

SELECTED ASPECTS OF PERFORMING THE PERSONNEL FUNCTION IN SMALL FOOD SERVICE ENTERPRISES

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Abstract

Performing the personnel function in a small food service enterprise depends largely on how the human is ranked in the organization, as well as on the management staff's approach to forming and exploiting the human potential. This involves creating favorable circumstances to perform this function, which entails examining specific variables (factors) that have an impact on how it is shaped. The study analyzes and assesses selected components of the personnel function in relation to food quality growth in small food service enterprises with use of the results of the empirical research conducted in restaurants located in Lower Silesia. The results obtained from the research were used as the basis for specifying the reality of performing the personnel function in the analyzed food service establishments.

Keywords: *personnel function, personnel policy, food service enterprises, food quality.*

1. Introduction

Food service enterprises are among the oldest forms of economic activity, ones depending on virtually all economic sectors. Such entities operate on the food service market, which is one of the most popular and dynamic market sectors. When considering the dynamics against the changes taking place in the structure of economic entities, what should be seen as a particularly painful issue, especially for continuity of small food service establishments, is first and foremost the necessity to implement stringent legal requirements, including mainly the food law, and hence to respect specific customer's interests with regard to food (e.g. good dish quality). Good dish quality should be identified with such a meal that meets the consumer's expectations in terms of its taste, smell, look and consistency (the so-called "sensory attractiveness"), as well as health properties and health safety (Turlejska, Pelzner, Konecka-Matyjek, Wiśniewska 2003, p. 37). Attentiveness to these qualities is a "measure" in the

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hands of the personnel, who is highly ranked in the process of shaping food quality in the entire food chain (i.e. from the primary production to the final consumption) (see more: Wiśniewska, Malinowska 2011, p. 28).

It should be added that quality has numerous layers of meaning, which makes it difficult to define it in an unambiguous manner both in the practice and theory of management (Costin 1999). This results from the fact that quality can be considered both in multifaceted and multidimensional terms, but also in comprehensive terms oriented towards continued improvement of all functions and processes that take place in the enterprise and influence the dish quality (Juran, Godfrey 1993, p. 2.4).

What is also important is the awareness that food quality is shaped not only by people but also as the result of exerting impact on people through, among others, creating favorable circumstances for performing the personnel function, which is one of the organic functions of the enterprise. The function is a set of activities (task areas) which refer to the human and which entail in fact not only recruiting people but also shaping them properly and exploiting them to the fullest (Lichtarski 2000, pp. 237-242). Performing the function should play the fundamental role in the process of shaping food quality. Therefore, it seems to be necessary to strive for recruiting competent employees, that is people who are able to act effectively using their knowledge that is indispensable to perform actions (tasks) related to shaping food quality and who are appointed based on their skills and abilities (Gableta 2006, p.19). What is also significant is the human internal motivation and physical features (e.g. health and appearance).

What seems to be of particular importance is focusing on such generic elements of the function as: choosing, appraising, training, developing and remunerating employees (See: Figure 1). These elements, apart from the fact that they should be performed in a given organisation, must be subject to regulatory (management) activities (Lichtarski 2000, pp. 237-242).

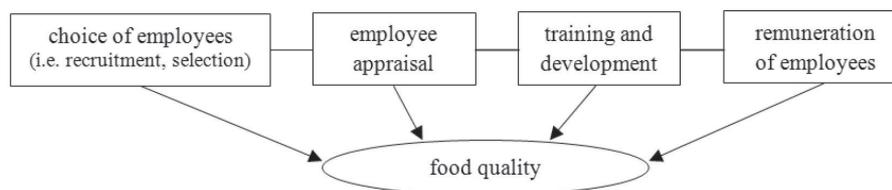


Figure 1. Selected elements of the personnel function constituting the object of empirical research

The “instrument” that facilitates performing the personnel function is the high rank of small food service enterprises’ owners with regard to personnel

issues. It is them that the approach to people –which manifests itself through the pursued personnel policy –adopted in a given organization depends on. Decisions concerning this policy reflect a given organization’s human resource management concept, which is a certain philosophy of performing the personnel function, and hence of perceiving employees and general intentions related to them. This policy constitutes a specific signpost in the process of forming a set of actions taken in the area of managing the human potential of food service establishments to facilitate the appropriate formation and exploitation of this potential (Gableta 2006, p. 29). It is also worth noting that entrepreneurs, for example through their attitudes and behaviors, shape a specific organizational culture, which determines the employee attitude to caring for the quality of actions involved in producing high quality dishes.

The study focuses on sixteen micro- and small food service enterprises that employ up to fifty people based on an employment relationship for an indefinite term or civil law contracts. The analyzed economic entities are conventionally called here small food service establishments. Particular attention is given to the leading restaurants on the Lower Silesian market that specialize in national cuisines.

The object of the study is defined as analysis and assessment of performing selected elements of the personnel function in relation to food quality growth in small food service enterprises. Simultaneously, the management staff’s attitude to subordinates is indicated with reference to the pursued personnel policy. This is reflected in the following research question: Does a specified set of principles and guidelines for managing the human potential of the examined enterprises facilitate shaping food quality? It has been considered appropriate to focus on choosing, appraising, training, developing, and remunerating employees. The weaknesses identified within those generic elements of the personnel function are analyzed with regard to attentiveness to food quality.

In order to meet this objective, both literature review and empirical research conducted between 2013 and 2014 are used. The latter were mainly surveys carried out with use of a survey questionnaire, which was developed with own means. They were expanded with in-depth interviews and own observations.

2. Considerations of performing the personnel function in small food service enterprises

The personnel function is always shaped in specific circumstances determined by various variables (factors), which have an impact on its components. Performing this function is influenced by variables connected with decisions and actions taken in food service enterprises and ones that should be directly

linked to the elements that form business environment. The factors listed first are referred to as internal factors, while the ones following them are external factors.

Internal factors should be associated mainly with:

- human resource management system,
- working conditions,
- financial situation of the enterprise (financial standing),
- preferable approach to the human.

External factors are manifested mainly in:

- stringent legislative requirements,
- situation on the labor market.

At this point, it is worth focusing on the human resource management system in small food service enterprises. The system is distinguished by its specificity. The specificity is discussed on the basis of particular features and behaviors which are the same for operating methods of small enterprises. M. Sidor-Rządkowska is right to indicate that in small economic entities the system is most frequently (Sidor-Rządkowska 2010, pp. 23-25):

- simple – the management staff employ simplified methods, techniques and tools, which is usually accounted for by lack of time, but also appropriate competence necessary to implement more complex human resource management systems,
- centralized – decisions made in these entities, in particular those related to shaping the personnel function, are usually taken by owners themselves. Their reluctance to expand the workforce structure and to delegate responsibility in fear of losing their power and control is manifested here,
- not very formalized – pressure on limiting formal requirements to perform those on which the management staff have no actual influence and which they have to observe subject to sanctions. In small enterprises, significance of other tools is reduced, particularly those which remain within the competence of the management staff, oriented towards shaping the personnel area in enterprises.

It should be added that the scope of functions and tasks performed by employees is very complex in small food service establishments. Particular emphasis is put on the possibility to delegate employees to work on any position.

A relevant determinant of the enterprise's specificity is also its organizational culture, which is a set of fundamental opinions that were developed, invented or adopted in the organization to minimize its problems (Chojnicki, Bałasiewicz 2005, p. 276). Ł. Sułkowski highlights that numerous small economic entities have a hierarchical, but at the same time collectivist,

organizational culture based on authority and influence of the owner's family members on the development of the organization (Sułkowski 2005, p. 47).

In such circumstances, what gains in significance is the necessity to create "human-friendly" working conditions with regard to material and social operational aspects that determine the human situation and behaviors in the working process. Therefore, the point is to create conditions which will be fully accepted by employees and which will simultaneously become the basis for addressing their needs and expectations (e.g. flexible forms of working time organization), which will be reflected in appropriate behaviors and hence appropriate quality of the activities taken in the area of food production (Gableta 2003 p. 179).

It is also important to give attention to the financial standing of small food service entities. This is because it may greatly facilitate "investing" in the personnel area of enterprises or reduce these investments. The dominant conviction regarding the practical operation of the discussed enterprises is that proper attentiveness to this area requires certain costs and is therefore unbeneficial. M. Rowińska-Fronczek is right to say that the management staff of enterprises must decide whether they are closer to P.B. Crosby's convictions (Quality is free! It's the lack of it that costs!), or lean towards the view that "Quality costs! Projects, investments, training!" (Lichtarski 2003, p. 319).

The actions taken in the personnel area of food service enterprises are largely determined by their preferred approach to people, which manifests itself in the pursued personnel policy. In broader or narrower terms the policy refers to either of the two basic models of this policy, i.e. the sieve model or the human capital model.

A policy based on the sieve model refers to the traditional formula of performing the personnel function based on objective and instrumental treatment of employees called Personnel Management (PM). Preference for this model entails recruiting and retaining employees who are the best in view of the current needs of the enterprise. According to this concept, people who perform their work are treated as one of the "instruments" in the hands of the management staff of food service establishments. In this regard, formalization of the employer-employee relation is desired. As for pursuing the personnel policy in accordance with the human capital model, which draws on the concept of Human Resource Management (HRM), involves a subjective orientation towards the employee, who is assigned the leading role in the enterprise management process. A high rank is attributed to the management staff who are responsible for shaping and exploiting the enterprise's potential. It is also important to develop employee competence and to invest in their development on a long-term basis, as well as to build their involvement and to stress their participation in decision-making processes (Cierniak-Emerych 2010, pp. 11-

31). This participation is reflected in a concept which has been gaining in significance lately and which relates to forming a bundle of key management practices, i.e. in the so-called High Performance Works Systems (HPWS). Within these systems, a significant rank is assigned to the High Involvement Work Practices (HIWP) concept, which stresses employee autonomy when making specific decisions concerning the work that they perform (Kostera 1999, Cierniak-Emerych 2010, pp. 11-31). In practice, numerous enterprises refer to the sieve model, simultaneously emphasizing elements of the human capital model in the adopted policy.

Problems related to the application and operation of the HRM concept entail to a large extent universalism, willingness to convey the “only right” idea for human resource management. In practice, however, difficulties in its implementation merge (Gableta 2003).

It should be also emphasized that integration with the European Union standards encouraged the contemporary food service entities to verify their previous approach to people and work performed by them. When shaping specific activities concerning the performance of the personnel function, one should at the same time focus on the important, from the perspective of food quality growth, activities connected i.e. with employees taking part in the decision-making process (the so-called employee participation) and investing in their development (See more: Gableta, Cierniak-Emerych 2011).

Employee participation may indicate not only taking part in a specific undertaking but also being its member, sharing something with someone. The issue of participation may also mean allowing the employee to participate in an activity, to assume responsibility, to reap benefits and to incur various costs. Participation understood in these terms indicates also employee share in the process of creating and exercising a specific impact on the operation of the enterprise (Dobrzański 2001, p. 267), inter alia through observing the principles of the Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points (HACCP) system, which is particularly important for product safety and health quality.

HACCP is a system used to identify, evaluate and control hazards relevant for food safety. What gains in importance in such circumstances is creating conditions for cooperation and involvement of people in the process. This means enhancing involvement of all employees, including management staff of food service establishments. This enhancement requires allowing for the competence of the people who have a direct contact with food, providing employees with supervision and training in accordance with the work they perform, as well as ensuring that all employees are aware of their role and responsibility with regard to performing HACCP-related activities. What is meant here is training on hygiene requirements and training on HACCP principles and their application. It is also important to draw on the instructions

and procedures which identify employee tasks related to each Critical Control Point (Wiśniewska 2004, pp. 73-91).

Performing the personnel function, and particularly the employees recruitment process should be considered in the context of the situation on the labor market. It is in fact the case of the employer market and the employee market. On the former one, no significant difficulties with availability of employees to perform activities supporting the basic activity of the food service enterprise are noted. It is the employers that dictate employment conditions here and target their offer at the broad labor market to reach the maximum number of candidates. On the latter market, there are, however, certain difficulties in recruiting qualified employees in a given segment (that is, inter alia, the chef). Such persons usually have very high expectations of their employer. This is why it is important to provide them with attractive offers and influencing them to arouse their interest in working in the organization (Ochremiak 2014).

3. Realities of performing the personnel function in small food service enterprises – results of empirical research

The research was conducted between January 2012 and March 2014 in sixteen food service establishments located in the Lower Silesian province. They include restaurants offering a full waiting service and specializing in national cuisines (i.e. Polish, French, Italian and Mediterranean ones). The organizational and legal status of the analyzed enterprises reveals the dominance of the economic entities which are sole entrepreneurs (62%) and partnerships (38%). The questionnaire survey method was used in the research process. The questionnaire was addressed to owners of small food service enterprises. The survey concerned the pursuit of the quality management process in the analyzed organizations. The most relevant questions linked to the examined relation between performing selected elements of the personnel function and activities connected with shaping food quality were selected for the purposes of this study. The survey questionnaire included open- and closed-ended questions. The majority of the closed-ended questions were presented in a tabular form as alternative questions: “yes/no” or a conjunction enabling a multiple choice of answers. The data were collected among a sample that was properly selected from the general population. The research sample was determined through purposeful selection. In order to generate this sample, one hundred and seventeen leading restaurants from the Lower Silesian market were selected. The return rate of the questionnaires equaled 13.7%.

Empirical research on the personal sphere of food service enterprises is a difficult task. It is noticeable that employers neither want to share information nor to verify their own and their employees’ knowledge. Owners of small

establishments explain it with their fear of disseminating the results of the questionnaire survey in spite of anonymity assurance, which does not facilitate conducting research in this area.

Table 1 presents the hierarchy of the values preferred by small food service establishments.

Table 1. The main values preferred by small food service establishments*

No.	Specification	Percentage of answers indicated
1	Improving food quality would not be possible without qualified personnel	26%
2	Bond valuable employees to the enterprise for a long term	19%
3	Take care of the employer's good image on the local labor market	19%
4	Raise the personnel's awareness in terms of food safety	16%
5	Invest in employees	13%
6	Minimize labor costs	6%

*Respondents could choose multiple answers, which is why the total does not equal 100.

As it can be seen, the personnel role in shaping quality is becoming more and more significant. This is proved by the management staff's statements that rank employees high in the process of improving food quality (26%). Nineteen percent of the management staff indicate that their efforts made to employ good personnel are usually linked to certain activities oriented towards supporting the process of developing the employer's positive image on the local market, which is reflected in the so-called personnel marketing. What is noticeable against this background is the concern declared by the management staff of food service establishments about bonding their key employees, i.e. the so-called core employees (i.a. chef, manager), with the enterprise (19%). At the same time, raising the personnel's awareness of food safety (16%) and investing in their development (13%) is becoming increasingly more significant. In such organizations, no attention is given to minimization of labor costs (6%). It should be also added that the statements recorded in these areas are in fact declaratory.

Seeking an answer to the question: "Does a specified set of principles and guidelines for managing the human potential of the examined enterprises facilitate shaping food quality?" was accompanied by investigating the aforementioned components of this function, such as recruiting, selecting, appraising, training, developing and remunerating employees. It is noticeable that the recruitment process in small food service establishments is carried out by owners themselves (88% of the indicated answers) or a person who is highly ranked by the owner in the process of appointing competent employees,

that is the chef (12%). The management staff are not willing to outsource tasks concerned with verifying personnel needs.

The results of the research indicate that the necessity to fill a new position in a small enterprise usually involves placing an announcement in the media (31%), mainly in online recruitment services and daily press (See Table 2).

Table 2. Which recruitment tools are applied in your enterprise to fill a vacancy when necessary?*

No.	Specification	Percentage of indicated answers
1	Announcements in the media	31%
2	Personal contact	28%
3	Recommendations from employees	22%
4	Announcements at workplace	14%
5	Job assistance	6%

*Respondents could choose multiple answers, which is why the total does not equal 100.

Simultaneously, free interviews with owners of small food service establishments reveal that these tools are used mainly for filling the position of the chef (i.e. due to his or her leading role in the quality shaping process). Therefore, the person to take this position is chosen more carefully. What is important here is the candidate's experience (measured by years of work and employment in renowned restaurants), culinary knowledge and skills, and ability to implement quality systems, as well as:

- self-organization competence (i.e. independence, time management, perfectionism, decision-making capacity, stress resistance),
- interpersonal competence (interpersonal communication, teamwork).

It should be also added that when it is necessary to fill non-core positions (e.g. a cook, serving staff), small enterprises use mainly personal contact (28%) and recommendations from employees (22%). These persons are employed even without any qualifications, and their skills are tested on the job, with careful execution of adaptation programs for new employees through extension of coaching. These employees are expected to present attitudes such as honesty, trust, subordination, as well as work involvement, ethical conduct and independence.

Table 3 presents selection tools applied in small food service establishments.

Table 3. Which selection tools are applied in your enterprise to choose the best candidate?*

No.	Specification	Percentage of indicated answers
1	Job interview	34%
2	Analysis of documents (CV, covering letter)	26%
3	Work samples	26%
4	Knowledge tests	6%
5	Recommendations from others	6%
6	I do not apply any selection methods	3%

*Respondents could choose multiple answers, which is why the total does not equal 100.

According to the management staff, an efficient tool that facilitates making decisions on employing the most competent employee is job interview (34% of answers indicated by the respondents) (See Table 3). Owners of a few of the researched enterprises, bearing in mind the significance of the human capital growth in the context of performing tasks connected with shaping food quality, included the direct involvement of the chef (12%) in the staff recruitment process. In the case of small enterprises, it is sometimes the case that no selection techniques are taken into account –owners employ anyone who wishes to work in their enterprise.

Employee appraisal is also among important elements of the personnel function. Appraisal facilitates identification of the desired attitudes, behaviors and performance, which foster improving the quality of the activities taken in the area of food production. They are applied in 94% of the analyzed food service establishments, mainly in the form of non-formalized appraisal, which is an element of employees' everyday work. A special emphasis is put on the informal appraisal performed by the owner (83%), appraisal meeting (12%) and appraisal by colleagues (3%).

Table 4 presents the major criteria for employee appraisal in the analyzed food service establishments.

Table 4. Which criteria are taken into account in your enterprise when appraising employees?*

No.	Specification	% of answers
1	Accepting the values observed in the enterprise (involvement, diligence, perseverance and regularity, order)	25%
2	Quality of work (precision, careful implementation of the adopted procedures)	24%
4	Ability to work unsupervised and uncontrolled by superiors	14%

No.	Specification	% of answers
5	Interpersonal communication	10%
6	Compliance with hygiene requirements	10%
7	Ability to use the working time (minimizing losses, inter alia, of energy, materials, time)	10%
8	Ability to make decisions at work	8%

*Respondents could choose multiple answers, which is why the total does not equal 100.

Due to employees giving much attention to executing specific food quality characteristics, the greatest significance is attributed to behavioral criteria, which refer to specific employee behaviors (i.e. involvement, regularity in performing activities (tasks), maintaining order in the workplace) (25%), and to effectiveness criteria (i.e. work quality) (24%).

Table 5 presents the main reasons for employee appraisal in small food service establishments.

Table 5. Do you appraise your employees in order to*:

No.	Specification	Percentage of indicated answers
1	Increase their remuneration	30%
2	Know whom to dismiss	22%
3	Increase their motivation	22%
4	Encourage them to take care of shaping food quality	15%
5	Decrease their remuneration	7%
6	Know whom to train	4%

*Respondents could choose multiple answers, which is why the total does not equal 100.

At the same time, 56% of the management staff declare that the appraisal approach applied in their enterprises entails activating employees to take actions in the quality area. Emphasis is put also on stimulating them to take actions exceeding the adopted standards through increasing attentiveness to good working ambience (30% of the indicated answers), using bonuses and allowances (22%), increasing employee remuneration (18%), ensuring employee development (13%), praising and recognizing (11%), and employing for an indefinite term (4%).

The interviews conducted with the enterprises' owners reveal that they do not attach much weight to the issue of recognizing employee expectations and preferences regarding their training or development. There are still considerable reserves in this area. It is worth bearing in mind that triggering them is not facilitated by the owners' fear of the risk involved in the first considerable

“investment in a human”. According to employers, taking relevant actions is too costly and comes down to organizing the training required by the law. Therefore, a high rank is assigned to training which is related to implementing HACCP principles and which is oriented towards developing employee involvement in improving food quality, particularly food safety (88%). In these entities, much emphasis is put also on the on the job training run by the chef (coach) (88%), which consists in uncovering their potential, supporting their development and stimulating them to work “better” on a given position. Lower rank is assigned to external training (i.e. specialist courses), where only the best employees are delegated (44%). What is important is also job rotation, which consists in deploying employees anywhere in the enterprise (38%).

4. Conclusion

The operation methods of small food service enterprises show a mixed personnel policy model, which constitutes rather a non-intentional and unconscious compilation of the sieve and human capital models. Combining different behavior-related principles and guidelines for the personnel requires in particular taking into account two fundamental employee groups, i.e.:

- core employees (i.e. chefs), who are chosen more carefully, with associating the features of their potential with the features facilitating attentiveness to food quality in the spirit of the sieve model. After employing a person, emphasis is put on shaping his or her potential through investing in his or her development, including proper exploitation in the context of quality growth.
- non-core employees, i.e. cooks in relation to whom the constant “delaying tactics” can be seen (Stabryła 1996, p. 24). It is noticeable that there are employees recruited through “contacts”, which reduces the costs involved in recruiting them. It is remarkable that these persons are usually employed without any analysis of their qualifications and their skills are tested on the job. If the employee does not turn out to be successful “on the spot”, he or she is dismissed or redeployed. The personnel is trained to a limited extent only. Such a method is in fact counter-productive in terms of quality, it does not facilitate food quality growth.

Without questioning the fundamental influence of the employer and core employees on creating added value in the food service enterprise, it should be remembered that the quality culture requires involvement of all internal stakeholders. In the process of caring for food quality, the final result is determined by all its links, including supply. A success or failure usually results in attraction or irreversible loss of the customer-consumer. As the research suggests, it is difficult to attract people with the desired competence

profile, even for the so-called peripheral positions (a cook, serving staff). In this respect, a special significance of good working ambience for accepting the values observed in the examined enterprises and the quality of the work provided there is revealed. This should be borne in mind when expecting that employees will implement the adopted procedures with involvement, regularity and diligence.

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