



A Qualitative Study Investigating the Relationship Between the Implementing of HR Practices and the Turnover Rates in Dublin Cafés from the Perspectives of Front of House Employees Currently Employed in the Sector.

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Abstract

Background: As Ireland emerges from the Covid-19 restrictions, the hospitality sector is reporting a staff shortage of about 40,000 (McCullagh, 2022; O'Leary, 2022). The average rent in Dublin is now around €2,000 per month (Duffy, 2022) and yet the average wage for a FOH Dublin employee salary now stands at €11.47 (Indeed, 2022), making Dublin cafés a very precarious place to build a career. This research aims at filling a gap in the research surrounding HRM practices within the Irish hospitality industry, focusing on Dublin cafés and employee turnover. HRM and cafés has been described by scholars as an underdeveloped field (Knox, 2016; Lloyd & Payne, 2021). An abundance of quantitative research exists surrounding HRM and hospitality in a general sense, this research aimed to explore, through the perspectives of FOH café workers, whether the implementing of HR practices makes a difference to their turnover intent.

Methods: Semi-structured interviews were carried out, using convenience sampling. A total of 4 participants were interviewed based on their current employment in a Dublin café. A thematic analysis was used to analyse the data.

Findings: Dublin café FOH employees deem communication and T&D opportunities highly valuable and necessary. HR functions and café owners must engage with their workers on a continuous basis through check-ins, feedback sessions and make investments in their employees through T&D to increase their skills and knowledge. Speciality coffee is highly technical, and employers must nurture and support their FOH employees to avoid high turnover rates.

Conclusion: Simply having a HR presence is not enough, the HR function within a café must engage effectively with the workers if they want to retain their talent. The café industry in Dublin doesn't just need talent, it deserves it. This may require employers investing in managerial training for upper management, investing time and resources into EE practices should be a priority going forward.

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List of Abbreviations

CM- Career Management

CIPD- Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development

Covid-19- Coronavirus

EE- Employee Engagement

FOH- Front of House

FT- Full Time

H&T- Hospitality and Tourism

HO- Home Owner

HR- Human Resources

HRD- Human Resource Development

HRM- Human Resource Management

LAH- Live at Home

PT- Part Time

RO- Research Objective

TD- Talent Development

TM- Talent management

T&D- Training and development

SMEs- Small medium enterprises

ST- Sub-Theme

Table of Contents

Abstract	2
Declaration Form	3
Submission Form	4
Acknowledgements	5
List of Abbreviations	6
Chapter 1: Introduction	9
Chapter 2: Literature Review	13
2.1. Introduction.....	13
2.2. HRM & Hospitality.....	13
2.3. Turnover in Hospitality.....	15
2.4. Talent Management.....	18
2.5. Employee Engagement.....	20
2.6. Training & Development.....	22
2.7. Career Management.....	23
2.8. Conclusion.....	25
Chapter 3: Research Question	26
Chapter 4: Methodology	27
4.1. Research Approach.....	27
4.2. Research Setting & Sample.....	29
4.3. Procedure.....	30
4.4. Data Collection.....	31
4.5. Recording of Data.....	32
4.6. Data Analysis.....	33
4.7. Ethical Considerations.....	33
Chapter 5: Analysis & Findings	34
5.1. Introduction.....	34
5.2. RO1: Theme 1.....	36
5.3. RO2: Theme 2.....	40
5.4. RO3: Theme 3.....	42
5.5. Conclusion.....	45

Chapter 6: Discussion, Conclusion & Recommendations	46
6.1. Introduction.....	46
6.2. RO1: Theme 1.....	46
6.3: RO2: Theme 2.....	49
6.4. RO3: Theme 3.....	50
6.5. Limitations.....	52
6.6. Conclusion.....	52
6.7. Recommendations.....	54
Personal Learning Statement	57
References	58
Appendix 1	67
Appendix 2	70
Appendix 3	71
Appendix 4	72

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1. Background and Rationale

This research project will be exploring the implementation of HR practices in Dublin based cafés and its effects on the talent retention and turnover intent of FOH staff. This will be achieved by focusing on four HR functions, employee engagement, training and development, talent management and career management.

Dublin was chosen as the geographical location for this research project as it possesses a unique set of characteristics that make it stand out from the rest of the country, while also being an under investigated location for this field of study. Dublin's housing crisis has been described as "out of control" (Duffy, 2022) with the average rent costing €2,000 per month, with an increase of about 9% per year. As of February 2022, the available houses to rent have fallen to a record low, approximately 700 (Paul, 2022). This makes Dublin an undesirable and challenging location to make a living, especially when the current living wage for Ireland stands at €12.90 an hour (Living Wage Ireland, 2022). The living wage has been described as a wage or salary that allows for the minimum standard of living that is considered socially acceptable along with the ability to afford clothes, feed, and house yourself. In addition, you should be able to afford basic healthcare, education, transport, and have enough left for social or recreational activities (Living Wage Ireland, 2022). However, the living wage is not always afforded to hospitality workers in Ireland, let alone Dublin. The minimum wage currently stands at €10.50 for an adult over 20 years old (Gov.ie, 2022). This means that many organisations will pay their employee's more than €2 below what has been determined as a liveable wage. Indeed (2022) has reported that the average front of house waiting staff salary in Dublin stands at €11.47, as of 8th of March 2022. This highlights the financial struggle that many Dublin café workers may face and warrants investigation into whether their low wage is justifiable if other HR practices are in place to support them.

When the Covid-19 pandemic began in March 2020 it sent shockwaves through many industries, but none were hit quite as hard as the hospitality sector. The beginning of 2020 saw Dublin's restaurant and café industry heating up (Paul, 2020). Things were taking off in Ireland's capital, as it established itself as a trendy, competition rich, and a food destination hotspot. Moore (2022) reports on the research conducted by Fáilte Ireland where it was

shown that 33,500 people left the H&T sector in Ireland during the pandemic. Former H&T employees reported that the rising cost of living was no longer reflected in their wages and thus left to work in a better paid sector, and some moving to more affordable parts of the country while remaining in the H&T sector. When the hospitality sector was forced to shut its doors, many international workers returned home, adding to the recruitment challenges of the sector which now sees 40,000 vacancies in the H&T sector across the country (McCullagh, 2022). The hospitality industry being hit heavily by the pandemic has meant much of the current research surrounding the hospitality sector and HRM has been conducted through the lens of Covid-19 (Chen & Chen, 2021). However, this research will seek to go beyond the scope of the pandemic, considering the wider context of the industry and its long standing retention and turnover challenges. Turnover and retention challenges have long plagued the industry, pre-dating the Covid-19 pandemic and will be around to outlive it too. The pandemic may have exacerbated the vulnerabilities that existed within the hospitality industry, highlighting to the world the problems that many insiders already knew. However, the goal of this research will be to remain relevant beyond the Covid-19 pandemic, providing much needed insight into the perspectives of front-line café workers and what they believe can prevent their turnover intent.

This research is currently important and necessary as the Irish Times (2015) reported from a survey that fewer than 60% of Irish SME's invest in HR practices, despite 93% deeming it paramount to organisational performance (Newenham, 2015). This statistic highlights how important many industry insiders deem HR to their business and yet many are not utilising these practices. This research will explore how they could achieve implementing effective HR practices through interviewing those currently employed in it. Curran (2021) argues that workers employed in the industry know best how to help the retention and turnover crisis currently happening in Ireland (Beesley, 2021). CIPD (2021a) state that the hospitality industry is plagued by elevated levels of turnover and the best way to prevent this is to understand the antecedents that lead to it.

1.2. Aim

This research project will be an exploratory study of the assumed importance of implementing HR strategies and systems into Dublin based cafés to ensure talent retention and avoid high turnover. Academic discussion about the topic of hospitality and human resource

management began to emerge around the 1970's (Temizkan & Yabanci, 2020), with much of the research since focusing on hospitality and HR in a general sense rather than specific organisations such as casual dining and cafés. Cafés and casual dining restaurants have their own unique and dynamic environments that come with a specific set of challenges and difficulties (Cajander & Reiman, 2019). These unique challenges and difficulties, and overall precariousness of the sector demands attention, particularly during these tumultuous times.

This research will be focusing on small Dublin based cafés that fall into the small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) category. Harney (2021) discusses that there is limited research on HR and SMEs as much of the research focuses on large organisations. This gap in research provides reasoning for investigating the lived experiences of Dublin based hospitality workers. There is limited research done on the Irish restaurant and food sector and HR strategies, and even less on Dublin cafés. Where research has been conducted, it is quantitative in nature and thus conducting qualitative research attempts to fill in this gap further. Qualitative data conducted using employee experience to form a rich argument for cafés and their use of HRM, qualitative research in this field remains scarce (Lloyd & Payne, 2021). Lloyd and Payne (2021) used interviews to gain insight into the lived experiences of café managers, supervisors, and floor assistants, however, this research focused on Australia, France, and the UK.

This research will examine through an exploratory study whether the implementing of HR practices in Dublin based cafés can reduce employee turnover and lead to stronger talent retention. A qualitative method will facilitate access to the knowledge and experience that only those employed in the industry possess (Jerez-Jerez & Melewar, 2020). By using semi-structured interviews, the researcher hopes to capture a consensus from the lived experiences of those currently employed in Dublin based cafés. A thematic analysis of the interviews will piece together the shared themes and experiences of those interviewed to answer the overarching research question at hand. A thematic analysis can capture important snippets of information to answer the research question and objectives (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Lastly, this study captures the lived experiences of those currently employed in the hospitality sector of Dublin, providing insight into four key HRM practices: employee engagement, training and development, talent management and career management, exploring the impact of their implementation on the turnover and retention challenges facing the Dublin café

sector. This research may be of use to hospitality managers and employer's looking to improve their retention and prevent turnover intent among their employees as they emerge into a post- Covid world.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

Dublin has been experiencing a sharp rise in coffee culture for some time now, leading to a significant increase in third wave coffee shops and cafés. However, the sector is experiencing unprecedented levels of staff shortages and high turnover rates. Presently, the research surrounding cafés and HRM practices is limited, and even more so when it comes to Ireland, HRM, and hospitality, let alone Dublin cafés. This literature review outlines the current scholarly literature surrounding the hospitality sector and HRM in a broader sense, to gain a deeper understanding of this field of research and how it may apply to cafés in Dublin, Ireland. Key scholars in this field, such as Knox (2016) and Lloyd and Payne (2021) agree that the café sector is tremendously overlooked. Curran's (2021) groundbreaking report on the Irish hospitality sector outlines some of the antecedents to the high turnover rates and major problems currently facing the industry at this current point of time. This study attempts to add to the existing body of research by providing insights into the café sector in Dublin. This literature review will begin by examining HRM in the hospitality sector both generally and in Ireland, narrowing its focus to Dublin's booming café sector. This will follow an exploration into the employee turnover rates within the industry, in a general sense and in relation to Ireland. Finally, this literature review will discuss different HR practices and how these relate to the hospitality sector such as talent management, employee engagement, training and development, and career management.

2.2. Human Resource Management and the Hospitality Sector

There is a consensus among scholars that employees are one of the most important assets to any organization (Hussainy, 2019; Montes, Arjona-Fuentes, Law, & Han, 2017; Temizkan & Yabanci, 2020). Developing and investing in your human capital is paramount for an organisation to gain a competitive advantage (Connolly & McGing, 2007). Ariza-Montes, Hernández-Perlines, Han, and Law (2019) argue that the precarious nature the hospitality sector allows for some level of scrutiny of the HR practices employed within the industry. The hospitality sector faces its own unique set of challenges when it comes to instilling HR practices, including issues such as low pay, intense physical labour, difficulties maintaining a work-life balance, poor career progression, and high turnover rates (Curran, 2021; Raub,

Borzillio, Perrettenm & Schmitt, 2021). Baharin and Hanafi (2018) posit the notion that there is often a lack of understanding of the intricacies and the potential value of effective HR practices, such as talent management, training and development, career management, and employee engagement can offer to organisations. Chen and Chen (2021) contend that the Covid-19 pandemic brought much academic attention to this field, making the correlation between HRM and the hospitality sector a topical and important subject. The pandemic exposed the vulnerabilities already existing in a sector known for being unpredictable and volatile in nature (Burnett, & Johnston, 2020). Juariyah and Saktian (2018) argue that HR practices in the café industry are rarely implemented and yet it can make or break the success of a business, making it a vital component to any company looking to achieve their organisational goals and sustain a competitive advantage amongst its peers. This is not just a global issue, but an Irish one too.

2.2.1. HRM and the Irish Hospitality Sector

The hospitality sector is one of Irelands most important industries, accounting for 8% of the total workforce employed in one of the 16,000 organizations prior to the Covid-19 pandemic (Allan & Mac Con Iomaire, 2017). The Covid-19 pandemic sent shock waves throughout the world, shutting down many industries, however, the hospitality sector was affected particularly badly (Agarwal, 2021). Burnett and Johnston (2020) highlight that Ireland is resilient in nature and has proven to be able to bounce back from previous, albeit not as serious, setbacks. Fáilte Ireland's recent report regarding the 40,000 job vacancies in the Irish hospitality sector will require a resilient and strong response to avoid permanent closure of business (McCullagh, 2022). This could involve investment into employees and developing them into becoming the organizations most valuable resource, through key HR practices, TM, T&D, CM and EE.

2.2.2. Dublin's Café Industry

Dublin has been noted as the second-most coffee obsessed capital in the world, with 181 coffee shops per 100,000 people (Dennison, 2021). Ireland's recent tech influx has led to an explosion in the speciality coffee market, with speciality coffee sales increasing from €32.1 million in 2013 to €102.5 million in 2018 (Roddy, 2019). It is evident that the people of Ireland,

and especially Dublin where the tech start-ups are located, value the coffee sector and see it as an essential component to the Irish market.

Despite it being a vital part of the Irish economy, the implementing of HR strategies and systems tends to be overlooked in the hospitality industry. Curran (2021) puts this down to managers and owners being more food and drink orientated rather than people orientated. Nolan, Garavan, and Lynch (2020) posit that the industry in Ireland lacks a level of sophistication when it comes to HR practices within the H&T sector, further noting that there is a continuous anomaly with there being a demand for skilled workers and yet a chronic talent shortage. Curran's (2021) trail blazing report on the Irish hospitality sector was the first piece of research on working conditions in the industry and projected the voices of those employed in it (Falvey, 2021). This report exposed the vulnerabilities facing the Irish hospitality sector, (77% reporting verbal abuse, 50% not receiving tips, 80% felt work had negative impact on mental health) that were there before the Covid-19 pandemic (Curran, 2021). These statistics highlight the fundamental need to further explore the correlation between implementing HR practices, retaining talent, and avoiding turnover within the Dublin café sector, and whether staff currently employed in this sector deem them to be of value. Along with conducting quantitative research, Curran (2021) carried out a series of interviews with hospitality employees, noting that it is those employed in the sector who best knows how to sort out existing problems. Knox (2016) declares that the café sector is an under investigated sector when it comes to HR, deeming the current field patchy and scarce. This is a field in need of a rigorous and robust research study.

2.3. Turnover in the Hospitality Industry

Datta (2020) posits that employee turnover is the most critical issue to affect the H&T industry and has knock-on effects on all other aspects within an organisation, noting that the environment and organisational culture plays a huge role in hospitality turnover. Retention of talented employees is crucial for organisations seeking to avoid the high turnover rates infamously associated with the hospitality sector. Hussainy (2019) argues that there is a correlation between organisations that implement HR practices and those with higher retention rates. Implementing effective HR strategies ensures turnover is kept low and retention of top talent high. These HR strategies include investments in the employees through practices such as talent management, employee engagement, training and

development, and career management. Jung, Jung, and Yoon (2021) maintain that when an employee feels their voice is heard and they are valued by their employer, they feel more compelled to remain with a business and perform better. This organisational commitment benefits both the organisation and the employee, thus café managers and employers should recognise the value of implementing HR practices. Jung *et al.* (2021) further argues that engaging with your employees is a sustainable way to ensure retention of talented employees, making it an accessible method of implementing HR practices into a business that may not be considered lucrative in nature. The instilling of HRM practices can satisfy many psychological needs (Agarwal, 2021), including things like employee autonomy, competence in the workplace, increased job satisfaction and one's own wellbeing. Agarwal (2021) posits that HR practices significantly improves employee wellbeing. When employee wellbeing is considered high, motivation, resilience, hope and their self-esteem increase, leading to higher retention rates and reduced employee turnover.

As there is a belief amongst scholars (Cajander & Reiman, 2019; Curran, 2021) that casual dining establishments have undeveloped and neglected HR systems when compared to other industries which have a direct impact on the high turnover rates. Exploring this phenomenon through the perspectives of current employees of the Dublin café sector will be imperative to improving organisational culture in a post-pandemic world. The hospitality sector often falls victim to a combination of both involuntary and voluntary turnover (Nombeko, 2019) which lends itself to a unique set of circumstances adding to its already vulnerable state. Voluntary turnover occurs when employees leave their job on their own accord, whereas involuntary turnover occurs when an employee leaves a job for reasons outside of their control, including, termination or dismissal by employer, redundancies, cutbacks, layoffs, and retirement (Nombeko, 2019). Ariza-Montes *et al.* (2019) states that the precarious nature of the hospitality industry, often defined by its low wages, intense physical labour, weak union representation, and low job satisfaction make it rife for high turnover rates.

2.3.1. Fair Pay and Turnover Intent

Immaneni and Sailaja (2020) argue that pay satisfaction and "fair pay" are one of the most prevalent antecedents for high turnover rates. What an employee considers a fair wage can significantly determine their organisational commitment and their overall satisfaction. Sthapit and Shrestha (2018) put forward the argument that hospitality organisations must offer

industry competitive wages and benefits to avoid high turnover rates. Mullaly (2022) reported that one Dublin bar owner pays his staff €20 per hour, approximately double the minimum wage and believes that wages need to increase overall in Ireland to keep up with the rising costs of living. This wage is not possible for many small, independent cafés in Dublin. However, offering a competitive and fair wage with the ability to increase as time goes on is something many industry workers would appreciate, often known as pay progression (Knox, 2016). Rewarding organisational commitment through pay and benefits could assist in talent retention in the café industry. Fair pay can be seen as empowering and recognises the ability and work of the employee (McGuire, 2016), leading to a more productive and engaged employee and reducing turnover intent.

2.3.2. Turnover in Ireland's Hospitality Sector

In 2017 the hospitality industry in Ireland recorded a 31% turnover rate (Allen & Mac Con lomaire, 2017), which was only made worse after the Covid-19 pandemic. High turnover rates cause substantial problems for the hospitality sector (Yousaf, Rasheed, Hameed, & Lugman, 2020). These include things such as costs for replacement of personnel, damage to employer reputation, low employee morale, costs of training and development along with loss of knowledge and skills, all negatively impacting the organisations (Hussainy, 2019). Exploring the reasons behind the high turnover rates is critical for justifying the exploration of whether implementing HR systems and strategies in Dublin cafés can help reduce high turnover rates. In Ireland, 40% of hospitality workers are casual, transient, seasonal, or part-time workers (Curran, 2021). This statistic presents a narrative that many in the hospitality sector are not viewing this industry as a long-term career path, only adding to the retention challenges faced by this sector in Ireland. Knox (2016) highlights that many view the café sector as having a poor career progression environment and describes the phenomenon of 'mcjobs' often associated with the industry. 'Mcjobs' get their name's sake from McDonalds and the menial work associated with the franchise that has crept into the general hospitality industry. Knox further notes that the current research involving the café sector is scarce at best. However, they indicate that the café sector is the fastest growing hospitality sector. Having previously alluded to Ireland's own expanding speciality coffee sector, research on this topic is not only warranted, but necessary. This is an industry that could hugely benefit from investment, such as implementing HR practices like talent management. A more thorough, qualitative

examination is needed to understand the perspectives of those currently employed in the industry to hopefully discover what exactly makes an employee stay long term in an establishment.

2.4. Talent Management

Talent Management is when an organisation actively seeks to attract, hire, develop, engage, and retain employees who they deem as valuable to the organisational performance of their business (CIPD, 2020). However, Sheehan, Grant and Garavan (2018) argue that TM is an ambiguous term, which means different things for different industries and sectors, further noting that much of the literature focuses on TM at an organisational level without differentiating between a MNC and a SME. Rani and Kumar (2014) argue that TM is all about having the perfect combination of the right people, in the right job, at the right time. Organisations who successfully use and develop their talent are cementing their competitive advantage within their industry (Garavan, Carbery & Rock 2011). Literature regarding TM and the hospitality sector is somewhat lacking, despite the topic being around since the late 90's (Kravariti, Voutsina, Tasoulis, Dibia, & Johnston, 2021). Research into TM and hospitality is warranted, especially in an Irish context. Deloitte (2020) reported that the H&T sector brought in between €5 billion to €7.6 billion, employing around 260,000 people across the country prior to the pandemic. This showcases the importance of the sector to the Irish economy. This is a sector that deserves TM investments akin to other professional sectors.

2.4.1. Hiring and Attracting Talent

TM begins at the hiring and selecting process, ensuring that the right candidate is chosen, (Gleeson, 2021; McGuire, 2016; Nombeko, 2019). This initial step of TM is imperative for going forward with any future talent development practices. Gleeson (2021) further notes that the averaging hiring manager spends only six seconds scanning CVs due to time constraints. Rushed hiring practices can have huge implications for organisations. A bad hire can financially set a company back significantly, along with damage to your employer brand, loss of productivity, decreased motivation, and harm to the company morale (Banaghan, 2022). There is an abundance of literature describing employees as the most valuable resource an organisation has to offer (Chang & Busser, 2017; McGuire, 2016; Nombeko, 2019; Sheehan *et al.*, 2018). It is evident that the consensus amongst scholars is that an

organisations human capital is indispensable, and this is even more so in the service sector. Baharin and Hanafi (2018) have described employees as “the heart and backbone of an organisation”. Considering how much the value of employees has been stressed in the literature, investing time and resources into attracting and hiring the right talent is paramount for any business. Globalisation has meant that the contemporary phenomenon, “war for talent” has intensified greatly (Sthapit & Shrestha, 2018). Although much of the literature and studies regarding the war for talent tend to focus on large MNCs with CEO’s (Keller, 2017). The hospitality industry is no stranger to talent shortages and talent retention challenges. Companies that intentionally hire the right candidate for the right role will cement themselves as industry leaders, making them a desirable place to work, attracting the more talented employees.

2.4.2. Talent Management and the Hospitality Sector

In the hospitality sector, the employees are the face of the company, they are what the customer deals with on an everyday basis. Chang and Busser (2017) describe front line service employees as “brand ambassadors” for the business. Investment in talented employees improves brand image while developing well-rounded confident and satisfied employees, committed to the organisation (Immaneni & Sailaja, 2020). Baum (2019) argues that the hospitality sector needs to implement sustainable HR practice, due to many hospitality organisations not having the means to sustain a HR function. These could include simple practices such as health and safety protocols and training, being recognised as an employer of choice and ensuring employees can have an adequate work life balance. Bagheri, Baum, Ebrahimi and Abbasi (2020) state that the hospitality industry faces a unique set of challenges when it comes to TM. They argue that outside forces, beyond their control such as outsourcing, layoffs, and downsizing all effect how an organisation can implement TM practices. Duffy (2021) reports that many hospitality organisations are simply reluctant to invest in sufficient HR practices, such as TM. Baharin and Hanafi (2018) argue that the hospitality sector needs to start recognising that anyone can be a knowledge bank with plenty of talent potential waiting to be developed, TM should not just be reserved for those at the top, and investment into your bottom line, like front of house wait staff and baristas could be incredibly useful for organisations going forward.

2.4.3. Talent Management and the Café Sector

Baum (2019) a leading HR researcher focusing on H&T posed the question “Does the hospitality industry need or deserve talent?”. In his report, he questioned whether TM was a necessary investment for the hospitality industry. He concludes that due to the precarious nature of the hospitality sector, it does not provide for a supportive or nurturing environment, nor is it interested in investing money or resources into the development of employees. It can be argued that this view does not account for the nuances and differences encompassing the café industry. Lloyd and Payne (2021) argue that the café industry is a vastly overlooked sector, characterised by many outsiders as low skilled and low pay work. However, they beg to differ and noted that many independent café employers acknowledged the importance of investing and retaining your talented staff.

Knox (2016) argues that the emergence of the third wave coffee movement, has meant a need for more nuanced and specific research to take place regarding the hospitality industry and TM. This new wave of coffee is comparable to the highly skilled and well-regarded wine industry. Knox (2016) coined the term “coffee intelligentsia”, meaning “high road coffee”, where continuous training and highly skilled employees are required. Knox (2016) carried out qualitative research to examine the characteristics of Australia’s booming coffee sector by interviewing industry experts to gain insight and perspectives into the nuances of coffee. Speciality coffee shops and cafés are incredibly knowledge based and highly skilled in nature (Speciality Coffee Association, 2022). The mechanism used such as coffee roasters, espresso machines and grinders, are highly intrinsic and require staff to be trained properly and continuously. Thus, investment in TM for baristas and front-of-house staff working in speciality coffee shops and cafés is unequivocally important and deserved. Sustainable TM investment into café employees can begin with ensuring employees are engaged with both the work they are doing and the organisation.

2.5. Employee Engagement

2.5.1. Defining Employee Engagement

There is confusion amongst scholars over the definition of “employee engagement” with CIPD (2021b) noting over 50 definitions. Something that is agreed is that EE is a psychological state of being, the opposite of burnout, where an employee possesses vigour with work, dedication

to the job and is engrossed and absorbed in their work. Kahn (1990) was one of the earliest scholars discussing and researching EE. He looked at how employees express themselves, physically, cognitively, and emotionally while at work. Sun (2019) outlines that defining EE is difficult and holds firm that there is no governing standard meaning. EE has thematic links to social exchange theory, in which labour is seen as transactional, benefiting both the employer and employee, when employees feel they are being valued and invested in, they will work better and more productively, in turn, benefiting the employer (Sun, 2019). EE is one-way organisations can gain a competitive advantage, utilising HRM practices that reflect the organisations business strategy and keeping in line with what their employees expect (Riyanto, Endri, & Herlisha, 2021). When an employee can find meaning in work, they are more motivated to perform better and align their values with the values of the company (Riyanto *et al.*, 2021). The role of the manager and employer is imperative to ensuring their employees are engaged in the work they are doing. Those that can give their employees a voice and make them feel empowered by their work can help reduce turnover intent (Ullah, Ahmaad, & Saeed, 2021). As EE has many different definitions and theoretical assumptions behind it, it is vital to look at what EE means in terms of the hospitality industry.

2.5.2. Employee Engagement in the Hospitality Sector

It is understood amongst scholars that HRD has huge significance when it comes to improving the performance of the employee and the organisation (Rumman, Al-Abbadi, & Alshwabkeh, 2020). Rumman *et al.* (2020) highlights those studies exploring EE in small independent food business are lacking, and the success of service orientated organisations such as hotels, restaurants and cafés are largely dependent on customer satisfaction. EE has a significant impact on job performance, making it an essential component of HR practices within the hospitality industry (Bhardwaj & Kalia, 2021). Many elements can affect job performance, including poor leadership and management, the work culture and environment, along with a lack of creativity and personality. However, it's EE that is gaining the most traction amongst scholars during this tumultuous time (Bhardwaj & Kalia, 2021). During the last two years, job security and EE has decreased massively amongst hospitality workers, leading to higher turnover intent rates and increased retention challenges (Jung *et al.*, 2021). Managers who can actively engage their employees with their job and the organisation can reduce turnover intent in a sustainable and manageable fashion (Jung *et al.*, 2021). CIPD

(2021a) state that poor relationships with managers is a cardinal indicator for employees to feel disengaged and unmotivated. FFT (2019) suggest that managers and employers interested in reducing employee turnover and ensuring retention of top talent need to invest in their HR practices. This can begin by simply recognising your staff by offering opportunities for feedback and open communication (FFT, 2019). This is something not always present in the hospitality industry, research dictates that many hospitality workers find open, two-way communication is often absent (Ghani, Zada, Memon, Ullah, Khattak, Han, Ariza- Montes, & Araya-Castillo, 2022). Juariyah and Saktian (2018) posit that café managers must support their employees job satisfaction through offering a job of value, offer recognition and opportunity for advancement. While communication is indispensable to ensuring an engaged workforce, one of the most effective ways to engage your employees is to invest in T&D practices. Managers and employers need to ensure training and development opportunities are offered to all front-line employees (Ghani *et al.*, 2022).

2.6. Training and Development

Training and development (T&D) are a fundamental part of HR and is vital for all employees in all industries. T&D increases the capabilities and knowledge of employees (Agarwal, 2021). There is research to support that organisational support is beneficial for employee satisfaction and job performance (Rady & Zaki, 2020). T&D is a way managers and employers can showcase their investment and support in developing their talent. T&D is a win-win for both the employer and employee (Immaneni & Sailaja, 2020). It shows the employee that they are valued and seen as worth investing time and money on, improving their skills and knowledge at the same time. This improved job performance and motivation is highly beneficial for the employer. O’Leary (2022) notes that often the training offered to hospitality employees is insufficient and does not capitalise on the potential skills and knowledge employees can offer a business. Literature in this field points to organisations like restaurants and cafés rarely training their staff, as they tend to hire individuals already sufficient in the skills and knowledge needed (Rumman *et al.*, 2020). However, conflicting research points to service-orientated organisations utilising their employees as their competitive advantage, becoming more invested in them as a resource and offering substantial training to improve their skills and qualities (Arroyo-López, Cárcamo-Solís, Álvarez-Castañón, & Guzmán-López, 2017). When training does exist, research has shown that the industry relies heavily on on-

the-job training practices, a learning as you go mentality (Immaneni & Sailaja, 2020). Davidson, McPhail, and Barry (2011) have deemed many hospitality organisations to have a “sink or swim” environment, which can often be a high pressure, low reward style of training. Scholars have discussed the need for formal and vocational training programmes at a government level is required to get to the root of retention challenges in the hospitality industry (Knox, 2016, Sheehan *et al.*, 2018). These include hospitality apprenticeships, state funded hospitality management college courses and linking with private and public organisations to offer training and eventual career opportunities. Raub *et al.* (2021) argues that research is lacking when it comes to the successful or unsuccessful orientation of new employees in the hospitality industry. Raub *et al.* (2021) further suggest that when T&D practices are implemented successfully from the very beginning, new employees can blend in seamlessly, feeling engaged with the company culture, their colleagues, and the business. Jerez-Jerez and Melewar (2020) posit that for the restaurant industry, continuous training programmes that reward individuals with competency skills, perseverance and allow them to gain self-understanding and coping skills are essential for talent retention. They further argue that when employees are offered T&D opportunities it creates a habit of lifelong learning. Nombeko (2019) states that one way the café sector could significantly reduce turnover is by job sharing and ensuring all employees are trained in different areas. He argues for baristas training as waiters, and vice versa. This can lead to higher career satisfaction, as employees learn transferable skills, empathy for their colleagues and the role they perform, along with some form of career progression. As mentioned previously, continuous, and detailed training is an essential component to the specialty coffee sector due to the nuances and intricacies of the business (Knox, 2016). Career progression is critical for career satisfaction, facilitated through career management, another HR practice managers and employers can implement to retain their talented employees.

2.7. Career Management

The last HR practice being discussed is career management (CM) and the discourse surrounding the concept within the hospitality sector. Nombeko (2019) maintains the notion that many workers employed in the hospitality industry do not see themselves working in the sector long term or view the hospitality sector as a viable career option. The question arises, if appropriate CM practices were carried out by managers, would more hospitality employees

remain in the industry long term? CM falls under the umbrella of TM, where employers can assist with career planning and development opportunities (Indeed, 2021). However, Nombeko (2019) disagrees and ensures the onus of career planning falls on the employee, with the manager as a supportive figure rather than a facilitator. It could be argued that no amount of career management will help if the employee themselves is not engaged, enthusiastic and ambitious in their job. Research highlights that many employees are not strictly motivated by money, workers want to see a clear-cut career progression pathway, an opportunity for performance appraisals and feedback sessions (McGuire, 2016). However, this involves organisations acquiring competent management with the skills to carry out these HR functions. The ability and knowledge to perform HR tasks such as CM involves time and money that many small cafés simply do not have. This will be something explored further in the interview process. Ghani *et al.* (2022) posits that many managers within the industry are ‘ignorant’ of staffing issues, and many overlook the basics of CM, such as effective onboarding practices. This research hopes to provide indispensable insight and guidance for hospitality managers and employers on retaining top talent despite not having a HR function or team within your business.

In Curran’s (2021) formative work, organisations that can instil career progression structures can ensure employee commitment, engagement, increased motivation, and overall retention of talent. This research will seek to explore the perspectives of café workers and their insights into CM practices and turnover intent. Sthapit and Shrestha (2018) suggests there is a prevalent issue of workers viewing the hospitality sector as a laborious industry to build a successful and sustainable career. Unfortunately, much of the literature suggests that copious amounts of workers do not view the hospitality sector as a long-term career (Chang & Busser, 2019). For a sector dominated by low pay (Curran, 2021; Knox, 2016; Lloyd & Payne, 2021; Sheehan *et al.*, 2018), pay progression and increased pay coinciding with commitment and performance of an individual are ways in which organisations could utilise CM practices that are in line with their more modest budgets (Curran, 2021).

The global pandemic has led to an immediate need to reimagine how the hospitality industry attracts and retain employees, as many long-term hospitality workers, in search of better pay, WLB and career growth, never returned to their jobs once the hospitality sector reopened their doors to the public (King, Lee, Murillo, Baum, & Solnet, 2021). Nowhere was this more

evident than in Dublin. Many hospitality employers are struggling to fill many positions due to the chronic labour shortage that was around since before the Covid-19 pandemic hit, but has got even worse since March 2020 (McCullagh, 2022). Many hospitality workers used their transferrable skills gained within the industry, and took them to a new sector (O’Leary, 2022). Sheehan *et al.* (2018) argues that hospitality employers need to capitalise on these transferrable skills through CM practices and nurturing their workers by providing opportunities to advance within the company.

2.8. Conclusion

To conclude, the research surrounding HRM, and the café sector is scarce. There seems to be limited research studies on the hospitality industry in Ireland that focuses on one sector rather than the entire industry. It is apparent that when research is focused on one sector of hospitality, it is hotels and large organisations. Cafés and casual dining establishments are often neglected. Previous scholars have mentioned an array of reasons for high turnover rates in the hospitality industry. These include, low pay (Curran, 2021), rudimentary HR systems (Cajander & Reiman, 2019), the “sink or swim” environment (Davidson *et al.*, 2011), and lack of EE (Ullah *et al.*, 2021) to name but a few.

A qualitative empirical study, using semi-structured interviews to gain insight into the experiences and perspectives of those currently employed in cafés in Dublin should reveal novel and interesting information regarding employee turnover in Dublin cafés and whether implementing HR practices is something they consider important or valuable. This research aims to understand what employees believe their employers can do to mediate high turnover rates and investigate why employees remain with an organisation long term. By focusing on café workers who are currently employed, the researcher hopes to understand their reasonings behind staying with their current employer and whether the absence or presence of some form of a HR function has made a difference.

Chapter 3: Research Question.

When researching HRM and the hospitality sector, it soon became clear that the café industry was a sector that stood out for its high turnover of staff and as an industry plagued by low investment in their HR functions (Lloyd & Payne, 2021). It is evident that the coffee sector, and in particular, the specialty coffee sector was one of the fastest growing sectors in Dublin, noted as being Europe's second most coffee obsessed capital, with 181 coffee shops per 100,000 people (Dennison, 2021). This is an industry that is only growing in popularity and as mentioned previously, is now being compared to the intricate and highly skilled wine industry (Knox, 2016). During the literature review process, the researcher noticed gaps in the research surrounding the concept of HR and turnover in Irish cafés. The overarching research question soon arose:

'Is there a relationship between the implementing of HR functions in Dublin based cafés and coffee shops and employee turnover intent?'

The goal of this study is to investigate the correlation between cafés who currently employ some form of HR function and the employee turnover intent often associated with this industry through the perspectives of those currently employed as front of house staff in a Dublin based café or coffee shop. This study wants to explore whether café employees believe HR functions make a difference to their intent to stay or leave a company, and whether they believe working in a café in Dublin can be a long-term career option. This research project aims to explore whether current FOH workers deem HR practices important to their intent to remain with an employer long term. To explore this further and assist in answering the overarching research question, a set of research objectives were created.

RO1: To investigate whether Dublin cafés currently implement HR practices and how they impact their front of house employees.

RO2: To explore whether Dublin café employees feel they have the opportunity for career progression and if they plan on remaining long term in the industry.

RO3: To investigate what Dublin café employees believe are the fundamental issues effecting employee turnover at the moment.

Chapter 4: Methodology

4.1. Research Approach

4.1.1. Research Background

Research involving HRM and the hospitality sector is a well-studied phenomenon, with much of the literature looking at the topic from a generalised sense (Ariza-Montes *et al.*, 2019; Bagheri *et al.*, 2020; Davidson *et al.*, 2011; Immaneni & Sailaja, 2020; Jung *et al.*, 2021; King *et al.*, 2021; Kravariti *et al.*, 2021; Rady & Zaki, 2020; Sthapit & Shrestha, 2018; Temizkan *et al.*, 2020; Yousaf *et al.*, 2020). Much of the literature surrounding this topic is quantitative in nature (Chang & Busser, 2019; Chen & Chen, 2020; Rumman *et al.*, 2020; Juariyah & Saktian, 2018). These researchers used questionnaires and surveys to conduct their studies which are used for descriptive and explanatory research, often “used to identify and describe the variability in different phenomena”, explanatory research will enable you to examine and explain the relationships between variables, in particular causes and effect relationships (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2019, pg. 505). Major consideration was taken as to what method was better suited for this research study. As this research approach has been exhausted by many scholars that have come before, the researcher reasoned that a phenomenological qualitative method was better suited for answering the overarching research question and subsequent research objectives. The researcher felt a survey or questionnaire would not provide the rich data needed for the exploration of the implementing of HR practices in Dublin based cafés to avoid high turnover rates amongst their front-line workers

4.1.2. Research Philosophy

The research philosophy guiding this study is interpretivist in nature, which has its roots in phenomenology, prompting researchers to search for experiences and to consider a multitude of perspectives for a common social phenomenon (Junjie & Yingxin, 2021). The researcher took an inductive approach to the research, using a small sample to conduct qualitative research. An inductive approach focuses on the context in which certain events occur (Saunders *et al.*, 2019). Dublin was chosen as the geographical location as its café sector experiences high levels of turnover. The researcher was concerned with understanding this

phenomenon through the lens of those currently employed in the café sector in Dublin, using their insight, experiences, and perspectives to answer the overarching research question and subsequent research objectives.

Many prominent key scholars have used a qualitative method to explore similar phenomena (Burnett & Johnston, 2020; Curran, 2021; Knox, 2016; Lloyd & Payne, 2021; Nolan *et al.*, 2020). However, qualitative research in the field of the café sector that capitalises on the human experience is severely lacking (Lloyd & Payne, 2021). Furthermore, the researcher was unable to find any qualitative research focusing on the café sector in Ireland, let alone Dublin, albeit, Curran's (2021) formative report did cover Ireland's hospitality industry, lightly touching on restaurant employees. For this reason, the researcher hopes to fill this significant gap within the field of HRM and the hospitality industry in Ireland.

4.1.3. Semi-Structured Interviews

To facilitate this qualitative research, semi-structured interviews were chosen as the research instrument. Semi-structured interviews are in line with the inductive nature of this study. Curran (2021) commended that interviewing those working in the industry is best suited as it is those currently employed in the hospitality sector that best know how to fix it. Their insights and experiences are indispensable to the researcher. This style of an interview allows for a degree of flexibility, as new themes and points of interest emerge naturally throughout the conversation (Saunders *et al.*, 2019; Longhurst, 2016). Semi-structured interviews align with the inductive nature as the researcher adopts an exploratory perspective to gain insight into the lived experience of those working in the café sector in Dublin. Semi-structured interviews were deemed the appropriate tool to achieve the research objectives at hand.

4.1.4. Thematic Analysis

The research was analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis model. A thematic analysis involves identifying, analysing, and interpreting themes within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis offers the researcher an accessible way to systematically generate themes arising from the qualitative data. It is encapsulated by a notion of flexibility, in terms of the research question, the sample size, and the data collection method (Clarke & Braun, 2017). It is frequently used to understand the lived experiences of

participants, forming patterns and themes around how they feel about the topic at hand (Clarke & Braun, 2017). Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis does not have its roots epistemological or the theoretical perspectives, making it a desirable method of research as it offers a substantial degree of flexibility (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017).

4.2. Research Setting and Sample

4.2.1. Research Setting

Dublin is currently undergoing a severe housing crisis, with the average rent in the county costing €2000 per month, increasing by 9% a year (Duffy, 2022). This makes Dublin an increasingly difficult place to make a living. The current living wage in Ireland is €12.90 per hour, however the average front of house employee working in hospitality currently earns €11.49 per hour. This provides for a particularly unique set of circumstances as it makes living in Dublin and working in a café quite challenging in 2022. Fáilte Ireland conducted wide scale research on the current state of the hospitality sector and reported 40,000 job vacancies in the H&T sector in Ireland (O'Leary, 2022). Many cafés are struggling to recruit and retain staff, especially since emerging from the Covid-19 pandemic. Many hospitality employees were laid off or furloughed due to the government restrictions placed on restaurants, bars, and cafés. As the sector went back and forth between lockdown and opening, many hospitality workers took this as an opportunity to leave the industry altogether. Those that remain working at the time of this research being carried out (April 2022) hold vital and rich insights into why they have remained working in an industry plagued by uncertainty and considered precarious and volatile by many key scholars (Ariza-Montes *et al.*, 2019; Chang & Busser, 2017; Curran, 2021; Nolan *et al.*, 2020).

4.2.2. Research Sample

The researcher used convenience sampling by reaching out to former colleagues and staff of local coffee shops. Interviews were conducted until data saturation was reached. The researcher was aware of the bias nature convenience sampling can have (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassin, 2016) and was also aware that the participants were chosen due to them meeting the geographical and employment criteria set out in the research question. Convenience sampling is an affordable and readily available form of sampling and depends on the respondent's willingness to participate (Etikan *et al.*, 2016). The researcher was left with four

willing participants in the end. The researcher had begun with a bigger potential sample, however, due to scheduling conflicts, Covid-19 and participants backing out last minute, the sample number was significantly reduced.

4.2.3. Eligibility and Demographics

The four participants were all currently employed in Dublin city centre café and employed for a minimum of one year in their current place of employment. The four participants ranged in age from 20-years old to 33-years old and consisted of three men and one woman. The breakdown of this data can be found in Table 1 of Chapter 5. The data gained from the four participants interviews allowed the researcher to answer the overarching research at hand, along with the three research objectives.

4.3. Procedure

4.3.1. Initial Contact

Data was gathered through different modes, one of the interviews were conducted over Zoom through an audio recorded phone call, while the remainder were carried out in person. The use of different procedures was due to the participants own schedule and what worked best for them. The researcher initially reached out through WhatsApp to gauge interest in participating. Once participants agreed to be interviewed, they were sent a pre-interview information form outlining some of the themes and topics that would be discussed in the interview. A list of definitions, such as 'onboarding', 'talent management' and 'retention' and 'turnover', were also included to ensure the respondents were more confident in their ability to answer questions (Appendix 1). Participants were also sent a consent form to sign prior to the interview (Appendix 2).

4.3.2. Justification for Selected Procedures

4.3.2.1. Telephone Interview

Zoom served as a telephone medium, with only the audio being recorded. Novick (2008) posits that it is suitable for reaching participants who are geographically dispersed (Participant 1 was abroad on holidays at the time of the interview, thus a telephone interview was deemed appropriate and necessary). Telephone interviews can offer a greater sense of control for the participant when compared to face-to-face interviews, as it allows them to

choose a time and place that they are comfortable with (Holt, 2010). The telephone interview allows for time and money to be saved by the researcher as they do not have to travel to a particular location to conduct the interview (Black & Erskine, 2012).

4.3.2.2. Face-to-face Interviews

There is an assumption amongst scholars that face-to-face interviews reign supreme when it comes to conducting qualitative research (Johnson, Scheitle, & Ecklaund, 2019). The objective of the interview in qualitative research is to gather rich, in-dept data, exploring how the participants assign meaning to the themes, experiences, and phenomena at hand (Johnson *et al.*, 2019). The in-person interview is noted as the traditional benchmark for conducting interviews in qualitative data as a strong rapport can be built with respondents (Irvine, 2011). The remaining participants were in favour of a face-to-face as they are very comfortable talking and engaging with people, in person due to the nature of their job.

4.3.3. Conducting the Interview

The interview consisted of themed, open-ended questions that would prompt the respondent to answer with their experience. The questions that followed would depend on the answers they were willing to give. As this study is inductive in nature, the researcher remained open to the possibility that the respondents would have different experiences and perspectives from working in Dublin cafés and whether they deemed HR practices important to their decision to remain with an employer.

4.4. Data Collection

4.4.1. Pilot Study

The researcher carried out a pilot study prior to conducting the interviews. Pilot studies allow time to address any potential practical issues that may arise, allows for questions to be adjusted, assists in identifying any flaws or limitations in the questions and gives the researcher a chance to adjust the questions or method of data collection as needed (Majid, Othman, Mohammed, Lim, & Yusof, 2017).

4.4.2. Interview Schedule

The interview format was based on the existing literature concerning the hospitality sector, employee turnover and the implementing of HR practices, The interview was split into 11 open ended questions, allowing for free-flowing discussion of key themes. The participants were ensured their anonymity and reassured throughout the process that they could withdraw consent at any point.

1. The researcher began with a series of casual questions to relax the participants by asking them about themselves, their current role in the café and some background information.
2. Discuss what drew them into a job in the café sector. What appealed to them about this role?
3. Discuss whether they see themselves in this role or the wider hospitality sector in a years' time.
4. Share information on the presence of a HR function in their place of employment.
5. Discuss the initial onboarding process that took place with your current role.
6. Discuss the training and development opportunities if any offered to you during your current employment.
7. Discuss how your employer has engaged with you and allowed you to have a voice.
8. Discuss ways in which your employer has made you feel like a valued asset to the company, if at all.
9. Discuss any career progression opportunities that have been offered to you during your employment.
10. Discuss your work life balance in your current role.
11. Share any further comments or suggestions you have the hospitality industry going forward.

4.5. Recording of Data

As agreed, through signing of the consent form, the interviews were audio recorded using the researcher's phone. The recordings were then saved, named, and uploaded to a secure file on the researcher's computer that only they had access to. The researcher also recorded data through note taking during the commencement of the interviews. Interviews were then

manually transcribed as soon as the interview finished. The interviews were transcribed on Microsoft word to ensure feasible coding and thematic analysis took place.

4.6. Data Analysis

The interview responses were analysed using Braun and Clarke's Thematic Analysis. Braun and Clarke (2006) set out six distinct phases to carrying out a thematic analysis, which was used as a guide for the researcher to perform a data analysis. The researcher began by familiarising themselves with the data through reading the transcripts and listening to the interviews. The reader then began to see codes and patterns forming through highlighting key quotes, arranging them under headings and drawing out an initial table of themes and sub-themes (Appendix 3) and a general mind map (Appendix 4). The researcher then searched for themes, allowing for comparisons to be made between the different answers. The themes were then reviewed and refined once data saturation was reached, allowing for familiarity between the themes to produce a more rigorous result. The themes were finalised and named. The final report was then produced, including poignant and stand out quotes from the respondents, to add value and insight into the results. This resulted in a report consisting of three key themes with subsequent sub-themes, to answer the RO at hand.

4.7. Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were considered throughout the interview process. This began by having participants read an information form (Appendix 1) and sign a consent form (Appendix 2), ensuring they were fully aware of everything being asked of them. Informed consent was of top priority to the researcher, ensuring there was no surprises for the participants. Participants were frequently reminded that they were able to withdraw consent, verbally and written, at any point of the interview process. The anonymity of the respondents was ensured and guaranteed by the researcher, including their name, their employer, and any identifying details. The researcher ensured to follow the guidelines set out by the General Data Protection Regulation and the National College of Ireland.

Chapter 5: Analysis & Findings

5.1. Introduction

This chapter details the findings from the four semi-structured interviews the researcher conducted. The data collected from the interviews represent the experiences, insights, and views of the participants. Braun and Clarke's Thematic Analysis was used to interpret the data, allowing for a selection of themes and sub-themes to emerge as the data was coded and interpreted by the researcher. The researcher has provided a breakdown of the demographics of the participants to provide complete transparency and clarity, giving context to the answers and quotes that will be later outlined in this chapter. These can be found in Table 1. Furthermore, another table has been provided to show the final break down of the RO, themes, and sub themes, giving the reader a full understanding of the final product. This can be seen in Table 2. The researcher has also included a mind map dictating the thought process behind the chosen themes and sub themes.

5.1.1. Table 1.

Participants	Age	Job Role	Years in Role	LAH/HO	FT/PT
Participant 1	23(m)	Barista	5	LAH	PT
Participant 2	20(f)	FOH	1	LAH	FT
Participant 3	33(m)	Head Barista/Manager	6	HO	FT
Participant 4	23(m)	Barista/Supervisor	3	LAH	PT

Table 1. Demographics of Participants.

All participants were currently employed in a Dublin Café and were living in the city. Participants were also chosen due to their longevity with their current employer. This was important to the researcher, as their commitment to the same employer was imperative to the research question and all participants offered insightful perspectives and opinions as to what does and does not make an employee remain long term with a café. The fact that they have remained with the same café for at least 1 year offers a rare insight and experience to a

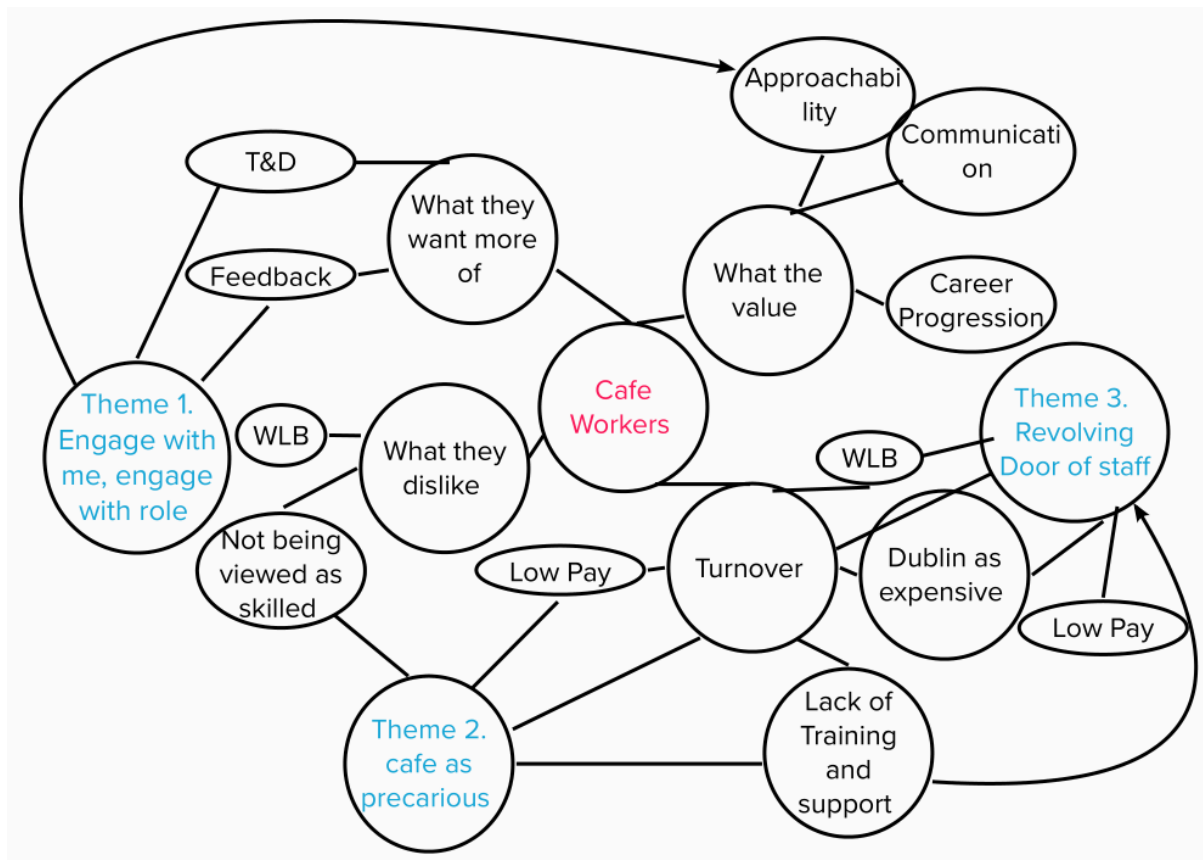
sector plagued with high employee turnover. The researcher hopes their perspectives of this world will be impactful and useful for café employers and managers going forward.

5.1.2. Table 2

Research Objective	Themes	Sub-Themes
RO1: To investigate whether Dublin cafés currently implement HR practices and how they impact their front of house employees.	Theme 1: Engage with Me and I'll Engage with the Job.	ST1: Talk to Me! ST2: Speciality Coffee Deserves Speciality Training.
RO2: To explore whether Dublin café employees feel they have the opportunity for career progression and if they plan on remaining long term in the industry.	Theme 2: Cafés, a Precarious Place to Build a Career.	
RO3: To investigate what Dublin café employees believe are the fundamental issues effecting employee turnover at the moment.	Theme 3: A Revolving Door of Staff.	ST1: Low Pay, Low Reward ST2: WLB- Too Many s Spinning Plates.

Table 2. Final Themes and Sub-Themes.

5.1.3. Mind Map of Themes and Sub-Themes



5.2. RO1. Theme 1: Engage with me and I'll Engage with the Job

All four participants who were interviewed outlined that they had some form of a HR manager of function present in their cafés. This was an enlightening revelation to the researcher as research had shown prior that less than 60% of SMEs in Ireland bother to invest in any form of HR practices and management (Newenham, 2015). Three out of four participants spoke highly of their employer's HR function, all mentioning notions such as, communication, administration, and approachability. While one participant discussed having an official HR manager working for their café, the other three participants all had a manager who performed the HR functions of the café alongside their other responsibilities. Despite all four participants' having some form a HR figure present, their level of engagement all varied.

5.2.1. Talk to me!

Engagement in the form of communication was discussed by all the contributors in varying degrees. Three participants deemed having approachable and open communication with their superiors as important to them.

Yeah, I can give feedback at any time I like. I can contact our operations manager, or even our general manager and I feel I can even contact the business owner with any grievances. I never feel like I'm in the dark, if I need to ask anything there is no problems doing so.

(Participant 4).

Yeah, I think so I don't think anyone would ever be getting fired on the spot I think yeah, I think it's a place where you could really just have a conversation with management and find solutions together. (Participant 2).

He (the owner) was quite open as well and if problems arose I would be able to go to him and say this is what's going on and he'll try and find a solution, but I learned that you had to go to him at the right time, if I went on a busy day I wouldn't get a good response but if I went on a quiet evening and just said there's a problem he'd be happy to talk and find a solution. (Participant 1).

Employers and upper management who can garner the ability to have effective and open communication demonstrate to their employees that they are valued and appreciated within the organisation. It is a cost free and rather simple way of engaging your staff. However, this is easier said than done, some employers and managers struggle to find the time to engage their employees and offer opportunities for feedback.

Right now, I don't feel I get any feedback. We have tried several times to make weekly meetings, to chat openly about everything with feedback and all that kind of stuff but eh, it only happened once this year, so yeah that's it. (Participant 3).

This sheer lack of engagement and communication can lead to feelings of resentment and frustration, as employees have their voice dwindled and morale lowered.

A way to counteract this is to find unique ways to engage with your employees by utilising their strengths in a way that benefits both the company and the worker. Participant 1

discussed being offered the chance to incorporate their college studies with their current role in the café.

Yeah absolutely, even the place I work, they've started a Tik Tok account and social media campaign which I helped a bit on, which is fun to relate what I'm studying to the work I am doing. (Participant 1).

Participant 2 was given the opportunity to integrate their previous bartending experience into their current café role.

I had three years bartending experience and yeah when a time came to come up with cocktails for the winter menu, they kind of put that up to me. They said yeah you come up with some cocktails and then they ended up putting two cocktails I came up with on the menu. But yeah, they followed through with what they said which was cool, putting my little mark on this situation. Participant 2).

Both of these engagement practices were a way management successfully communicated with their employees, leading to feelings of recognition, appreciation, and increased engagement with their job. These practices do not go unnoticed by staff, proving that when employers engage with employees, they engage with their job.

5.2.2. Specialty Coffee Deserves Specialty Training

Communication is only one-way employers can engage with their staff to get the best out of them. Investment in T&D opportunities is a crucial HR practice to ensure your workers are engaged with their job. Throughout the interviews, the topic of T&D opportunities arose, a HR practice café workers feel is imperative to their job but often neglected by their managers and employers. This is HR practice that café workers deem important to their engagement and should be invested in cafés to ensure better employee retention.

Participants discussed the lack of robust T&D opportunities and talked about the pedestrian nature of employer's investment into developing their employees' skills.

From the business, the only training I had was about three years ago, after asking for it for over 2 years, was a kind of sensory course for roasting coffee. The rest was self-made and self-taught. I used YouTube and books. I did have a small amount of training for the coffee, but nobody provided me with a course or teaching me properly. I didn't receive any

certificate or anything, pretty much you are learning as you are working. Learning on the job. (Participant 3).

The only thing was, I had to learn to wait tables and work on the floor, perhaps I had to learn more of the front of house skills. I haven't been offered any further training opportunities.

(Participant 4).

One participant provided the opinion that café workers were not worthy of T&D investment.

Yeah, because many don't see them as worth investing time and money into. They're often seen as kind of disposable and "oh we can find new ones" and now we can't find new ones.

(Participant 2).

The notion of coffee being a viable skill akin to that of wine sommeliers was assumed by many of the participants interviewed.

Yeah, specialty coffee industry gets very specific. (Participant 2).

Of course, I mean, everyone can make coffee but not everyone can make a good cup of coffee. It's as simple as that. It's like being a chef, everyone can cook at home, but not everyone is a chef. You need training, you need time, and you need support when it comes to specialty coffee. (Participant 3).

Training is really important, a basic understanding and an ability to do things correctly at the beginning is vital. I often find that people are expected to have good speed rather than good technique. They are expected to have speed without giving them correct training. They may have speed, but they are doing things incorrectly. It's much better to learn how to do things correctly first, and then comes the speed. Investment in training is one of the main things, and more patience. (Participant 4).

It is evident that many café workers and baristas appreciate the skill and technique involved in making good coffee. This was a notion expressed by Knox (2016), who outlined the intricacies surrounding this third wave of coffee movement that Dublin is experiencing. Café employees have a desire and urge to better their skills and knowledge and yet their employers seem to be neglecting this, leaving them feeling stagnant. Investing in T&D opportunities is paramount for engaged, enthused and productive workers, leading to better retention and

reduced employee turnover. By offering more T&D opportunities, employees feel recognised by their employer or manager and seen as worthy of investment.

Its more about the business owners looking after their staff. That's the main thing. You have to think that, if they look after you, you have a happy employee, they will do a better job, they will be better at pretty much everything and be fully engaged with the business. In return, you will have more money, more customers and better service. As simple as that one.

You don't invest, you don't have anything at all. (Participant 3).

This notion, discussed by participant 3 was incredibly insightful and summed up the importance of T&D investments. This perspective demonstrates the concept of HR and employee engagement as a continuous cycle, with one influencing the other.

5.3. RO2. Theme 2: Cafés, a Precarious Place to Build a Career

The results from the four interviews revealed the precarious nature of the café sector in Dublin when it comes to building a long term, sustainable career. There is a perception amongst scholars that the café industry and hospitality as a whole does not offer much in terms of career progression and career management (Nombeko, 2019; Sthapit & Shrestha, 2018). Two of the participants discussed the desire to not be working in their current place of employment in a years-time, sharing the feeling of longing for a more 'permanent career'.

Ideally, this time next year I hope to be headed towards a more permanent career option rather than working in a café. I'm happy enough to continue working there until I find a serious career option. (Participant 2).

Participant 3 discussed how they returned to college part time during the pandemic to improve their employability and gain business administrative skills and now has intention to quit the café sector altogether.

I went back to college after the pandemic. My plan is to just finish college as soon as I can and just move on from here and quit. I'm thinking about starting an office job or administration thing. (Participant 3).

Only two of the participants have been offered the chance to progress in their role in the café, despite all participants employment longevity. Participant 3 shared with the researcher how

they went from a humble kitchen porter to head barista and general manager of a café over the course of six years.

That's tricky because at the beginning, it was out of necessity. I just moved to Dublin from Spain and the easiest way to find a job with my level of English at that point was to just start as a kitchen porter. After 1.5 year of cleaning dishes, I just moved onto the front of house. 1 year after that, I applied for a manager position, and I became the general manager.

(Participant 3).

This level of career progression is commendable and offers a unique perspective of “working your way up the corporate ladder” often associated with ‘professional’ careers. Although, this tends to be the exception and not the rule. Participant 4 discussed how a job promotion led to increased engagement, leading to increased productivity and performance.

Yeah, about three months ago, they asked if I would like to become a supervisor for the weekends. That comes with extra tasks and responsibilities, like counting the till and doing orders. I'm more engaged with the work now, as it also came with a pay rise so that was good. (Participant 4).

Participant 2 shared feelings of frustration due to being employed for over one year and has yet to be offered any form of career progression by management.

Not specifically, I mean I've talked to my supervisor, the head barista, about moving up but yeah there hasn't been anything official said or offered to me or said that it was available to me. I would like to progress a little bit more to like a supervisor, but it hasn't been discussed and definitely hasn't been brought to me. (Participant 2).

Participant 3 offered an insightful perspective, ensuring that there are workers who would like to make this a career, but unless they are supported and nurtured by their employer, this is not possible.

A lot of people think this is a student job or something. People think that hospitality workers don't want to do it as a career. The truth is, there is a lot of people who love this job. There is a lot of people who are really involved and engaged with the work and with the business, but if there is nothing coming in return, the only thing that happens is people give up.

(Participant 3).

The results highlight the precarious nature of building a career in a Dublin café, although it can be done, it may take the person years. Hospitality work is unpredictable and may not be suitable for everyone. The results also show that career progression within this sector is dependent on having a HR function that is trained effectively and present in their role, engaging with the workers on a continuous basis.

5.4. RO3. Theme 3: The Revolving Door of Staff

The hospitality industry in Ireland is currently under immense pressure to fill roles and retain employees as they experience a staff shortage of about 40,000 people (McCullagh, 2022). Getting to the crux of the problem is essential for employers going forward. This section explores why staff are not staying long term in Dublin cafés from the perspectives of those currently working in a sector described as having a ‘revolving door of staff’ (Riell, 2022). One participant offered the researcher a staggering statistic regarding the staff turnover they have witnessed.

I think that during the last few years, I have been working with around 150 people. The thing is, we are coming back to what I said earlier. The only way to keep staff with you is if you look after them. It’s as simple as that one. At the end it doesn’t matter if you have good food or good coffee or whatever. It matters, who is looking after the customers and who is looking after the place, it’s the employees. So, if they are gone, everything is gone.

(Participant 3).

Participant 4, adding to this sentiment,

There’s been a lot of change, massive change since I’ve started working here. It’s only me who has stuck around since 2019. I think you’re expected to have quite a high level of competence when you start in this café. However, training is not really a huge thing. You very much get thrown straight into the deep end. If you’re not able for it, it’s quite evident immediately. Sink or swim. If you’re able for it, you’re able for it and if you’re not you’re not.

It can often be a bit of a hard slog for a little while. (Participant 4).

5.4.1. ST1: Low Pay, Low Reward

Unfortunately, the hospitality sector is notoriously known for their low pay (Curran, 2021; Raub *et al.*, 2021). This is one of the most prominent antecedents for high turnover within the

café sector in Dublin. Three out of four participants were living at home with their parents due to the rising rental prices and increased cost of living.

Well, I think service jobs like hospitality and retail they're always gonna be at the much lower end of a salary. But that doesn't mean that it's enough for people to live off and you know even though I'm above the minimum wage I still can't afford to live here. But at the same time, what's a fair wage here for the work that we do. (Participant 2).

It's just when you look at how much money a café makes and how much you earn, there's quite a disparity between what you are getting and what's being turned over. I understand rents are high and wages are high, but they don't seem to meet the cost of living and they don't meet what you need. (Participant 4).

There was a sense amongst participants that they were growing increasingly frustrated with the current pay associated with this sector. It is tough work in a high-pressure environment that doesn't seem to pay accordingly.

I'm currently living at home with my dad. I'm trying to move out with my boyfriend but it's just not possible because neither of us make enough money to live in Dublin. I'm not making that the living wage in the café and yeah, I'm not sure if people can live off €12.90, maybe they can? Even at €11 an hour, I can't afford to move out. (Participant 2).

Perhaps, many employers simply can't afford to pay their staff a higher wage. However, it would be appreciated amongst workers if there were monetary incentives for exceeding in your job or an annual bonus as a token of appreciation for showing commitment to the role.

If there was better analysis on what people are doing, if there was more of an eye kept on things like how many tables a person serves or if there were certain areas people were better performing well in. A bonus and just being appreciated for what you are doing well would be a good incentive. Incentives would work and people would work harder. Increasing wages would generally make people more appreciative of their job. People might be prouder of what they are doing. (Participant 4).

This insight from Participant 4 could be very useful for employers looking to combat their employee turnover issues.

5.4.2. ST2: WLB- Too Many Spinning Plates

Work life balance is a hugely topical issue, and the hospitality industry is no stranger to attempting to achieve an effective WLB. Participant 3, who expressed his intent to quit his job soon, shared his total lack of a WLB with the researcher.

Right now, zero (WLB). At the beginning it was fine as we had plenty of staff. We did a kind of rotation roster. As soon as staff quit, more problems come up. You need to be on top of everything. My social life was just gone, so, pretty much in my case, I have been working here pretty much 90% of the weekends in the last two years. It is what it is. The higher you go, the less social life you have. (Participant 3).

Participant 1 talked about their WLB decreasing a lot during Covid-19 due to staff shortages and staff being close contacts or out sick.

In the summer when I was working full time it was hard at times, because I was working too many hours and they were quite short staffed for baristas and so I was found doing a lot of work and found hard to balance everything. I dropped sport and I kind of just worked and socialized but I did miss the sport which was frustrating at times. (Participant 1).

Participant 2 offered a glimmer of hope as she compared her WLB in a bar to her current one in a café.

Well, I was working in bartending before, but I was really struggling to find a work life balance, so I ended up in a café just so that I would have my evenings free and that I could count on regular hours. Like I'm working a full 40 hours a week, but I still have my evenings so that kind of allows me to have a pretty decent work life balance. (Participant 2).

It could be said that there is potential for a WLB in the café industry, but it is dependent on the roster and what you value as an employee. For some, simply having your evenings free is enough to make you stay working in a café, for others, working many weekends is a major deterrent, leading to resentment and intention to quit. Employees and employers should work together to come up with a solution that allows for WLB, leading to happier, more engaged workers, benefiting the business in the long term.

5.5. Conclusion

The above results portrayed a really interesting narrative and provided insightful perspectives on the turnover problems Dublin cafés are currently experiencing and offered a viewpoint on what makes an employee stick around long term in a sector infamously known for low retention. It could be said that while having some form of HR function present is important, it is how this HR function engages their employees that matters most. Simply having a body to turn to for administrative reasons is not enough, they must be approachable, engaging and invested in their employees. The researcher acknowledges that these results, due to the small sample size only offer a glimpse into the current state of Dublin cafés but the results are still relevant and useful for hospitality managers and employers.

Chapter 6: Discussion, Recommendations, & Conclusion

6.1. Introduction

The aim of this research study was to explore the relationship between the implementing of HR practices and employee turnover in Dublin based cafés. Additionally, the researcher wanted to investigate the antecedents behind why a worker stays long term in this sector, despite the precariousness often associated with hospitality. This chapter will begin by discussing and analysing the results from the four interviews and how they relate to the pre-existing body of literature and attempt to fill in the gaps where possible. This chapter will use the three RO set out in chapter three to answer the overarching research question at hand. The researcher will then offer a conclusion and recommendations for future research, along with the limitations of this study. This chapter will conclude with practical and actionable steps employers can make to curb the turnover problem within the Irish hospitality sector.

6.2. RO1: Engage with Me, and I'll Engage with the Job

The four participant's interviews were enlightening and surprising to the researcher. All four respondents reporting their place of employment employed some sort of HR function, be it an official HR manager or a general manager carrying out HR practices along with their other jobs and responsibilities. This revelation making more sense in hindsight, as all four participants have remained in their current café for at least one year. These findings contrast with Raub *et al.* (2018) who determined that HR functions in hospitality often lacked the critical understanding of the potentials effective HRM can have for organisations. The researcher acknowledges that this result is of a small sample of Dublin cafés and does not represent the majority or norm, however, it is reassuring to know that there are cafés in Dublin who realise the benefits of having a HR presence.

Three out of four of the participant's spoke highly of their HR function, acknowledging the benefit of having a designated person for both administrative duties and as a point of contact during times of need. However, participant 3, spoke about their feelings of their HR function being on the side of the business rather than the employees. There is a consensus amongst scholars that the employees are a hospitality organisations most valuable resource (Hussainy, 2019; Montes, *et al.*, 2017; Temizkan & Yabanci, 2020), when employees begin to cast doubt on their function, feelings of frustration and resentment emerge. Participant 3 expressed

their desire to quit their job and make a drastic career change, perhaps if he had a better relationship with the HR function, this would not be the case. The results highlighted not only the importance of having a HR function to some capacity, but also that the HR function must collaborate with the employees in an engaging manner. When employees and management work together, it is a win-win for both sides. This sentiment is in line with the findings of Immaneni and Sailaja (2020), who acknowledge that employees and employers must work together, not against each other, to achieve organisational success and employee satisfaction.

6.2.1. Talk to Me!

Employee engagement practices implemented by the respondent's café's HR function were deemed highly valuable and important to the participants. Employees who were made feel engaged by management were more committed to the role and had increased levels of job satisfaction. EE practices meant different things to different participants, which agrees with Sun (2019) who discussed the nuances and intricacies of defining EE. There is no one governing, all encompassing way to engage your employees, as there are numerous scholarly definitions from over the last few decades (CIPD, 2021B). However, all participants revealed ways in which they have felt engaged in their role and with the company. Participant 1 discussed how their HR manager allowed them to help with the café's social media, incorporating their college degree into their job role. This allowed participant 1 to feel heard and respected, increasing job performance and satisfaction. Participant 2 discussed being allowed by upper management to use their bar tending background to devise new cocktails for the drink's menu, leading to feelings of appreciation, job commitment and increased enthusiasm in their role.

Two-way communication and feedback opportunities were mentioned by all participants, making them an essential component of EE. Participant 3 expressed frustration over the lack of opportunities they had to give and receive feedback to upper management. This desire for open communication and feedback is in harmony with the work of Bhardwaj and Kalia (2021) and McGuire (2016), who all determined that consistent two-way feedback opportunities must be afforded to workers. When employees are engaged through communication, trust, autonomy, and performance is enhanced greatly. Participant 3's experience with sub-par communication mirrors the findings of Jung *et al* (2021) who argued that EE had decreased across the board since the Covid-19 pandemic. Employers would be wise to make deliberate efforts to increase EE through regular meetings with employees and allowing for continuous

open communication. Future research that was focused on interviewing café owners would be beneficial to gain insight into their perspective and opinion on EE practices.

6.2.2. Specialty Coffee Deserves Specialty Training

Specialty coffee and coffee making in general requires highly trained and engaged personnel to achieve maximum success and cement a sustainable competitive advantage. T&D falls under the umbrella of talent management, something many scholars have discussed as often neglected in the hospitality sector (Baharin & Hanafi, 2018, Baum, 2019, Duffy, 2021). Effective and specialised T&D opportunities are both wanted by café workers and very much deserved. All participants interviewed shared the same experience of minimal, on-the-job training at the commencement of employment and then very little after that. Participant 4's experience of being hired with vast barista knowledge and experience prior to beginning their current employment and therefore required no further barista training, according to management, reflects the view of Rumman *et al.* (2020), who discussed the notion of cafés rarely training staff as they tend to hire experienced employees. However, this is not good enough, no matter the level of experience and knowledge, employees desire sufficient T&D opportunities. It demonstrates to the employee that they are an asset worth investing in, they are valued by the employer, and encourages them to perform better and increases their engagement. The phenomena of 'sink or swim' discussed over a decade ago in the work of Davidson *et al.* (2011), was echoed in Participant 4's interview, showing that in 11 years, hospitality workers are still put in high pressure situations and forced to learn as they go and succeed, or succumb to the pressure and leave.

What was evident throughout the four interviews was the notion of coffee and barista work as a highly skilled endeavor and demands sufficient T&D investments. Knox (2016) famously coined the term 'coffee intelligentsia', putting forward the argument that this is a sector that requires continuous T&D, where the employees must be properly trained, equipped with substantial coffee knowledge, and allowed to develop and hone their craft. This sentiment is mirrored in the interviews, with all participants acknowledging the skills required to work with coffee and yet all admitting that they have not received any additional training since their initial on-the-job training at the point of hiring. The findings contradict the work of Arroyo-López *et al.* (2017) who found that service orientated organisations do invest in their workers to significantly improve their skills and use their workers as their competitive advantage. In an ideal world, Dublin café owners would follow suit, and provide the T&D necessary to set

themselves apart from their competitors. However, the researcher acknowledged that many café employers in Dublin simply do not have the resources and are struggling to stay afloat as the country continues to 'get back to normal' after two years of lockdown. When Baum (2019) proposed the question, 'Does the hospitality industry need or deserve talent?', he determined through an in-dept literature review, that the culture surrounding hospitality is not suitable to attract and maintain talented employees. The researcher disagrees with this sentiment, the results from the four interviews highlight that current café workers have the desire and drive to improve and better themselves but require employers and management to invest in adequate T&D. Quantitative research, using a large sample, would be needed to investigate whether café owners are investing in their employees and offering substantial and continuous T&D opportunities.

6.3. RO2: Cafés, a Precarious Place to Build a Career

The hospitality sector has long been known as a precarious and volatile place to build one's career. However, there are exceptions as outlined in the results chapter, Participant 3 managed to work their way up from the humble kitchen porter to the head barista/general manger position of a Dublin café, remaining in his current role for six years. This is a remarkable career progression, but is the exception, rather than the rule. It showcases the precariousness of the situation; this career progression was due to a combination of timing and hard graft.

Participants 2 and 3 both expressed their intent to be working in a different sector in a years-time. The desire for a more 'permanent career' echoes the findings of Nombeko (2019), who found, through a rigorous literature review, that many hospitality workers do not view their work as a long-term career opportunity, due to the precariousness of the industry. However, the researcher differs with Nombeko (2019) on their belief that career management is the responsibility of the employee. Participant 2 expressed the desire to take on more responsibilities and yet, after over a year in employment, had not been approached by management with an offer to advance in their role. This belief is further mirrored in the work of McGuire (2016) who declared that hospitality workers want performance appraisal opportunities, feedback sessions and CM practices from their management and employers. This would require management being trained accordingly to achieve this goal. The findings from the interviews suggest that the hospitality sector in Dublin is a risky sector to build a

career, which aligns with the work of Sthapit and Shrestha (2018) who used a descriptive survey to achieve a similar sentiment. The results gained from the four interviews reflects the work of Ghani *et al.* (2022) who outlined how many hospitality managers are inexperienced when it comes to CM practices such as effective onboarding practices and offering career advancement opportunities.

All four participants shared similar onboarding experiences, detailing a casual, non-specific, and informal introduction to the company and role. The results align with Curran's (2021) view, who used both surveys and interviews to determine that employers and management who can implement effective CM practices ensure increased retention of talent, increased employee commitment and improved EE. Employers and HR functions within cafés need to possess the ability and willingness to attract and nurture workers who express an interest in coffee and café culture. It is clear career opportunities are present in Dublin cafés, however, they are dependent on effective implementing of HR practices by employers and management. This view is reflected in the work of Sheehan *et al.* (2018), who declared that hospitality managers must capitalise on their employees' skills by investing in CM practices. Café workers deserve the same investment and career support as workers in less precarious industries. Future research may investigate through interviewing upper management and café owners to see if they believe cafés are a precarious place to build a career and whether their actions or inactions can make a difference to FOH café workers.

6.4. RO3: The Revolving Door of Staff

The 'revolving door of staff' is a phrase often used to describe the high turnover rates experienced within the hospitality sector (Riell, 2022). This section will discuss what currently employed café workers believe are the antecedents to such high turnover rates, exploring what employers and managers could do to mediate this in the future.

6.4.1. Low Pay, Low Reward

Ultimately, this is a sector plagued with low pay with little salary increases, benefits or rewards. Participants discussed in detail, their frustration regarding their low wage, and how it is hard to attract talent when the money or support is not in place. These results parallel the findings of Immaneni and Sailaja (2020), who found that employers not granting 'fair pay' is one of the prime predecessors to high turnover rates. Only 1 out of 4 respondents earned

above the living wage of €12.80 (Living Wage Ireland, 2022), making it increasingly difficult for café workers to remain optimistic about a long-term career. These feelings are exacerbated due to the rising cost of living in Dublin. Participant 4 suggested financial incentives based on performance, believing it would lead to increased employee satisfaction. These results coincide with the findings of Knox (2016), who conducted qualitative research on Australian cafés and found that cafés there offered better financial rewards and opportunities for career progression. Future studies using quantitative research, such as in-depth questionnaires would be beneficial to examine the salaries, rewards, benefits, and pay progression opportunities currently available to Dublin café workers.

6.4.2. WLB- Too Many Spinning Plates

The results found that hospitality workers found it difficult to achieve a satisfying WLB, leading to feelings of frustration, resentment, and intention to quit soon by Participant 3, who has had to work 90% of the weekends of 2022. Participant 1 shared his frustration of his lack of WLB during the pandemic due to staff shortages surround the pandemic. These results mirror the findings of King *et al.* (2021) who posits that many hospitality workers increased their standards during Covid-19 and that a WLB is now a top priority.

However, a WLB is subjective, and what is valued by one employee, may not work for another. Participants 2 and 4 were satisfied with their WLB, as simply having evenings free, due to the day-time hours associated with cafés, was acceptable. Employer's who can engage effectively with the workers, could intentionally help achieve WLB for their employees. This involves allowing your workers to have a voice, listening to their needs, and supporting it by creating rosters and schedules that are balanced and fair. These findings reflect the work of Jung *et al.* (2021), who found that employers who allow their employees to have a voice through proper engagement practices can have stronger talent retention rates. Ultimately, café workers want to feel supported in their role, employers and managers who can do this successfully set themselves apart from their competitors and become an attractive place to attract fresh talent. This is critical for Dublin café owners, looking to fill their job vacancies and get back on track after the Covid-19 pandemic. As WLB is so subjective, quantitative research using in-depth surveys and questionnaires would be worth conducting to pinpoint whether a sustainable WLB can be achieved in Dublin cafés post-pandemic.

6.5. Limitations

The researcher found it difficult to lock in interviews due to conflicting schedules with the potential participants and the time constraints surrounding the research. The researcher wanted a homogenous sample to ensure validity and reliance in the findings. The sample chosen was frontline café workers who were currently employed and living in Dublin at the time of the interview. In retrospect, the sample could have included café owners, who would have incredibly rich knowledge, experience, and insight into the field at hand. This is a study conducted on employees working in Dublin cafés in April 2022 as the country emerges back into a restriction free society. This means that the results of this research, qualitative in nature, could be difficult to replicate. The researcher attempted to create a study that produced data rich in detail and depth, offering a unique perspective and insight. The researcher hopes the findings from this study adds to the current body of literature surrounding employee turnover in the Irish hospitality industry.

6.6. Conclusion

6.6.1. Final Thoughts and Contribution of Study

This qualitative research aimed to explore if there is a relationship between the implementing of HR functions in Dublin based cafés and coffee shops and employee turnover intent. This was achieved through an extensive literature review that shaped the research objectives that followed and guided the researcher in conducting semi-structured interviews. What was produced was an amalgamation of industry perspectives, experiences, and values that allowed the researcher to achieve their RO and answer the overarching research question. The researcher concludes that simply having a HR function present is not enough to deter turnover intent in Dublin's café industry, more importantly, it is how the HR function, engages with their staff that makes a difference to employees. The HR function varied from specific HR managers to upper management or owners acting as a HR body, a point of contact or administrative figure per se. Employees appreciated having one specific person to turn to on a fundamental level. However, their reasoning for remaining with the café or intention to quit was determined by their willingness to engage with them, support them, invest in them, and communicate with them. Employees want their managers to engage with them through open communication, supporting them through recognition and offering them the chance to

progress in their career (Juariyah & Saktian, 2018). This research adds to the existing literature concerning employee turnover in hospitality, specifically, Irish cafés. It provides insight into the perspectives and experiences of FOH café workers in a post-pandemic world, useful for any café manager or employer looking to improve their EE and in turn, their turnover rates. All four participants had a HR presence in their café, to varying standards. T&D practices were substantially lacking in all the contributors' cafés, improvements in this field are drastically needed. T&D are a critical element of hospitality HR practices (Agarwal, 2021; Rady & Zaki; 2020; Immaneni & Sailaja, 2020) and yet are severely lacking in much of Ireland's hospitality sector (O'Leary, 2022). When employees are left with sub-par training, leaving to skills and knowledge gaps in a highly pressurised environment, high turnover rates ensue (Davidson *et al.*, 2011) On a fundamental level, the results of these studies could have implications for future government plans surrounding Irelands hospitality sector and for business owners throughout the country.

6.6.2. Future of Dublin Cafés

It must be noted that this is a subject steeped in subjectivity and is not representative of every café in Dublin. On the 27th of April 2022, news dropped that the average rent in Dublin was valued at €1,972 (Hennessy, 2022), making it €100 more per month than the average wage (€11.47 per hour, Indeed, 2022) of a FOH hospitality worker working 40 hours per week. It begs the question, is a career in Dublin cafés, reserved for the privileged and the financially well-endowed? It can be said that pursuing a career in a sector known for its precariousness and low pay, is a privilege, as money isn't the number one factor behind this choice. It is a privilege to make a career out of your passion and interests, something many people simply can't afford, and thus forced to pursue different career paths out of necessity. It is difficult to say where the future of cafés and coffee is heading, will it become a sector permanently struggling to fill vacancies, employing, students, part-time and transient workers or can it become a beacon of hope and prosperity for the coffee enthusiasts of Ireland? This could be the case if café owners and managers begin to think long term, making the right investments now to gain success in the future.

6.7. Recommendations, Timeline & Financial Costs

This section will outline the researcher's recommendations for Dublin café owners looking to improve their employee turnover rates as society emerges into a post-pandemic world. This will be followed by a realistic, potential timeline of implementing these recommendations, concluded with any financial costs associated with these directions.

6.7.1. Recommendation 1: Improve Communication

Open and effective two-way communication was deemed by all four respondents as valuable and important for their engagement, performance, and commitment to the organisation. The researcher recommends the following actions employers and managers can implement to improve EE through effective communication.

- Perform weekly or bi-weekly employee check ins through informal 'chats' to gain insight into how they are feeling, allowing time for them to offer feedback and suggestions.
- Provide the opportunity for anonymous suggestion boxes, to allow employees to give feedback anonymously to ensure there are no repercussions or sanctions for employees who express dissatisfaction or frustration with employer or job role.
- Allow for annual or bi-annual performance appraisals. Employees deserve the opportunity for formal performance appraisals to gauge their skill level, improvements and negotiate any salary progression and bonus'.

Timeline: Effective immediately.

Cost: Minimal to zero financial cost. The only cost is that of time and effort on the employer and manager's part.

6.7.2: Recommendation 2: Improve T&D for Baristas and FOH

The lack of subsequent T&D opportunities after commencement of employment was noted by all contributors to this study. Improving the T&D opportunities afforded to FOH café workers would be a fantastic way to start reducing talent turnover. This can be done through the following:

- Incentivise improvements and quality of latte art by holding social media competitions where customers can vote on the 'best' latte art.
- Pay for employees to attend regulated and well-regarded barista courses to receive official credentials.
- Provide opportunities for continuous latte art training, whether from experience senior staff, or an outside body.

Timeline: The social media competition can be implemented at any point, this could generate some excitement and enthusiasm amongst employees, leading to increased performance and commitment to job. The barista courses would be based on necessity, choosing workers who show a desire to upskill and a need to improve. A different employee could be chosen every year to attend a barista course of the employers choosing. Continuous latte art training can be done every six months to ensure consistency.

Cost: Minimal cost for the social media competition and in-house latte art training. Dublin Barista School offer a half day of training for €399 and a full day course for €750 (Dublin Barista School, 2022). There would be an additional cost of a day's wages to cover the employee on the training course.

6.7.3. Recommendation 3: Improving Managerial Skills

The researcher recommends that café owners invest in their managerial skills by sending the designated HR function on a CIPD accredited training course. CIPD (2022) provide an intensive business course for personnel looking to improve their HR knowledge and skills.

Timeline: Dependent on the turnover rate and severity of employee dissatisfaction, but sooner, rather than later would be best.

Cost: €995 for a three-day course and the equivalent of the employee's wage for days missed.

6.7.4: Hiring an Official HR Manager

For café owners looking to expand their personnel and make substantial change to how they operate, the researcher recommends hiring an experienced and qualified HR manager to take the administrative stress away from the owner, providing an official point of contact for the employees.

Timeline: If resources available, effective immediately. If finances are not available, this could be implemented into the five-year plan of the business.

Cost: Average HR salary in Dublin ranges from €39,000 to €73,000.

Personal Learning Statement

Having always been fascinated by the high turnover rates surrounding the hospitality sector, in particular the casual, day-time restaurants, and cafés, I wanted to explore why people did not see it as a viable career. When working abroad in San Francisco, I discovered that many hospitality workers viewed their work as a viable and respectable career choice. I questioned why this wasn't the case in Ireland. I spent many years working in the hospitality sector, with varying degrees of a HR function, some places with zero presence and others with an official HR manager. My curiosity was sparked further when I embarked on this HR masters and learned the theoretical and practical implications effective HR can have on an organisation, including cafés.

The four participants interviewed were incredible. Their openness and vulnerability were incredibly poignant, allowing me into their world and offering critical insights and perspectives on this topic. Ideally, if time and circumstances had allowed, I would have liked to have interviewed more participants. I do feel this research is still relevant and robust enough to provide an insight into the perspectives of café workers in Dublin regarding employee turnover within the industry. I would be delighted for this study to be of practical use and a potential guide for café employers and managers looking to improve their talent retention going forward. Dublin is a wonderful city with lots to offer and it would be great to see more skilled and capable workers making a reputable career in the café and coffee industry and timely, indeed.

This was my first experience carrying out an empirical study of this nature and I learned a wealth of skills and knowledge that I feel will benefit me going forward. I have improved my reading and analysing skills immensely, along with my communication and listening skills. I feel my ability to take rejection and constructive criticism has improved immensely. This was a demanding, yet gratifying experience and has cemented by belief that the café industry both needs and deserve to retain their talent through implementing of HR practices. I look forward to taking the skills learned through this dissertation process into my future HR career, where I hope to lead with my heart and my head.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Information Sheet

Information Form

Exploring the relationship between the implementing of HR practices and retention of talent within the Dublin café sector

I would like to invite you to take part in a research study that will be exploring the relationship between implementing HR practices and how it relates to the high turnover rates currently being experienced in the Dublin café sector. Please take your time to read the information presented below. Please feel free to ask me any questions or if you need anything explained further. Take your time before deciding to take part and know that you can withdraw from this research at any point in time.

Who am I and what is this study about?

I am currently studying a Master of Arts in Human Resource Management in the National College of Ireland looking to carry out qualitative research for my dissertation. I am interested in studying whether there is a correlation between cafés who implement some form of HR practices throughout their business and those that have high retention rates and low employee turnover. This research aims to get the insights and perspectives of current café front of house employees to gather current and up to date information on the HR practices, if any, currently being implemented in Dublin cafés and if these have any effect on turnover rates. It also aims to discover whether café employees stay long term with a business because certain HR practices were in place.

What will taking part involve?

Taking part in this research will involve a 20 minute (approx.) semi-structured in person interview covering themes such as working and living in Dublin, employee engagement, training and development, talent management, and career management. The interviews will use audio recording, with your consent of course, to record the interview. The interviews will remain anonymous, omitting names, name of employer and any defining features that may identify you or your employer.

Topics that will be discussed

- *Does your place of work have a HR function or someone to carry out HR practices?*
- *Why have you chosen to work in the café sector?*
- *Do you find meaning in your work?*
- *Are you encouraged and supported by your manager/employer?*
- *Have training and development opportunities been afforded to you?*
- *Do you get opportunities to discuss and explore career progression opportunities with your manager/employer?*

Why have you been chosen to take part?

You have been invited to take part due to your current employment in a Dublin based café and will hopefully be able to provide valuable insight into the correlation between

implementing HR practices and retaining talent in the café industry in Dublin. Ultimately, the researcher wants to discover what makes a person remain long term with an organisation.

What are the possible risks and benefits of taking part?

The participants will not benefit directly from this research, however, hopefully the research as a whole will provide indispensable information and insight for further research to take place. This could then allow the café sector and even the hospitality sector as a whole to gain sufficient knowledge on retaining talented employees and avoiding the turnover challenges associated with the industry.

Will taking part be confidential?

Participation is completely voluntary, and you have the right to refuse to answer any question and you may withdraw at any time during or after the interview without any consequences. The information gained through these interviews will remain confidential with the identities of participants being anonymised. Any details that are revealed in the interview that may expose your identity or the identity of anyone mentioned in the interview will be hidden. Disguised quotes and extracts may be used in the final research project will be submitted to the National College of Ireland Examination Board for examination.

How will the interviews and information you provide be stored and protected?

The signed copies of consent forms and audio recordings will be kept, securely on file for two years by the researcher, as is expected by NCI. These files will be stored on a password protected device that only the researcher will have access to. Recordings taken on the mobile device will be downloaded and stored correctly and securely, and then deleted from the researcher's phone. You are legally entitled to any information you have provided under the Freedom of Information Act.

What will happen to the results of this study?

The information gathered from the interviews will hopefully be used in my final dissertation which will then be submitted to the National College of Ireland Examination Board. There is a possibility that NCI will decide to upload it to their own database which can only be accessed by past and present NCI students.

Definitions

- *Employee Engagement*- How people express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally as they interact with their jobs. Rather than being burnt out, employees show vigour (energy, resilience, and effort), dedication (eustachiasm, inspiration, and pride) and absorption (concentration and engaged in one's work) (CIPD, 2021). Employee engagement is the emotional commitment the employee has to the organisation and its goals (Forbes, 2012).

Talent Management- Seeks to attract, identify, develop engage, retain and deploy individuals who are considered particularly valuable to an organisation. Talented

- employees are those who make a significant difference to organisational performance. Talent may fulfil a particular role or have potential to reach higher levels within the organisation (CIPD, 2020).
- *Career Management*- Supporting your employees to develop and realise your potential, recognising strengths, skill gaps and interests, regular conversations with managers to gain insight into their performance and what skills they need to work on (Irish Institute of Training and Development, 2022).
- *Employee Turnover*- The proportion of employees who leave an organisation over a set period of time (often on a year-on-year basis) expressed as a percentage of total workforce numbers. Covers all leavers, voluntary or involuntary (CIPD, 2021).
- *Employee Retention*- Relates to the extent to which an employer retains its employees and may be measured as the proportion of employees with a specified length of service- typically one year or more- expressed as a percentage of overall workforce numbers (CIPD, 2021).
- *Onboarding*- Process of familiarising a new employee with the organisation. It begins from the moment an offer is made to the employee until the time the employee becomes a productive member of the organisation.

Appendix 2: Consent Form

Consent Form

An Exploratory Study of the Implementing of HR practices in Dublin Based Cafés and its Effects on Talent Retention and Employee Turnover.

Consent to take part in research.

I _____ voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.
I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without consequences of any kind.
I understand I can withdraw permission to use data from my interview within two weeks after the interview, in which case the material will be deleted.
I have had the purpose and nature of the study explained to me in writing and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.
I understand that participation involves a 20-minute semi-structured in person interview
I understand that I will not benefit directly from participating in this research.
I agree to my interview being audio-recorded.
I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially.
I understand that in any report on the results of this research my identity will remain anonymous. This will be done by changing my name and disguising any details of my interview which may reveal my identity or the identity of people I speak about.
I understand that disguised extracts from my interview may be quoted in the final research report which will be submitted to the National College of Ireland Examination Board.
I understand that if I inform the researcher that myself or someone else is at risk of harm they may have to report this to the relevant authorities - they will discuss this with me first but may be required to report with or without my permission
I understand that signed consent forms and original audio recordings will be retained on a password protected device.
I understand that a transcript of my interview in which all identifying information has been removed will be retained for two years after this, until May 2024.
I understand that under freedom of information legislation I am entitled to access the information I have provided at any time while it is in storage as specified above.
I understand that I am free to contact any of the people involved in the research to seek further clarification and information.

Researcher's Contact Details: Kate Morrissey. Email: x20189362@student.ncirl.ie

Signature of research participant

Signature of research participant

Date

Signature of researcher

I believe the participant is giving informed consent to participate in this study

Signature of researcher

Date

Appendix 3: Initial Themes and Sub-Themes Table

Research Objective	Themes	Sub-Themes
<p>RO1: To investigate whether Dublin cafés currently implement HR practices and how they impact their front of house employees.</p>	<p>Theme 1: Presence of a HR Manager of HR Function within the Café.</p> <p>Theme 2: Employee Engagement Practices</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Communication -Administration -Business Partner -Approachability - Feedback -Feeling Valued and Appreciated
<p>RO2: To explore whether Dublin café employees feel they have the opportunity for career progression and if they plan on remaining long term in the industry</p>	<p>Theme 3: Career Progression in the Café Sector.</p> <p>Theme 4: Training and Development Opportunities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Career Management -Career Opportunities -Specialty Coffee and Café Work Being Seen as Skilled Work - Training and Development Investments -Employee Development Opportunities -Employee Recognition -Employee Retention Strategies
<p>RO3: To investigate what Dublin café employees believe are the fundamental issues effecting employee turnover at the moment.</p>	<p>Theme 5: Employee Turnover in the Café sector in Dublin.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Work Life Balance (WLB) - Low Pay - Dublin’s high cost of living - Lack of respect - Not viewed as skilled workers -Laborious Work

Appendix 4: Initial Themes and Sub-Themes Mind Map

