Lost Opportunities and Wasted Skills: Learning Experiences of Apprentices and their Attrition

Portfolio

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Certificate of Original Authorship

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

Signature of Student:

Date:
Acknowledgments

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Portfolio Structure

This portfolio consists of a meta-statement and seven artefacts, each with their own page numbers, table of contents and references. It is an assembly of distinct artefacts, written for multiple audiences connected by the Research Study and bound as a single thesis. Each artefact has been separated by a coloured page to delineate it from the following artefact for ease of retrieval and reference. After much deliberation the final structure of this portfolio is offered as the clearest solution to a composite research study.
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Glossary of Terms used in this Portfolio

ABS: Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACCI: Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry
ACTU: Australian Council of Trade Unions
AVETRA: Australian Vocational Education and Training Research Association
CBT: Competency Based Training
CEO: Chief Executive Officer
DEEWR: Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations
GTO: Group Training Organisation
MCEETYA: Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs
MCVTE: Ministerial Council for Vocational and Technical Education
MEGT: Trade name for Group Training Organisation; Melbourne East Group Training
NCVER: National Centre for Vocational and Education Research
OECD: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
R&CA: Restaurant and Catering Association
RTO: Registered Training Organisation
TAFE: Technical and Further Education
TVET: TAFE delivered Vocational Education and Training
VET: Vocational Education and Training
Meta-statement
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Abstract

The rate of attrition of apprentices failing to complete their apprenticeship and dropping out of a trade altogether has long been a concern for both industry and government (DEEWR 2008; Knight & Karmel 2011). Attrition amongst commercial cookery apprentices is one of the highest, where more than 60% leave within their first year. Low pay and unsociable hours have often been cited as reasons why many apprentices reassess their career choice (Pratten 2003a; Pratten & O’Leary 2007). However while these conditions are difficult to change, many apprentice chefs leave through poor treatment and the lack of opportunity for learning, rather than the physical demands of the job. The purpose of this study is to investigate learning opportunities for apprentice chefs and their influence on retention. This study further examines the inter-relational dynamics of enriched work practices and learning and its influence on apprentices’ motivation.

Apprentices will bring expectations to their apprenticeship from sources external to their workplace and VET. These sources may be from programs on television and the internet (Bonsal 2007), school VET programs (Smith & Wilson 2002a, 2002b) or weekend casual work in local restaurants (Fuller & Unwin 2004; Hodgson & Spours 2001). The origin of these expectations may be an idealised notion of what it means to be a chef but a prevailing motivation to cook for a living. This study examines what motivates apprentices to complete their apprenticeship and qualify in a very challenging industry.

Two stages were developed in this investigation where the findings of the first stage informed the progression to the second. Stage one investigates apprentices’ motivation and attrition from a broad spectrum of industry stakeholders where qualitative data was collected in order to gain insight into the viewpoints of key individuals. The Stage One Report Industry and VET was disseminated in order to seek feedback and enrich the data. Conference papers presented during the study also acted as conduits for feedback. Stage two then progresses the study through interviews with successfully qualified apprentices and their nominated mentors to capture the voices and perceptions at the core of this problem. The Stage Two Report Industry and VET was published and disseminated for feedback, again to enrich the data together with a final conference paper. The resultant findings present evidence of generational shifts in apprentices’ expectations of their learning and work practices in the workplace. The sociological implications for workplace reform may require effective industry and VET changes for the next generation of apprentices. Recommendations have been generated for the industry and VET to apply in practice for the retention of apprentices.