



**Becoming top global chef: What does it take to become a highly successful entrepreneurial careerist?**

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3 **Becoming top global chef: What does it take to become a highly successful**  
4 **entrepreneurial careerist?**  
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9 **Abstract**

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12 **Purpose** – To understand the career path to the pinnacle of professional life. What does it  
13 take for an entrepreneur to become a global celebrity in one’s profession? We explore the  
14 career motivation, trajectory, and outcomes of a niche population who made it to the top of  
15 their careers.  
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22 **Design/methodology/approach** – A qualitative method using publicly-available, pre-  
23 recorded interviews of a documentary series on a unique sample of 30 top global chefs who  
24 gain Michelin-stars or equivalent. We used a qualitative approach to analyses the data  
25 alternating data and theory.  
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32 **Findings** – We identify a unique pattern which we label as the ‘two-steps’ trajectory, where  
33 these successful chefs went through a dual-hurdle process, first, delving into formal training  
34 and establishing themselves, then moving to a top chef status through innovation inspired by  
35 their history, chance events, and treating their work as an artistic oeuvre and an experience.  
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42 **Practical implications** – The authors provide an observed pattern for what is required to be a  
43 top global chef  
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47 **Originality/value** – The study advances career theory and entrepreneurship studies via  
48 integrating the two perspectives. We offer a theoretical contribution by identifying the  
49 relevance and importance of ‘new careers’ for entrepreneurs, recognizing critical success  
50 factors and reinstating the balance between the agency of the entrepreneur and their context.  
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56 **Keywords:** Entrepreneurship careers, chefs’ careers, New Careers  
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## 1. Introduction

The restaurant business, a highly competitive sector of the hospitality industry, is characterized by significant entrepreneurship activities, where more business failures occur than in other sectors (Garcia-Lorenzo et al., 2018; Watson, 2007). To attain success in this business, the entrepreneur needs to combine entrepreneurship, creativity and artistic competence (Fernández-Pérez et al., 2020; Garcia-Lorenzo et al., 2018; Svejenova, 2005), in addition to factors that are relevant to any entrepreneur. These can be dealing with challenges (Jumelet et al., 2020) or having professional knowledge of and strong passion for the business (Cardon et al., 2009).

Within the hospitality industry, the restaurant sector is large and expanding: revenue for the USA restaurant industry was estimated at \$799 billion at the end of 2017 and growing (Griffith, 2018) as long as the COVID-19 impact is restricted to the time of the pandemic (Gössling, Scott, and Hall, 2020; Yang and Koh, 2022). In France it's 14.4 million employees in some 87,000 restaurants, with estimated sales at \$106.10 billion. In the UK, 614,100 employees in around 72,500 enterprises.

We focus on chefs' career as restaurant entrepreneurs where their career journey is of entrepreneurs in small business, which is understudied (for exception see Andringa et al., 2016), answering recent calls to better understand the sector and how success can be achieved in it (Thirumalesh Madanaguli et al., 2021). Startups of small businesses have a low rate of success (Eisenmann, 2021), but lessons should be learnt from those successes. Indeed, being considered top in this field, via gaining reputation and attaining the status of a celebrity, is a worthy accolade to aspire to (Ng and Feldman, 2014; Spurk et al., 2019). There is considerable literature regarding how people ascend to the top echelons of large enterprises, such as professionals or academics (Beigi et al., 2018), but the cover of entrepreneurs' is scant (Quinn et al. 2020). Little is known about industry-specific business awards (Harrison and

Jepsen, 2015) and investigation of vocational accolades like those won by chefs are rare in the literature (for rare exceptions see Gill and Burrow (2018), Giousmpasoglou et al., (2018), and Traynor et al., (2021)).

Similar to other sectors, founders of successful businesses in this sector have higher entrepreneurial self-efficacy, independence, and motives-related innovation which characterize entrepreneurs (Ottenbacher and Harrington, 2007; Zellweger et al., 2011). Yet, more is required to become a global celebrity. An important test for success is decided by ranking and critics here, such as the Michelin categorization, as the very few who make it on the list typically remains an understudied cases of vocational and entrepreneurial career success. What factors enable entrepreneurs to reach this level remains unknown. Is it the role of qualification system? Of chance event? Of career orientation and motivation?

Our aims are to study the intersection between entrepreneurship and careers, exploring the career trajectories of the most successful global chefs, their motivation, and the challenges they have experienced, thereby answering earlier calls to integrate entrepreneurship and careers studies (Burton et al., 2016; Decker et al., 2012). We explore factors that enabled a unique and very selective list of individuals who have attained the status of global celebrity in their field – those who have Michelin-star restaurant or similar level of recognition.

We offer a unique contribution to the study of careers and entrepreneurship, by extending the current knowledge of the so-called ‘new careers’ into this specific niche. Entrepreneurship literature has largely failed to build on careers studies, and we believe this to be a significant omission, as much of the success of any small business is interwoven with the career aspiration and fulfilment of the entrepreneur. Further, these successful individuals serve as role models for others. Through exploring the role of career orientation, career as a calling, chance event, and the business environment as part of the wider labor market ecosystem (Baruch and Rousseau, 2019), we challenge contemporary career theory.

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3 We also show that entrepreneurship is context- and actor-dependent (Welter, 2011).  
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5 The context-dependent aspect includes in particular the vital role that chance events have on  
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7 entrepreneurs' success, and the importance of institutional elements in achieving the highest  
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9 of status. These chefs/entrepreneurs, and their success, are therefore considered within the  
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11 ever-changing context with all its complexity and uncertainty.  
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## 17 **2. Theoretical background**

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19 The career literature tends to focus on managers and professionals (e.g. accountants and  
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21 consultants) and less on vocational individuals. Theories that can help explain the success for  
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23 'conventional' managerial and professional roles are *Social Capital* theory (Seibert et al.,  
24  
25 2001) or *Self-determination* theory (Deci and Ryan, 2011), for example, stop short in their  
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27 explanatory power when it comes to the very top few. Indeed, rarely can scholar study the  
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29 careers of the few top individuals in their field (cf. Davidsson and Honig, 2003).  
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## 36 **3. Entrepreneurial careers in the restaurant business**

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38 Entrepreneurship can be defined as the scholarly examination of how enterprise ideas are  
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40 institutionalized by entrepreneurial actors through relational process in order to generate  
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42 social and economic value (Karataş-Özkan and Chell, 2010). The role of actors, in particular  
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44 the entrepreneurs, is critical in leading change and generate enterprise (Battilana et al., 2009),  
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46 but contemporary entrepreneurship literature emphasizes the centrality of contingencies that  
47  
48 condition entrepreneurial success (Davidsson, 2020; Ramoglou et al., 2021), representing a  
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50 shift from the traditional focus on entrepreneurship's agents (e.g., Alvarez and Barney, 2007;  
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52 Sarasvathy, 2001).  
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56 Earlier studies of contextual factors necessary for entrepreneurial success (Johns, 2016;  
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58 Ramoglou and Tsang, 2016) explored individual factors that can predict the success of small  
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3 enterprises in general (Murnieks et al., 2014) and of restaurants' entrepreneurship more  
4 specifically (Ramos-Rodríguez et al., 2012). Factors that distinguish the most successful from  
5 the rest remains underexplored with one recent exception on the importance of charismatic  
6 leadership on the success of top chefs (Gui et al., 2020; Montargot et al., 2022). Being top in  
7 the restaurant business is about uniqueness professionalism and recognition. Traversing  
8 symbolic and social boundaries can enhance the likelihood of gaining professional eminence  
9 or, if the outcome is negative, sliding into relative obscurity (Jones, 2010), and at least at the  
10 first stage, much is due to word-of-mouth (Line et al., 2020).

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21 Another factor is the aspiration to be self-employed, taking risks like questionable job  
22 security, and gaining autonomy, which account for successful entrepreneurship (Kolvereid  
23 and Isaksen, 2006). A strong passion is another critical ingredient for being successful in  
24 business (Cardon et al., 2009). Conversely, overconfidence and emotional unfitness of  
25 individual owners were the main predictors of restaurants' failures (Camillo et al., 2008). To  
26 date, though, it is unclear what career paths enable successful entrepreneurship, and how  
27 individuals embark on such paths.

#### 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 **4. Careers and new careers**

##### 41 42 *4.1 Boundaryless and protean careers*

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44 Contemporary careers are depicted as dynamic, volatile, and fast paced (De Vos et al., 2020;  
45 Hart and Baruch, 2021). The boundaryless careers theory does not suggest a total lack of  
46 boundaries (Inkson et al., 2012; Rodrigues et al., 2016), but where individuals choose and  
47 follow their career path according to their own values and desires, such as following the  
48 protean career (Hall, 2004) crossing physical, psychological, and other boundaries (Sullivan  
49 and Arthur, 2006). Those studying careers that led to the top organizational echelons usually  
50 focus on CEOs or top executives – less so on entrepreneurs of small businesses that reach the  
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3 pinnacle of their profession. We are thus ill-informed whether entrepreneurial careers follow  
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5 boundaryless and protean careers (Marshall and Gigliotti, 2020).  
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#### 10 *4.2 Career success at the top*

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12 There are many ways to define and to attain career success (Ng and Feldman, 2014), but more  
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14 factors intervene when moving to the 'top of the top' like being authentic (Tolson, 2001).  
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16 Contemporary societies glorify the status of celebrity as a reflection of the uppermost level of  
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18 success (Driessens, 2013). Haute cuisine is recognized as a highly institutionalized field (Gill  
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20 and Borrow, 2018), where rankings conducted by experts (e.g. critics, being awarded  
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22 Michelin-star, James Beard awards, or the World's Top 50 list) have a determinate effect on  
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24 business success.  
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#### 30 *4.3 Career ecosystem*

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32 The nature of the current business world leads to a career system that can be considered as the  
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34 *career eco-system* (Baruch, 2015). An eco-system is defined as '*a system that contains a*  
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36 *large number of loosely coupled (interconnected) actors who depend on each other to ensure*  
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38 *the overall effectiveness of the system*' (Iansiti and Levien 2004, p. 5). The eco-system view  
39  
40 offers an innovative way to explore business phenomena (Gribling and Duberley, 2020). The  
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42 use of ecosystem can also correspond with viewing entrepreneurial activity as an ecosystem  
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44 on its own (Wurth et al., 2021). Within career eco-systems, multiple actors communicate, act,  
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46 react, negotiate, engage, and develop, evaluating and re-evaluating multiple psychological and  
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48 legal contracts (Baruch and Rousseau, 2019). The restaurant sector is highly competitive, and  
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50 to survive in it one needs to realize the 'landscape' of career at the personal level, and the  
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52 needs and demands of the clientele as well as the media, when aspiring to the top echelons of  
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54 the profession (Lee and Tao, 2021). A career ecosystem operates under the 'survival of the  
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3 fittest' law, and only few can reach and maintain certain top positions, and sub-systems co-  
4 exist and a number of stakeholders can influence career trajectory of individuals. Thus, the  
5 career ecosystem perspective may help to better understand entrepreneurial careers of chefs in  
6 a global context.  
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#### 14 *4.4 Career as a calling and passion for entrepreneurship*

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16 Many people follow or wish to follow their career in response to an inner 'calling' (Hall and  
17 Chandler, 2005), which can be influenced by a number of factors (Duffy et al., 2018). For  
18 entrepreneurs, having entrepreneurial passion is a critical ingredient of the calling (Marshall  
19 and Gigliotti, 2020). When following a sense of calling, one would typically be more  
20 determined and efficient, and thus more successful in making and following career decisions  
21 (Ahn et al., 2017), because 'calling' is instrumental in overcoming difficulties and developing  
22 resilience in making it to the top. It has been suggested that the role of 'Calling' is important  
23 in fulfilling career aims, and requires passion to the cause (Cardon et al., 2009). Most people  
24 consider work as one of three options: basically a 'Job' to perform, more broadly as a  
25 'Career', or at the higher level of aspiration, a 'Calling' (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997). By  
26 *career*, Wrzesniewski and colleagues (1997) refer to a focus on advancement, and by *calling*,  
27 to a focus on enjoyment of fulfilment, and on socially useful work. Passion is associated with  
28 entrepreneurial identity centrality (Murnieks et al., 2014) where the role and identity of the  
29 entrepreneur are important but need further investigation (Karataş-Özkan et al., 2014). Yet,  
30 such studies were not conducted in the hospitality industry, where restaurants are businesses  
31 that require multiple skills and competencies and are measured externally by the media and  
32 public ranking systems.  
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56 When a career follows a 'calling', there is a higher chance of attaining psychological  
57 success (Hall and Chandler, 2005). But if the calling is not fulfilled, the consequences for  
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3 well-being are very negative. Calling is typically considered to be a strong motivator, to reach  
4 the top or to enter certain professions (e.g., medicine, architecture). It could be expected that  
5 people reaching the top of their profession would tend to be directed by such an inner calling.  
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7 Yet, this proposition was not tested empirically, and it is unclear what factors play a role –  
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12 *internals* – like ‘calling’ and passion, or *external*, like existing structures on one hand, and  
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14 luck (e.g., chance events), on the other hand.  
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#### 19 4.5 Chance event

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21 Chance events can influence career trajectory in various ways, and might culminate in un-  
22 anticipated, unintended outcomes (Pryor and Bright, 2011). To date, the role of chance event  
23 in careers has not attracted in-depth investigation in the literature (for an exception see Bright  
24 et al., 2009). Nevertheless, chance events can alter one’s career for the better or for the worse.  
25  
26 The perception that the chance event is deterministic was challenged recently, suggesting that  
27 chance events can be managed, or at least utilized by individuals for their benefit (Kindsiko  
28 and Baruch, 2019). This idea has not yet been tested in the business environment.  
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38 The above discussion has generated the following research questions:

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40 1. What was the motivation and trajectory for this choice of career and business? Was it  
41 a planned endeavor? Are there a clear pattern or patterns of ‘becoming top chef’?  
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- 44 2. Were those careers directed externally or managed by the individual and, if so, did  
45 they follow an inner calling or were they influenced by chance events? If the latter,  
46 can serendipity be managed?  
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- 50 3. Do the careers of these highly successful entrepreneur chefs match with the nature of  
51 the ‘New Careers’ theory?  
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## 5. The context – profession and business

While it is critical to acquire certain technical and managerial skills in order to become a head-chef (Allen and Mac Con Iomaire, 2017), the profession/vocation of a global-renowned top chef depends on innovation and ability to be creative (Lee et al., 2020; Madeira et al., 2021), to identify and to shape the taste that people will want to have – these cannot be replaced by machines and robots (Ottenbacher and Harrington, 2007).

To be a top chef is a career aspiration for current and future generations. An attempt to understand the journey of an elite chef was recently portrayed by Traynor et al. (2021). They interviewed a (single) Michelin-star chef, concluding importance of dedication, passion, and competitiveness, among other, as important factors of success. Earlier, Gergaud et al., (2011) analyzed quantitatively a large sample of successful French chefs revealing that the quality of the restaurants where these chefs initially start their career has a significant impact on becoming a successful chef. Similarly, and trying to understand the connections between top chefs and top restaurants in Germany, Aubke (2014) used social network analysis to conclude that the observed high degree of centrality in the German haute cuisine could constrain the creativity of individual actors. Stierand and Lynch's (2008) conceptual work used secondary data and looked at sources and models of culinary innovation. They related innovation to artistic aspiration, perceived newness, continuous and discontinuous conditions, learning and network, and adaptation. Finally, the gender barriers in becoming a top chef are documented, but Albors-Garrigos et al., (2020) empirical study found "feminine values" to be important factors in the success of six female top chefs. Our study answers these studies call for further research in a larger sample adopting a qualitative design (Haddaji et al., 2020; Traynor et al., 2021) on the processes of becoming a top chef (Gergaud et al., 2011, Stierand and Lynch, 2008).

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3 Restaurants are most typically small to medium size – apart from the major franchised  
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5 businesses. Out of the 15 million restaurants globally, only 55 (less than a very small fraction  
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7 of a per cent - 0.00037%) gain the top grade of 3 Michelin-star status. Michelin-stars are  
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9 given to the restaurant, but chefs of these restaurants tend to gain a ‘celebrity’ status in the  
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11 media. This means that the entrepreneurship activity and the individual career are interwoven  
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13 in many ways. Similar prestigious rankings are the World’s Top 50 and the James Beard  
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15 awards in the USA. These awards have a very important symbolic value in this highly  
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17 institutionalized field. Restaurants and chefs in these lists are idolized, and recognized for  
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19 their artistic and innovative contribution to the international haute cuisine. The vast majority  
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21 of these top chefs are the owners of their restaurant, or sometimes multiple restaurants,  
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23 emphasizing the importance of the entrepreneurial work in this sector.  
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## 29 **6. Method and data collection**

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31 To explore the career trajectories of top global chefs, we employed a qualitative research  
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33 approach. Collecting primary data from these individuals is a difficult task due to their  
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35 geographical locations and their busy schedules. However, modern communication  
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37 technologies enabled us to collect an abundant amount of secondary data, as did other  
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39 scholars when trying to study this elite group (e.g., Aubke, 2014, Gergaud et al., 2011,  
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41 Stierand and Lynch, 2008). Our main dataset was collected from 30 pre-recorded video  
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43 interviews with top global chefs who featured in an award-winning documentary series  
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45 episodes of about 50 minutes each, *Chef’s Table*. This main dataset was triangulated with  
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47 further secondary data consisting of publicly available documents, such as records of chefs’  
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49 schooling, articles in newspapers, podcasts, other interviews, and the social media.  
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54 *Insert Table 1 About Here*

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57 The 30 video episodes had a similar structure following a semi-structured interview protocol  
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59 that covered the following themes:  
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- The distinctive characteristics of the chef's culinary approach, and how it was developed over the years. What makes the chef's creation unique? Where do they find their inspiration? How do they select and source their ingredients? What philosophy drives their creations?
- Each chef tells a narrative of how they reached this high level of success, both for their career progress and for their entrepreneurship development (the restaurant being the enterprise). If and when did they start to study at culinary school? What motivated their career choices? What were the highs and lows in their careers? What have been the main events in their career development? What fueled their entrepreneurial spirit?
- Further interviews with other persons such as food critics, other chefs, family members, collaborators, partners and employees added to the richness of the data regarding the chefs' career trajectories and the questions raised in the previous two themes.

This way, the program enabled the participants to deviate when a certain issue was of relevance, but then return to the main theme. The narratives reflect rich and thick descriptions of each chef's journey to success from multiple perspectives: the chef themselves, experts in the field and often times family members. These narratives produced a high-quality dataset to analyze – many examples are provided in the findings section. The data gathered from the interviews were subjected to strong scrutiny, enabling us to compare and contrast the various views expressed by the participants. Further, we employed data triangulation to clarify and validate the emerging themes and outcomes (see later) to ensure trustworthiness. Doing so offers a major advantage, as our method curbs biases that can be an influence, consciously or unconsciously, when scholars approach a subject with their own agenda.

It is worth pointing out that others have used either a smaller sample to interview (e.g., one chef in Traynor et al. (2021), and six in Albors-Garrigos et al., (2020)) or a larger

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3 regional sample to study quantitatively (e.g., Aubke, 2014; Gergaud et al., 2011). Through  
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5 this innovative methodology, our study is able to look at larger samples qualitatively, and  
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7 provides new insights on this elite group.  
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10 We reached the theoretical saturation point of data around the 25th interview, then  
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12 continued to verify that. Saturation is required for qualitative studies (Corbin and Strauss,  
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14 2008), as reaching category saturation is a critical means of verification when conducting  
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16 qualitative research (Suddaby, 2006). Our sample size also matches well with what is  
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18 considered a 'good size sample' (Saunders and Townsend, 2016).  
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## 24 **7. Analysis**

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26 The interviews and the complementary data provided ample evidence, both in terms of depth  
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28 and breadth, to answer our three research questions. We employed the widely used qualitative  
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30 data analysis NVivo software, where the interviews were transcribed and imported, to manage  
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32 the large dataset, as it is considered a robust tool for qualitative analysis (Edhlund and  
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34 McDougall, 2016). The data analysis followed Gioia et al.'s (2013) recommendations. We  
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36 started by coding the whole episodes inductively, where first-order concepts emerged from  
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38 the data as the researchers tried to remain faithful to the data: "through coding you define  
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40 what is happening in the data and begin to grapple with what it means" (Charmaz, 2006, p.  
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42 46). Coding was conducted by the first author, and the second author played the devil's  
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44 advocate and checked the logic and consistency of the coding process. When deemed  
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46 necessary, the codes were modified to reach agreement. Next, we included all concepts  
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48 related to our theoretical lens and set aside any codes that did not have a clear relation to the  
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50 chef's careers (e.g. having a tattoo, being polygamous).  
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56 In the second phase, all the interview transcripts were read again, and triangulated, in  
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58 order to trace second-order categories and aggregate the codes under thematic clusters  
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(Corbin and Strauss, 2014; De Wet and Erasmus, 2005). The thematic analysis revealed the nature of the process of becoming a successful entrepreneur within the top restaurants sector. Triangulation was carried in this second phase out in the form of comparing and contrasting data from multiple sources, aiming to enhance the trustworthiness (credibility and dependability) of the research, as recommended by Lincoln and Guba (1985). For example, in one interview, Dan Barber presented the argument for a direct relation between the restaurants and the farmers (farm to table). In addition to the interviews, our main source, we found confirmation of a long-term commitment to this philosophy across Dan's career through articles and podcasts. Similarly, Ben Shewry's discourse during the interview about hitting rock bottom at a certain stage in his career, which then was confirmed via a newspaper article three years previous before the documentary.

During this process, we identified themes that reflect well-established theoretical constructs (e.g., chance events, protean careers). In the third and final stage of coding, and following Corbin and Strauss (2014), we used such theoretical constructs to structure our empirical observations. This process allowed us to trace each chef's career trajectory in relation to the codes. The overall data structure is presented in Figure 1, designed following Gioia et al. (2013).

## 8. 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*

### *8.1 Motivation and intentionality of becoming a top chef*

Surprisingly, only 1/3 of the chefs had a career based on early 'calling'. By early calling we mean that they got into the restoration business early in their life with an intention to carve

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3 out a career in this field. The majority of these top chefs had gone into working in the kitchen  
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5 at a later stage of life or via serendipitous accidents.  
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10 For those who wanted to be a chef early, falling in love with this career seems to be related to  
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12 an early family connection and context. For example, the early stage for Ben Shewry, Grant  
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14 Achatz, Vladimir Mukhin and Corrado Assenza was working in their family restaurants. This  
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16 early exposure to the restaurant environment induced fascination with and a love of it,  
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18 translating later on to a ‘call’ to become a chef. All these 10 chefs either opened a restaurant  
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20 or attended a cooking school early in their lives.  
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24 More surprisingly perhaps, the majority of the other top chefs did not initially see themselves  
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26 in this industry. For instance, Mashama Bailey studied psychology but did not do well in her  
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28 first job before turning to cooking. Both Nancy Silverton and Enrique Olvera cooked to  
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30 impress their potential partners (both later married later the person they were trying to  
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32 impress). Cristina Martinez was forced into cooking by her husband’s family. Alexa Atala  
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34 signed up to cooking school in order to extend his visa:  
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39 *“I had two problems. First one, make money. So I start to work painting walls. And*  
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41 *the second, get a visa. One of the guys who was painting walls was doing chef school.*  
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43 *I said, “Nice way to have a visa.” So I went to chef school. To be clear... I didn't*  
44  
45 *decide to be a chef. [laughing] My visa pushed me to be a chef.”*  
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49 Our data, then, illustrate that becoming a top global chef does not necessarily start through  
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51 an early childhood calling. Most of the studied chefs started in the culinary environment  
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53 due to various contextual elements.  
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### 8.2 *The importance of exposure and diversity*

Once they started their career in cooking, these top chefs acknowledged the importance of mobility in order to work with different mentors, different types of dishes, and exposure to different ingredients. This was sometime self-managed, as in the case of Niki Nakayama who decided to spend time in Japan and Dominique Crenn traveled to various places and worked in numerous hotels before deciding to open her own. 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?”*

Finally, another source of exposure is when a chef examines the different regional cuisines. Magnus Nilsson traveled in the Baltic countries to discover different preparations and document them in a book. Similarly, Virgilio Martinez traveled to different places in Peru to discover the diverse cuisine:

*“I decided to travel for 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 in the early stages.

### 8.3 *The role of chance events*

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



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3 Maissmo Bottura recalls that his work became recognized after a visit from the most  
4 important food critic in Italy, who had to stop in Modena (where Massimo's restaurant is) to  
5 avoid heavy traffic caused by a road accident:  
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11 *"One night in April 2001, the most important food critic in Italy was driving from*  
12 *Milan to Florence, and there was an accident in Bologna, so there was a very long*  
13 *line. He decided to stop in Modena. He detoured and he had dinner in Osteria. Two*  
14 *days later, the most important magazine, Espresso, came out with this article."*  
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21 Grant Achatz had tongue cancer and lost his sense of taste after radio therapy. This loss  
22 forced him to collaborate and be creative. When the taste sense came back gradually, he re-  
23 discovered flavors in a unique way, just like babies discover them. Dan Barber bought an  
24 excessive quantity of asparagus by mistake, so decided to do a whole menu based on this  
25 vegetable in order to avoid loss. This excessive use of one seasonal ingredient impressed a  
26 food critic who wrote an important and influential review. Vladimir Mukhin's passion about  
27 Russian cuisine drawn very little attention initially, but the Russian embargo on imported  
28 European ingredients (after the annexation of Ukraine triggered a series of event) suddenly  
29 put him in the spotlight as a national hero.  
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42 These findings illustrate the importance of chance and coincidental events on the life and  
43 professional achievement of these entrepreneurs.  
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#### 46 47 *8.4 Strongly structured and institutionalized field*

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49 Achieving a top chef status is bounded by strong institutional rules. First, mastering the  
50 French cuisine appears to be an important requisite in the trajectory. The vast majority went to  
51 France to learn from the best chefs there, as did Vladimir Mukhin, Dan Barber, and Francis  
52 Mallaman among others. Magnus Nilsson explains:  
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3       *“You go to France to be trained, and there's a tradition of it, and it's brutal, and it's*  
4       *brilliant. It presupposes a knowledge of your ingredients and what to do with them*  
5       *that nobody else has. It doesn't mean that you're gonna be creative, it doesn't mean*  
6       *you're gonna know... That you're gonna come up with new recipes. It doesn't mean*  
7       *you're gonna be a success, but you have the tools. And you can't get 'em anywhere*  
8       *else.”*  
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Once this French-experience is completed, the chef-in-the-making then explores other possibilities and techniques. Oftentimes, this meant being inspired by a mentor. Moreover, career success is achieved only when receiving peer-recognition, symbolized by invitation to exhibit at international conferences, attracting food-critic reviews, and featuring on lists of top restaurants. Ana Ros's restaurant in Slovenia received no attention until a review appeared in an Italian publication, and Alex Atala's serving of Brazilian food only became known after he was invited to an international conference and received compliments on stage from a top chef. This reflects the institutional power concentration in food critics, international conferences, and established classifications – all institutional elements.

#### *8.5 Readiness to break norms, do things differently, to innovate*

Reaching the pinnacle of the chefs' pyramid requires courage and not being afraid to challenge norms in an innovative way. Massimo Bottura's early work was detested by the local Modenese as a food critic, Massimo himself and his wife told. However, Massimo aspired to run 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 tarts. Taka, suddenly, he dropped one of the two tarts, 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*

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3 *on the counter and half was there in the plate [...] I said, "Taka, stop, stop. Look*  
4 *through my fingers. [making a photo frame] That is beautiful. Let's re-build as it's a*  
5 *broken stuff." [...] So, we get the lemon sabayon and we spread it on the plate. We ...*  
6 *rebuilt on the other plate with all this single precision to make them feel we did that*  
7 *on purpose. That was the moment in which we created 'Oops! I Dropped the Lemon*  
8 *Tart'."*  
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18 This innovation seems thus important to the success of these top chefs. It is  
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20 underpinned by a desire to be different and to stand out from the crowd.  
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### 22 23 *8.6 The process of becoming a top global chef*

24  
25 As these top chefs told the stories of their careers, it became evident that achieving a start  
26  
27 status was broken into two main stages. First, the chef achieves recognition after long years of  
28  
29 hard work and dedication. However, achieving a world-class peer recognition appears to be a  
30  
31 consequence of cooking dishes inspired by their own roots. Alex Atala cooked for years and  
32  
33 was recognized as a good chef by reproducing the French cuisine. However, he became  
34  
35 known internationally only when he stopped cooking French food and started cooking  
36  
37 Brazilian workers' food as two food critics point out:  
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42 *"When I talk to Brazilians about Alex Atala, they're just proud that he's done it. That*  
43 *he's risen to this level, and he's done it with dignity, and he's done it in an*  
44 *uncompromising way."* and *"At this point, in Brazilian cuisine, chef Alex Atala*  
45 *started to play an important role internationally. All of this helped Brazilians feel*  
46 *pride in their own culture."*  
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54 Virgilio Martinez even went a step further, when he achieved a world-leading position only  
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56 after utilizing local and little-known ingredients from each altitude-classified ecosystem in  
57  
58 Peru, and serving a tasting menu based on these different ecosystems:  
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3 *“From the bottom of the sea to the top of the mountains, in Peru, we have many,*  
4 *many, many different levels and altitudes. So, at Central, we want to show you Peru*  
5 *in a vertical way. You are here in the restaurant, and you're eating a dish that comes*  
6 *from 4,000 meters above sea level and you're experiencing the Andes. And then*  
7 *you're gonna go down to the sea... going up to the valleys... and then you're gonna*  
8 *cross to the Amazonia. You are going to 17 ecosystems in one experience.... we have*  
9 *to see the whole thing.”*  
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20 We summarize the process of becoming a top chef in our data in Figure 2, representing a  
21 dual-step process. Whereas the first steps are dealing with the professional journey of learning  
22 and becoming a chef, the second stage is closely linked to becoming entrepreneur, setting and  
23 building own business, reputation and unique signature to reach success.  
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30 ***Insert Figure 2 About Here***  
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## 32 **9. Discussion and Conclusions**

### 33 *9.1 Conclusions*

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39 Our overall conclusions are that reaching the level of global top chef, requires certain career  
40 orientation, tenacity, and perseverance. However, chance events have a significant role, and to  
41 a certain extent can be managed. The typical progress that has led to becoming a global  
42 celebrity followed a two-stage path. Finally, success is not exclusive to those who considered  
43 the aim of becoming a global celebrity as a ‘calling’.  
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### 50 *9.2 Theoretical Implications*

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53 We have focused on world top chefs’ career as restaurant entrepreneurs, studying their career  
54 journey – the why and how they have managed to gain an exceptional career success as  
55 entrepreneurs. In the case of restaurants, the nature of the business and the entrepreneurship  
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3 activity are strongly associated with the individual and his or her career. We thus contribute to  
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5 both career and hospitality entrepreneurship literature and theory (Burton et al., 2016; Dyer,  
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7 1995; Thirumalesh Madanaguli et al., 2021).  
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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 dual-hurdle process, first delving into having their own restaurant and establishing themselves, then moving up in terms of both quality and reputation (brand name – see Erkmen and Hancer, 2019) to reach a top level. This contributes to the concept of the boundaryless career that is not linear (Arthur, 2014), and this applies in particular to the creative industry (Bennett and Hennekam, 2018).

### 9.2.1 Contribution to Careers theory

Looking at the motivation and trajectory for this career choice, only a third of the chefs suggested that their path to the top was an early 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 et al., 2014). When entering the second phase, having a role model was instrumental for many of the successful chefs (see Scherer et al., 1989).

We also checked whether the careers were motivated by following an inner calling (Hall and Chandler, 2005). The majority of the cases in our sample were clearly influenced by chance events. Some of the chefs were actively looking for opportunities, and when a chance came, they positively exploited it. We thus exposed the role of chance events in careers (Pryor and Bright, 2011), and how they can be positively exploited (Kindsiko and Baruch, 2019).

Regarding ‘New Careers’ theory, we have mixed evidence. Some chefs have charted the 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). We expand the protean career

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3 theory and the role of being proactive to the under-covered area of the hospitality industry.  
4  
5 Equally, our findings suggest that vocational barriers and silos still persist, contrary to the  
6  
7 premises of the theory of the boundaryless career, and the progression system are highly  
8  
9 institutionalized.  
10  
11

12 We further developed career theory: whilst framed by values, norms of behavior, and  
13  
14 customs, as well as by law and regulations, a career ecosystem nevertheless submits to the  
15  
16 Darwinian principle of 'the survival of the fittest', and where, for entrepreneurs, the  
17  
18 psychological contract may be with the self, not with the organization (Baruch and Rousseau,  
19  
20 2019). The chefs need to navigate their careers through a combination of professionalism and  
21  
22 business acumen with multiple actors. The success rate in the restaurant business is low  
23  
24 (Watson, 2007), and much of it is due to the chef in charge, as conventional wisdom backed  
25  
26 by anecdotal cases suggests (Svejenova et al., 2005). The urge for innovation, and the need  
27  
28 for recognition and independence characterized our sample, in line with Carter et al., (2003).  
29  
30 To the above we would add the need to be proactive (Seibert et al., 2001) and acquire an  
31  
32 entrepreneurial mind-set (Haynie et al., 2010).  
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#### 40 *9.2.2 Contribution to Entrepreneurship theory*

41  
42 We found that successful entrepreneurship is both actor- and context- dependent (Welter,  
43  
44 2011). Thus our study helps reinstate the conceptual balance between "the agent" and the  
45  
46 agency of the entrepreneur (Alvarez and Barney, 2007; Sarasvathy, 2001) and "the  
47  
48 environment" by underscoring the contingencies (Davidsson, 2020; Ramoglou et al., 2021)  
49  
50 necessary for the realization of entrepreneurial aspirations (Johns, 2016; Ramoglou and  
51  
52 Tsang, 2016; Welter, 2011). Our empirical insights add nuance to the recent turn toward the  
53  
54 complex interplay of the environmental conditions facilitating the actualization of desirable  
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56 futures (Davidsson et al., 2020; Dimov, 2020). For example, how opportunity and luck may  
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3 play for success (Kirzner, 1979; 2002) and how individuals can exploit an imaginable turn of  
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5 (Feduzi et al., 2021; Ramoglou, 2021). This should be seen in balance with the entrepreneurs'  
6  
7 active agency to manage their careers, for example, by exposing themselves to diversity,  
8  
9 following discipline and rigor, being creative and innovative (Garcia-Lorenzo et al., 2018;  
10  
11 Ottenbacher and Harrington (2007). Being proactive is critical factor not merely for career  
12  
13 studies, but also for entrepreneurship activities (Glaub et al., 2014). Our study offers further  
14  
15 contribution to understand individual factors that may contribute to entrepreneurship success,  
16  
17 adding to earlier work which identify the role of psychological factors (Baluku et al., 2016)  
18  
19 like leadership (Montargot et al., 2022) and creativity of the chefs (Lee et al., 2020; Ouyang et  
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21 al., 2021).  
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26  
27 Entrepreneurship literature does not offer a significant cover of entrepreneurs-chefs  
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29 and their development. Serial entrepreneurship literature does not characterize our population.  
30  
31 Only a few of the sample followed a career trajectory through a sequence of opening  
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33 restaurants, in contrast to the 'Corridor Principle' (Ronstadt, 1988) and the positive effect  
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35 identified for entrepreneurship experience (Uy et al., 2013).  
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39 Our participants developed significant entrepreneurship capital, a form of social  
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41 capacity that drives economic development (Urbano and Aparicio, 2016) and leads to  
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43 economic growth (Audretsch and Keilbach, 2004). Part of it may be due to the ability to make  
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45 a positive impression via the media, a feature which characterized our population (Baron and  
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47 Markman, 2003).  
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### 50 *9.3 Implications to practice*

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52 Trying to learn from failures, Eisenmann (2021) focused on reasons for start-ups failures.  
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54 Lessons, though, can also be learnt from successful venture. Chefs feature on top-restaurant  
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56 lists and aspiring chefs/entrepreneurs could benefit from our two stage model when  
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58 developing their career plans. When preparing future entrepreneurs, in particular in the  
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3 restaurant field, for example in training, schools may expand their training programmes to  
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5 wider knowledge on how to identify and exploit chance events  
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#### 10 9.4 Limitations and Future Research.

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14 Our sample size is limited, though it is sufficient, in line with earlier studies, and covers a  
15 strong representative sample (Saunders and Townsend, 2016). Relying on secondary data set  
16 as the main set of data is a limitation, as we could not formulate our own specific questions. Yet,  
17 consistent structure and quality of the TV documentary enable us to gain insights and learn from it, as  
18 a resourceful option (Hill, 2007). Lastly, we only targeted successful populations, thus could not  
19 compare with non-successful chefs. Future studies may look at those who failed, as reasons  
20 for failure of entrepreneurial activities vary, and there is new call for studying the reasons  
21 why they tend to fail (Eisenmann, 2021).  
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**Figure 1: Data structure**

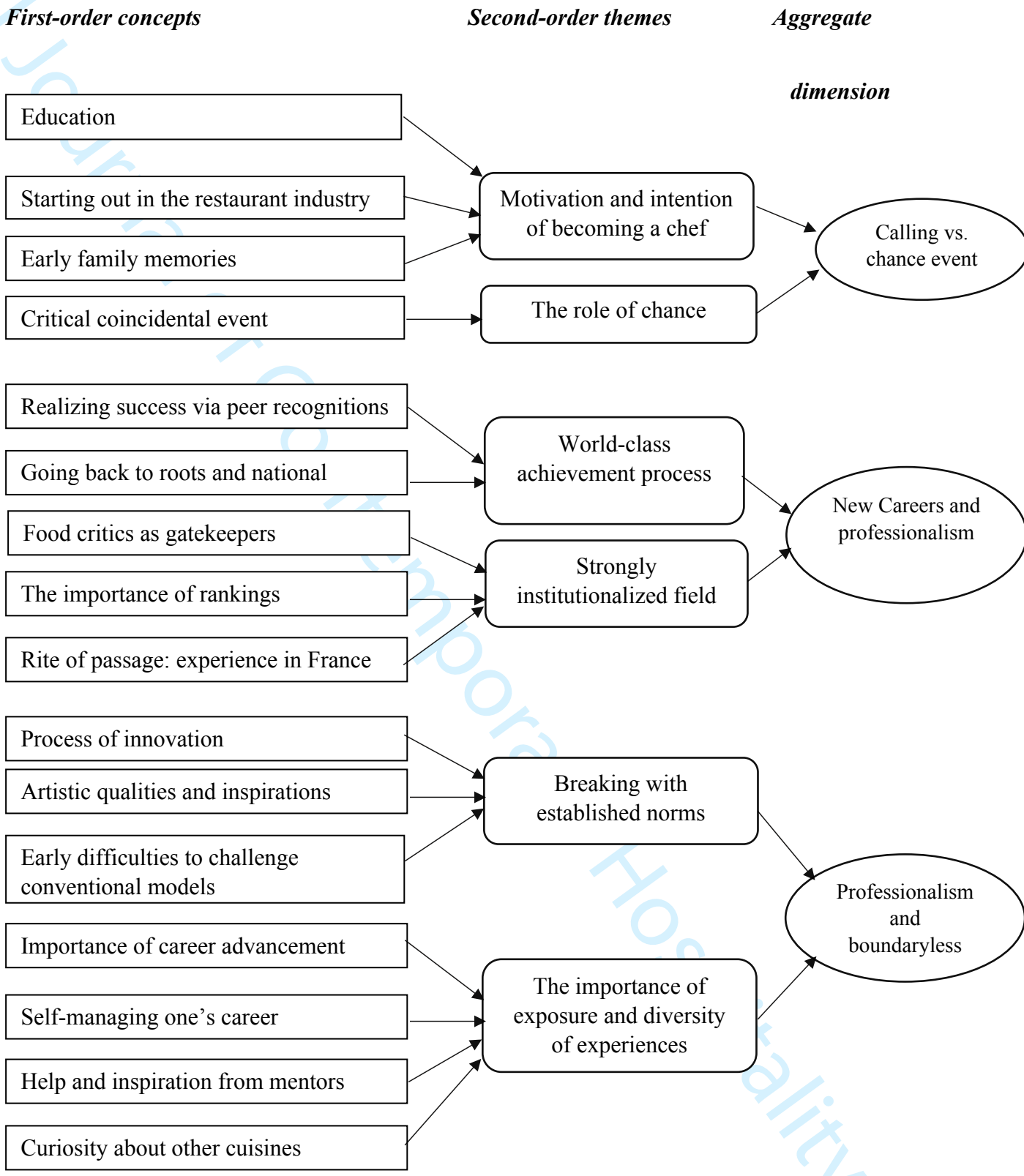
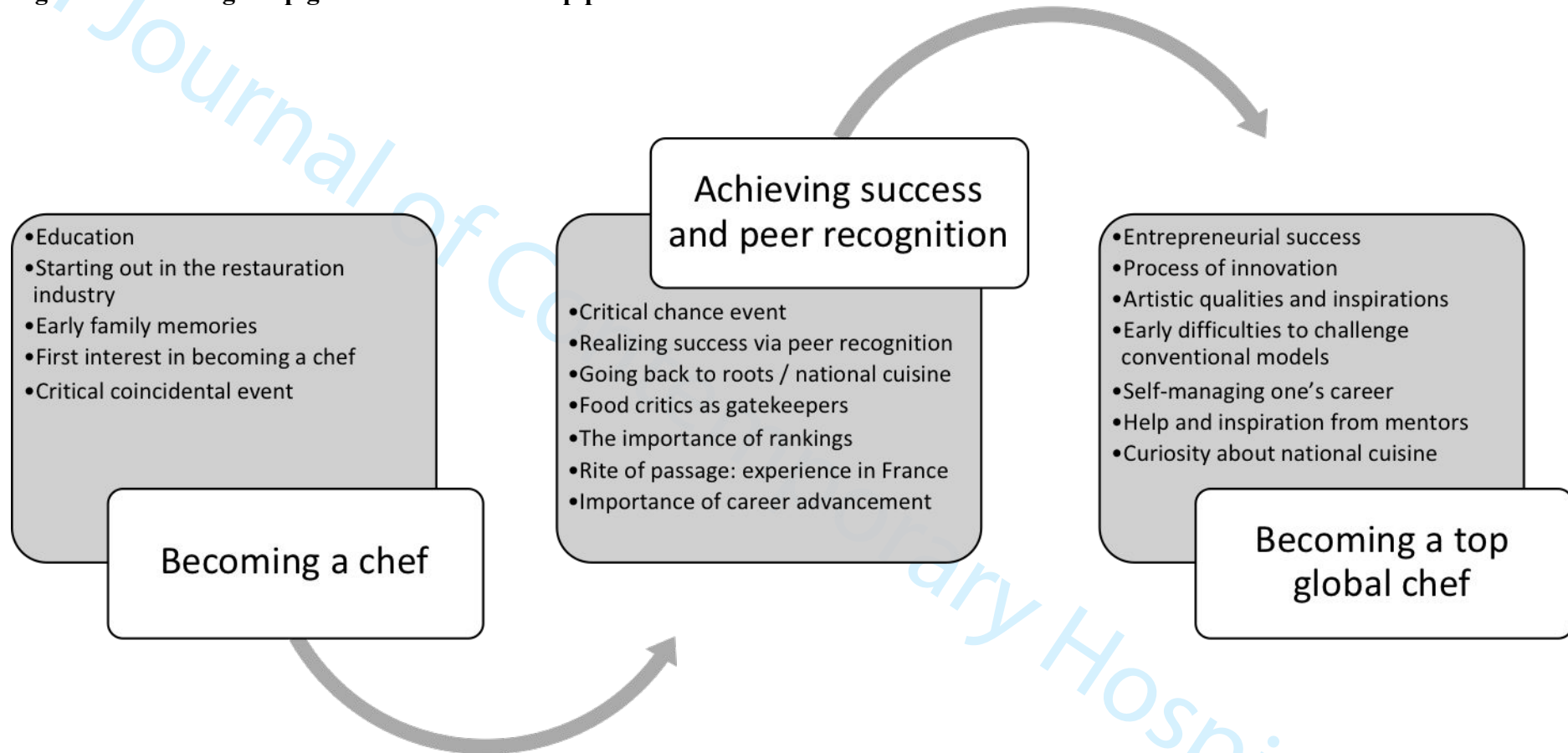




Figure 2: Becoming a top global chef: A dual-step process



**Table 1 – the 30 Top Chefs included in this study**

<b>Chef</b>	<b>Restaurant</b>	<b>Why considered a top chef?</b>	<b>Genre</b>	<b>Age</b>
Massimo Bottura	Osteria Francescana	World's 50 Best Restaurants (1st place) 3 M Stars	M	59
Dan Barber	Blue Hill Restaurant at Stone Barns	Top chef in the US, in the Time's 100 most influential, chefs' choice award	M	52
Francis Mallmann	Patagonia Sur	World-pioneer in outdoor cooking. In 2015 resigned from the top 50 judge duty in protest over 'awards' system	M	65
Niki Nakayama	n/naka	The only female Kaiseki chef, rising stars J BEAD award	F	46
Ben Shewry	Attica	World's 50 Best Restaurants	M	44
Magnus Nilsson	Fäviken	2 Michelin-stars, top 100 in the world	M	37
Grant Achatz	Alinea	3 stars, World's 50 Best Restaurants (6th)	M	47
Alex Atala	D. O. M.	World's 50 best (18th)	M	53
Dominique Crenn	Atelier Crenn	First female USA to get 2 stars Michelin, world's best female chef	F	56

1	Enrique Olvera	Pujol	James Beard rising star, third on Latin America's 50 top	M	45
2					
3	Ana Roš	Hiša Franko	World's best female by the world's 50 best	F	48
4					
5	Gaggan Anand	Gaggan	Asia's best, and 7th in world's best 50	M	43
6					
7	Jeong Kwan	The Baegyangsa Temple	Rare case: identified and recommended by other Michelin-star Chef, she is a monk, invited regularly in top events/restaurants	F	60
8					
9	Vladimir Mukhin	White Rabbit	15th in the 50 world's top	M	38
10					
11	Nancy Silverton	Mozza	Outstanding chef James beard, international star diamond, TV chef of the year	F	67
12					
13	Ivan Orkin	Ivan Ramen	Rare case: US chef who excels in Japan, cooking Ramen	M	57
14					
15	Tim Raue	Restaurant Tim Raue	World's top 50, 2 Michelin-stars	M	47
16					
17	Virgilio Martínez	Central	World's top 50 (6th)	M	44
18					
19	Christina Tosi	Milk Bar	James Beard Rising Star Chef + outstanding pastry chef	F	39
20					
21	Corrado Assenza	Caffè Sicilia	One of the best ice cream chefs in Italy, dating back to multiple generations	M	60
22					
23	Jordi Roca	El Celler de Can Roca	3 Michelin-stars, best restaurant top 50 world, world pastry chef	M	43
24					

1 2 3 4 5	Will Goldfarb	Room 4 Dessert	10 Best Pastry Chefs in America, Star chef “Rising Star” award, a James Beard nomination for Best Pastry Chef in America	M	46
6 7 8	Cristina Martinez	South Philly Barbacoa	Top 10 new restaurants in the USA	F	31
9 10 11 12	Musa Dağdeviren	Çiya	Gourmand World Cookbook Awards, famous local chef, food anthropologist, writer and researcher, André Simon Award	M	50
13 14 15	Bo Songvisava	Bo.Lan	Best female chef in Asia	F	41
16 17 18	Albert Adrià	Tickets	World's 50 best, 1 Michelin-star	M	51
19 20 21	Mashama Bailey	Grey	James Beard Foundation’s Best Chef, Eater restaurant of the year 2017	F	41
22 23 24	Dario Cecchini	Antica Macelleria Cecchini	World's most famous butcher	M	66
25 26 27 28	Asma Khan	Darjeeling Express	UK's Asian Restaurant Awards, Asian Women of the Year Awards & Best Casual Dining Restaurant	F	52
29 30 31	Sean Brock	Husk	James Beard best chef, best new restaurant in America, Culinary Preservation Award	M	43
32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46				20 M & 10 F	Av. 49