior (Hagmaier, & Abele, 2012). Calling is typically considered to be as strong motivator, essential to reach the top in certain professions, or even to enter certain professions (e.g. medicine, architecture design). As a result, one would expect people reaching the top of their profession would tend to be directed by such an inner calling for their chosen career. Yet, this proposition was not tested empirically.

Chance event

Whatever the theory and logic of proper career planning and management, the role of chance event cannot be underestimated. Chance events can influence career trajectory in various ways, and might end with un-anticipated, unintended outcomes (Pryor & Bright, 2011). To date, the role of chance event in careers has not attracted in-depth investigation in the literature (for an exception see Bright, Pryor, Chan & Rijanto, 2009). Nevertheless, chance events can alter career for the better or for worse, and they can occur at critical junctures alongside career progress. A significant challenge is the idea that chance events can be managed, or at least utilize by individuals for their benefit (Kindsiko & Baruch, 2019).

The context – profession and organization

The profession/vocation of chef depends on innovation, ability to be creative, to identify and to shape the taste that people will want to have – these cannot be replaced by machines and robots. To be a top chef is a career aspiration for current and generations to come. Yet, how can one become a top chef? What can entrepreneurship role models offer? What can be learned from the career trajectories of highly successful chefs?

Restaurants are most typically small to medium size – apart from the major franchised businesses that can be global MNCs. There are about 15 million restaurants globally, but only

55 (less than a very small fraction of percent - 0.00037%) gain the top grade of 3 Michelin Star status. The chefs whose restaurants gain this status tend to gain a ‘celebrity’ status in the media. To clarify: Michelin Star are given to restaurant, not to its chef. Still the lead chef is most associated with the Michelin Star of his/her restaurant. Similar prestigious rankings are the World’s Top 50 and the James Beard awards in the USA. Again, these awards have a very important symbolic value in this highly-institutionalized field. Restaurants and chefs in these lists are idolized, recognized for their artistic and innovative contribution to the international haute-cuisine.

Following the above discussion, and bearing in mind the context, we develop the following research questions.

Research Questions

1. Are there a clear pattern or patterns of ‘becoming top chef’?
2. What was the motivation and trajectory for this choice of career? Was it a planned endeavor?
3. Were those career directed externally or managed by the individual, and if so, did they follow inner calling or influenced by chance events? If so, can serendipity be managed?
4. Do the career of these highly successful chefs match with the nature of the ‘New Careers’ theory?

Method and data collection:

The aim of our study was to explore career trajectories of top global chefs. To meet our aim, we collected qualitative data from 26 video-recorded interviews with top global chefs who featured in a TV series episode of 50 minutes each, called *Chef's Table*, which is the first original Netflix documentary series. Further data consists of publicly available documents that

were studied for triangulation, such as records of Chefs' schooling, articles in newspapers, other interviews and the social media.

All episodes have a very similar structure and pattern, revolving around the following themes:

- the distinctive characteristics of the chef's culinary approach, and how it was developed over the years
- each chef tells a narrative of how they reached this high level of success
- while the interviews were mainly with the chefs, each episode includes also interviews with other persons, such as food critics, other chefs, family members, collaborators, partners and employees, adding to the richness of the data regarding their career trajectories.

The 26 interviews allowed us to reach a theoretical saturation point of data, which is required for qualitative studies (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), as category saturation is "one of the primary means of verification in grounded theory" (Suddaby, 2006). Our sample of 26 participants fare well with the typically population of less unique populations. In good journals, the median for 'good size sample', according to Saunders and Townsend (2016), was 32.5, but that was for general population.

Analysis

The 26 episodes were transcribed and imported to Nvivo. We employed the widely used qualitative data analysis Nvivo software to manage the large dataset. We conducted the data analysis following the recommendations described by Gioia, Corley, and Hamilton (2013). We started by coding the whole episodes inductively, where first order concepts emerged from the data as the researchers tried to be faithful to the data: "through coding you define what is happening in the data and begin to grapple with what it means" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 46). Coding was mostly done by the first author, and the second author played the devil's advocate and

checked the logic and consistency of the coding process. When deemed necessary, the codes were modified to reach agreement among the authors. Next, an initial process of consolidating codes was conducted, where we set aside any codes that didn't have a clear relation to the chef's careers (Molecke & Pinkse, 2017). At the second phase, all the interview transcripts were read again, and triangulated with other sources of data, in order to trace second-order categories and aggregate the codes under thematic clusters (Gioia et al., 2013; Corbin & Strauss, 2014)

During the process of data analysis, we identified themes that reflect theoretical constructs that are well-established in the literature (e.g. chance events, protean careers). In the third and final stage of coding, and following Strauss and Corbin (1990), we used such theoretical constructs to structure our empirical observations. This analysis process allowed us to trace each chef's career trajectory in relation to the codes. We asked our data questions like: what motivates these individuals to become chefs? Do they mention any chance events and their consequences? What inspires them to be creative? How is this creativity and success judged and evaluated? We treated each chef as a case study on their own, and then compared and contrasted the 26 cases to unearth any interesting patterns, similarities and disparities. The overall data structure is presented in Figure 1, designed following Gioia et al. (2013).

Findings

In this section, we present our findings in line with our data structure. We use the second order categories as headings before moving to the discussion section.

Insert Figure 1 About Here

Unlike our expectations, only nine of 26 chefs had a career based on initial or early 'calling'. By initial calling we mean that they got into the restauration business (as a cook, waiter or otherwise) early in their life with an intention to have a career in this field. More in line with

anticipated, the data evidence the important role of chance events in succeeding or increasing the success of these top chefs.

Intentionality of becoming a top chef

Only few of these top chefs have deliberately studied and started a career in the culinary industry, with the intention to become a chef. The majority of these top chefs had gone into working in the kitchen at a later stage of life or via serendipitous accidents.

For those few nine out of 26 who wanted to be a chef early, falling in love with this career seems to be related to the family connection and context. For example, Ben Shewry, Grant Achatz, Vladimir Mukhin and Corrado Assenza early stage was working in their family restaurants. Grant said that he spent more time in his parent's diner from an early age:

“I was four and a half when my mother and father got their first diner. I spent more time in a diner than I did in my actual house.”

Ben Shewry recalls falling in love with the environment:

“When I was 14, I got a job in a small place run by a brother and sister, called the Time Out Cafe. From the little cutout in the wall of the kitchen, I could see into the dining room, and I could see the customers eat my food. It was the most incredible feeling. I was hooked.”

This early exposure to the restaurant environment induced fascination and love to it, translating later on to a 'call' to become a chef. All these nine chefs either opened a restaurant or attended a cooking school early in their lives. For instance, Francis Mallman recalled:

“When I started my first restaurant on my own, I was 19. I was doing some recipes of Argentina.”, Magnus Nilsson's parents told that “Magnus came to ask if he could go

to cooking school in Are. We told him, there is a perfectly good cooking school right here. Then he said, but that one is the best one and that is that.”.

More surprisingly perhaps, the majority of the other top chefs didn't initially see themselves in this industry. For instance, Alexa Atala signed up to cooking school in order to extend his visa:

“From my very first step in Europe, I was living a dream. Everything was new, and I decided not to go back to Brazil. But, in that time, I had two problems. First one, make money. So I start to work painting walls. And the second, get a visa. One of the guys who was painting walls was doing chef school. I said, "Nice way to have a visa." So I went to chef school. To be clear... I didn't decide to be a chef. [laughing] My visa pushed me to be a chef”

Both Nancy Silverton and Enrique Olvera cooked to impress their potential partners (both married later to the person they were trying to impress), as Enrique explained:

“And in high school, she lived by herself, so I started to cook for her. So I... I started cooking, just trying to impress Allegra [his wife], and I... I just realized I loved it. And then I started cooking for my friends. It was fun because I'd get to spend a day in the market and then come back, cook, play some music.”

Musa Dagdeviren's family was poor and he had to work in his uncle's bakery out of need:

“I didn't grow up in a wealthy family. So, as a kid, I was taught not to waste anything and to know the value of every little thing. From the time I was five or six years old, I used to work at my uncles' bakery” and “After I arrived in Istanbul, I needed a job. My uncle had a restaurant. So that's where I started to work”

Whereas Cristina Martinez was forced into cooking by her husband's family:

“And then at 17, I got married. And I moved to his house. My husband's family also made barbacoa. They put me to work. I was always busy cleaning, cleaning, cleaning. Everything had to be cleaned, chopped and stored. I'd go to sleep at 10:30 at night. But at 3:00 in the morning, I'd have to get up because I'd have to remove the barbacoa. That was my job”.

The importance of exposure and diversity:

Once they started their career in cooking, these top chefs acknowledged the utmost importance of mobility in order to work with different mentors, cooking different types of dishes and exposing to different ingredients. This was sometime self-managed, as in the case of Niki Nakayama who decided to spend time in Japan:

“I went to Japan because I knew that that was gonna be the best experience for learning how to cook. I went to work at my cousin's ryokan, which is a Japanese inn. It was in the countryside. You could hear nature all over. That's where I first experienced kaiseki. It was a different kind of Japanese food.”,

Gaggan Anand who wanted to learn from the best at El Bulli and approached them to spend time there:

“I had six months of free time. Rajesh [Anand's business partner] told me, "What is your dream?" I told him, exactly. "I would love to go and be an apprentice in El Bulli. I want to learn from the lion how to hunt.””

While Dominique Crenn travelled to various places and worked in numerous hotels before deciding to open her own:

“In the course of eight years, I work for different people. And I was at Stars, and then I moved to Indonesia, then I went to Los Angeles. And then I came back to San Francisco. I worked for a lot of different restaurants and hotels here in San Francisco”

On other occasions, a mentor would arrange for the person a visit to another restaurant, like Grant Achatz’s mentor who arranged for him to visit one of the most iconic restaurants at the time – El Bulli, or Bo Songvisava who went to London to learn about Thai food as her mentor recalls arranging this for her:

“When she was cooking in my Mediterranean restaurant, Bo was quite keen to learn more about her own cuisine. And that wasn't gonna happen in Bangkok. And I was like, "Why don't you just get out and go and work for David Thompson in London?" David was taking Thai food to the next level. No Thai chefs were really doing that.”

Finally, another source of exposure is when a chef examines the different cuisines in their own country. Magnus Nilsson travelled in the Baltic countries to discover different preparations and document them in a book:

“I traveled around in the Nordic region to interview people and to search for recipes, and to find and document cultural occurrences within the realm of food. There are so many things that I found during these trips that I didn't know existed, that has in some way influenced what we do now in the restaurant”

Similarly, Virgilio Martinez travelled to different places in Peru to discover the diverse cuisine:

“I decided to travel one year to do some research about Peru. I was looking for inspiration. When I went to the Amazonia and the Andes, there were all these beautiful landscapes. I started to feel some connection. I realized that Peru is so much more than Lima.”

This last type appears at an advanced stage in chefs' careers, rather than early one.

The role of chance events

The data illustrate the vital role of chance events on the career achievements of these chefs.

Maissmo Bottura recalls that his work got recognized after a visit from the most important food critic in Italy, who had to stop in Modena (where Massimo's restaurant is) to avoid heavy traffic caused by a road accident:

“One night in April, 2001, the most important food critic in Italy was driving from Milan to Florence, and there was an accident in Bologna, so there was a very long line. He decided to stop in Modena. He detoured and he had dinner in Osteria. Two days later, most important magazine, Espresso, came out this article.”

Grant Achatz had tongue cancer and lost his taste sense after radio therapy. This loss forced him to collaborate and be creative:

“I realized that I... I couldn't taste. All the charting and scans were showing tumor size reduction. But, the doctors couldn't tell me with any certainty... that I would ever be able to taste again. How can you be a chef? How can you cook... and not be able to taste? [...] There was a light bulb that went off and said... "For the first time ever, I think I can be a chef without being able to taste. Because it's up here [in the mind]. It's not here [in the mouth]”

When the taste sense came back gradually, he re-discovered flavors in a unique way, just like babies discover them and later:

“It started to come back in waves. But the interesting thing was... when everything started colliding together. When we're born, we have a very limited ability to perceive flavor. And as you get older, you're able to discern more. But you're so young, you're

not able to have that flavor memory. And you're not intelligent enough, at that point, to figure out how all of those things work in synergy. I got to experience that as a 33-year-old. To me, it was revelatory. To me, it was like... my whole world just changed, as a chef. I was on fire with... an amount of energy that I think I've never had before”.

Dan Barber bought an excessive quantity of asparagus by mistake, so decided to do a whole menu based on this vegetable in order to avoid loss:

“We'd been open a couple months. We were tired and it was grinding along. It was deep into asparagus season and I had come back from the farmer's market with a couple of cases of asparagus, and I opened up the walk-in refrigerator and there were just cases lined to the ceiling of asparagus, and here I was with four more, and I just - I lost it. I was just like, "How the fuck is this thing on the market list?" So I did this kind of edict thing where, "Every dish is getting asparagus tonight. Every goddamn dish has asparagus. We're gonna do asparagus ice cream. Every single dish”

This excessive use of one seasonal ingredient impressed a food critic who wrote an important and influential review:

“Two hours later, Jonathan Gold, the most important, respected restaurant reviewer in the country, walks in the door. What was clearly a very stupid decision on my part played itself out in the worst possible way. I just thought we were gonna get skewered. Jonathan Gold doesn't show his emotions on his sleeve. So I had no goddamn clue what the man thought of the meal until the article hit. He loved it. He defined us before we really knew who we were. He named us the new epitome of farm-to-table, a restaurant that was not shy about advertising a product that was at the height of its flavor”.

Jordi Roca was forced to be in charge, and eventually become the world's best pastry chef, only after the chef in charge broke his leg and was unable to do the job as he tells the story:

“After eight, nine months, Damian [the pastry chef in charge at the time] taught me a lot. But I knew I needed to learn more. It was summer. It was June or July. [...] I was scared. It was terrible chaos. Damian Allsop, our pastry chef, had an accident. One night, he left his keys at home. And he fell from the third floor, trying to climb to his balcony. [...] Damian had a recipe file where he had all his recipes. And all of them were in English. I said, "Okay, let's do what I know." I was forced to not do one thing at a time, but, rather, I had to keep track of 15 or 20 things at a time. I had to run more. Start to be more agile. My friends didn't understand. "What's happening to you? Are you crazy? Let's go out!" I didn't want to go out partying. I found myself leaving last, but very happy.”

Vladimir Mukhin's passion about Russian cuisine drawn very little attention initially, but the Russian embargo on imported European ingredients (after the annexation of Ukraine triggered a series of event) suddenly put him in the spot light as a national hero as he explained:

“When they sealed the borders, we were, so to say, on the crest of the wave... because we started working with the Russian ingredients a long time ago. We already had many farmers who were growing produce for us. So we were making a living by it, working with it. And all of a sudden, the embargo helped us and pushed us further up. We were ready.” Indeed, one food critics remarked the shift *“Suddenly, everything he's been talking about is tied into the politics of the day, which makes what he's talking about what everybody else is talking about. And he's the only chef on the world stage talking about these things. Vladimir was suddenly everywhere.”*

Strongly structured and institutionalized field

Achieving a top chef status is bounded by strong institutional rules. First, chefs must learn the basics of French haute-cuisine. Mastering the French cuisine seems to be an important condition in the trajectory. The vast majority went to France to learn from the best chefs there, as did Vladimir Mukhin, Dan Barber, Francis Mallaman. Magnus Nilsson explains:

“You go to France to be trained, and there's a tradition of it, and it's brutal, and it's brilliant. It presupposes a knowledge of your ingredients and what to do with them that nobody else has. It doesn't mean that you're gonna be creative, it doesn't mean you're gonna know... That you're gonna come up with new recipes. It doesn't mean you're gonna be a success, but you have the tools. And you can't get 'em anywhere else.”

Once this French-experience completed, the chef-in-the-making then can explore other possibilities and techniques. Oftentimes, this meant being inspired by a mentor and doing one's best to work with that mentor. Moreover, career success is achieved only when receiving peer-recognition, symbolized by invitation to exhibit at international conferences, food-critics reviews and figuring on lists of top restaurants. Alex Atala's serving of Brazilian food only became known after being invited to an international conference and receiving compliments on stage from a top chef:

“A mythical chef on my stage during my demo. I became so proud. That was the turning point of my professional life.”

Ana Ros's restaurant in Slovenia received no attention until a review appeared in an Italian review:

“The article changed things. It put us on the world map. All these little things, which really aren't so little... help the gastronomies of small countries like Slovenia slowly position themselves on the international stage.”

This reflects the power concentration in food critics, international conferences and established-classifications.

Readiness to break norms, do things differently; to innovate

Reaching the pinnacle of the chefs' pyramid requires courage and not being afraid of challenging norms in an innovative way. Nancy Silverton, one of the most known bakers in the USA, told how she didn't share a common belief:

“For years, people had been saying we can't make the European-style bread in America, because we don't have the flour, we don't have the water. But I had been to a little bakery called Acme in Berkeley, and having that bread, I knew that it could be done.”

She then had to convince the customers that her bread is not un-normal:

“you know I remember the earlier comments when, um, I first opened La Brea Bakery. I remember one saying, you know. Some old lady coming in and saying, "You know, your bread is dirty." Looking at, like, you know, the flour pattern that's left from the rising, the proofing baskets. But then the other complaint I got was, 'Your bread is too holey' and all the peanut butter, you know, falls through. Now, of course, that's what I really wanted.”

Massimo Bottura's early work was detested by the local Modenese as his wife tells:

“What [Massimo] was looking for, more than anything, was to initiate a dialog and that was met with a lot of resistance. The first five, six years was really, really, really

tough. [...] In a town like Modena, people weren't ready and people didn't necessarily want that kind of kitchen. That interaction created a lot of energy. The friction, complaining, or even asking questions, or leaving the restaurant and laughing, "Oh, Bottura, look what he's doing".

Massimo persevered to become running the best restaurant in the world, and he was sometimes inspired by unusual events:

"One day, me and Taka, my sous-chef, were serving the last two lemon tart. Taka, suddenly, he dropped one of the two tart, and we were ready to serve. And that tart was on the counter, in the middle, between the plate and the counter. Half was there on the counter and half was there in the plate [...] I said, "Taka, stop, stop. Look through my fingers. [making a photo frame] That is beautiful. Let's re-build as it's a broken stuff." [...] So, we get the lemon sabayon and we spread it on the plate. We just... Like this, like... And then we rebuild on the other plate with all this single precision to make them feel we did that for purpose. That was the moment in which we create Oops! I Dropped the Lemon Tart."

Becoming a top global chef: achieving high potential through two 'steps'

As these top chefs told the story of their career, it became evident that achieving a start status was broken into two main stages. First, the chef achieves recognition after long years of hard work and dedication. However, achieving a world-class peer-recognition appears to be a consequence of cooking dishes inspired by their own roots.

Alex Atala cooked for years and was recognized as a good chef:

"I left Europe and I went back to Brazil, and I started to work in kitchens in fine dining places. [...] In that time, important chefs and important restaurants in Brazil were only serving Italian and French cuisine. French chefs were the gods in Brazil. [...]"

After four years, I was working in a French restaurant. I met a French chef called Erick Jacquin”

Yet, he became known internationally only when he stopped cooking French food and started cooking Brazilian workers’ food as two food critics point out:

“When I talk to Brazilians about Alex Atala, they're just proud that he's done it. That he's risen to this level, and he's done it with dignity, and he's done it in an uncompromising way.” and “At this point, in Brazilian cuisine, chef Alex Atala started to play an important role internationally. All of this helped Brazilians feel pride in their own culture.”

Gaggan Anand became a very successful manager after many years in the industry:

“It took me three years to have about 150 employees and doing meals for about 5,000 people... a day. [...] I became from a... from a cook to a businessman. I was making a lot of money, but I was not cooking at all.”. He eventually went back to be a chef and became recognized as the top restaurant in Asia when he served authentic Indian food, that are not curry “I felt if Pink Floyd can make a 20-minute song and make it sound good, then I can make Indian food, 23 courses, without serving more than one curry. That's a challenge. That's the challenge I take [...] When you look at India, our cuisine has 30 to 36 cuisines itself, completely different to the geography. But then they all become a curry. Curry came from British, the word. They named anything that was saucy or soupy a curry. In our own language, there's no word called ‘curry’”.

Enrique Olvera was successful utilizing Mexican ingredients to produce American-styled dishes as he recalls:

“Ricardo Muñoz Zurita is a very well-known chef here in Mexico. One day, he told me, “You're a really good cook, but you're not making Mexican food. You're using

Mexican ingredients in a very shy way and you should know your culture better, and you have a responsibility as a Mexican cook to do Mexican food." And I never forgot that"

At a later stage, he became one of the top Latin America's restaurants by seeking authentic Mexican ingredients, such as varieties of corns that was almost forgotten in Mexico, to prepare traditional Mexican dishes:

"The heart and soul of Mexican cuisine is corn. There are hundreds of varieties of corn, if not thousands. The problem is, in the interests of efficiency, many of the old traditional varieties are being phased out. And these are absolutely essential to Mexican cuisine. To me, the risk is losing these amazing ingredients that I can cook with and just being able to find one kind of corn. GMO corn, it's a consequence of the agricultural system that is not working."

Virgilio Martinez went even a step further, when he achieved a world-leading position only after utilizing local and little-known ingredients from each altitude-classified ecosystem in Peru, and serving a tasting menu based on these different ecosystems:

"From the bottom of the sea to the top of the mountains, in Peru, we have many, many, many different levels and altitudes. So, at Central, we want to show you Peru in a vertical way. You are here in the restaurant, and you're eating a dish that comes from 4,000 meters above sea level and you're experiencing the Andes. And then you're gonna go down to the sea... going up to the valleys... and then you're gonna cross to the Amazonia. You are going to 17 ecosystems in one experience. At one point, you can be, like, a bit dizzy, yeah? [chuckles] But that's very important. Just not to see the ingredients. Just not to see the landscape. Just not to see one region of Peru. For us to understand Peru... we have to see the whole thing."

We summarize the process of becoming a top chef in our data in Figure 2.

Insert Figure 2 About Here

Discussion & Conclusions

The aims of the paper is to study the career trajectories of entrepreneurs, the motivation and challenges experienced by a unique and very restricted selection of individual people who have reached the status of global celebrity in their field – chefs who reached the accolade of Michelin three star restaurant or similar level of recognition. We studied chefs that are clearly recognized as on top of their field, the majority features in the top 50 restaurant list.

Going back to our research questions, we identify a unique pattern which we label as the ‘two-steps’ trajectory, where these successful chefs went through a double-hurdle process, first, delving into having their own restaurant and establishing themselves, then moving up in terms of both quality and reputation, to reach the Michelin level. Thus, a significant finding was the dual-step progress, where to become a celebrity level, the first step was to be highly professional and gather experience, and then the next step could come (although not guaranteed).

Contribution to Careers theory

Looking at the motivation and trajectory for this choice of career, only about a third (nine out of the 26) suggested that their path to the top was a planned endeavor. In many cases the impetus started with family or via Apprenticeship, which is a long and essential phase of a chef's career (Inversini, Manzoni, & Salvemini, 2014). As for the idea of having a role model to follow, this was not the case in the first step, but later, when aiming to the second phase, having a role model was instrumental for many of the successful chefs (see Gibson, 2003; Scherer, Adams, Carley, & Wiebe, 1989).

We also checked whether the careers were directed externally or managed by the individual, where they were mostly initiated and pushed by the individual, but not in the sense of following inner calling (Hall & Chandler, 2005). This was not prevalent, with only one third suggesting or implying that this was their long-time focus of inspiration. The majority of the cases were clearly influenced by chance events. Serendipity was a factor, though it was clear that some of the chefs were actively looking for opportunities, and when a chance came, it was positively exploited by them. This way we respond to calls to study and address the role of chance events in careers (Pryor & Bright, 2011), and how they can be managed and positively exploited (Kindsiko & Baruch, 2019).

Our last Research Question was about the possible match with the nature of the ‘New Careers’ theory – and the answer is mixed. Some followed traditional career path in restaurant business, such as following a family business. Others reached their position by managing their own career and taking the responsibility for their future, like the protean career theory suggests (Hall, 2004). There was less support for the theory of boundaryless career, as most stay within the same sector, and did not experience many job changes. This suggests that vocational barrier/silo still remains – to make it to the top, one needs to attend a Chef School, mostly in France. Chefs’ school and the progression system are highly institutionalized. The reputation system relies heavily on external measure – in particular the need to gain Michelin ‘approval’.

Careers and their trajectories are the product of multiple mutual ‘deals’, explicit or implicit, (e.g. legal vs. psychological contracts). These deals are negotiated and agreed among individuals, organizations and society agents (e.g. media, for chefs). Whilst framed by, on the one hand, values, norms of behavior, and customs, and on the other hand, by law and regulations, a career ecosystem nevertheless submits to the Darwinian principle of ‘the survival of the fittest’. The success rate in the restaurant business is low (Watson, 2007), and much of it is due to the chef in charge, as conventional wisdom backed with anecdotal cases suggest

(Svejenova, Aran, & Mazza, 2005). Those not able, ready and willing to challenge themselves and others, change and adapt to emerging circumstances, will be left out. The urge for innovation, the need for recognition and independence characterized our sample, in line with Carter, Gartner, Shaverand and Gatewood (2003).

Contribution to Entrepreneurship theory

Entrepreneurship literature does not have a significant cover of restaurant and their development. Most of it refers to large chains and franchised businesses. We offer a fresh look at highly successful restaurants from the vantage point of the chefs that lead them. The literature on serial entrepreneurship does not characterized our population. Only few of the sample followed a career trajectory of sequence of opening restaurants, in contrast to the ‘Corridor Principle’ (Ronstadt, 1988) and the positive effect identified for entrepreneurship experience (Uy, Foo, & Song, 2013).

Connecting the two literatures

The data and analysis manifests the multiple level of career actors that one need to be engaged with in order to progress to the top level. The interdependence on a wider system is evidence for the career ecosystem theory (Baruch & Rousseau, 2019). Chance event was also prominent, but we offer evidence to suggest that in many cases it was more of intuition for identification of the opportunity. Being in the right place and the right time is critical, as suggested recently (Kindsiko & Baruch, 2019) but individuals can aim to and look for finding which is the right place and what is the right time to be in.

The process of progress is not linear – we identified two or rather three stages. The actual stage, it is known, that most restaurants do not manage to survive not even for one year – the ‘valley of death’ (Hudson & Khazragui, 2013). Then of those which are successful in surviving, gaining the first, then second or third Michelin star is the second step.

The market is global. While by far, Japan and France have the most (28 and 27 respectively), the other countries where there are 3 star Michelin restaurants are globally distributed: USA (14), Germany (11), China (10), Italy and Spain (9 each), UK (5), Switzerland (3), Belgium and South Korea (2 each). Still none in South America, Africa, or Australia.

Practical and managerial implications

Vocational training are a critical stepping-stone, though insufficient on their own. Individuals interested in entrepreneurship career in the restaurant businesses should realize that to fulfil a dream of becoming celebrity chef, the path requires high level of investment, following a traditional process of bottom to top via a two-step process.

Limitations and future research agenda

Like any qualitative studies, we have a limited sample size, though sufficient and in line with earlier studies, and covering a representative sample (Saunders & Townsend, 2016). Relying on secondary data analysis, which was targeting only successful populations meant that we could not find similar interviews with those who did not make it. Future studies may look at entrepreneurs who managed to gain fair success, and those who failed, rather than focus on the top successful very selected individuals.

Conclusions

Reaching the top of profession, to a level of global celebrity requires certain career orientation, tenacity and perseverance. Chance event can play a significant role in it, but can sometime be led by the individual, namely serendipity can be managed to a certain extent. The typical progress that have led to becoming a global celebrity took two-stage path, and included a significant training and developing in a domain that is renown for the specific sector – for our population it was the French restaurant sector and geo-location. Success is not limited to

those who considered the aim of becoming a global celebrity as a ‘calling’, though this was the case for a significant minority of the participants.

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Figure 1 – Data structure

1st order concept	2nd order themes	Aggregate dimensions
Education	Intentionality of becoming a chef	Calling vs. chance event
Starting out in the restauration industry		
Early family memories		
First interest in becoming a chef		
Critical coincidental event	The role of chance	
Realizing success via peer recognitions	World-class achievement through two steps	New careers & professionalism
Going back to roots / national cuisine		
Food critics as gatekeepers	Strongly institutionalized field	
The importance of rankings		
Rite of passage: experience in France		
Process of innovation	Breaking with established norms	Professionalism & Boundaryless
Artistic qualities and inspirations		
Early difficulties to challenge conventional models		
Importance of career advancement	The importance of exposure and diversity of experiences	
Self-managing one's career		
Help and inspiration from mentors		
Curiosity about national cuisine		

Figure 2: **Becoming a top global chef: a double-step process**

