

A Qualitative Study of Grit and Creativity in Michelin Star Chefs

Maggie Tang

Advisors: Angela Duckworth and Paolo Termini
University of Pennsylvania



Research Question

How does **world-class creative achievement** emerge in the haute cuisine sector, where early career success is achieved by the **precise execution** of previously defined **routine tasks**?

Introduction

Creativity, the production of novel and useful ideas, is an important predictor of achievement in a variety of domains. However, while researchers have looked at the factors that influence creativity in general, much less is known about the factors that contribute to **world-class creativity**, honed over decades of dedication to one's craft.

Method

In this qualitative study, I interviewed $N = 20$ chefs who are working or have worked in **Michelin Star restaurants*** to explore their creative development. I used the **grounded theory approach** (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), an inductive and systematic methodology used in qualitative research for theory construction, which includes:

- 1) **Open Coding:** assigning meaning to the data by identifying and labeling statements potentially relevant to the study questions
- 2) **Axial Coding:** finding relationships between the open codes and aggregating them to more abstract categories
- 3) **Theoretical Coding:** exploring how different axial codes articulate into an overarching theoretical story

*The work experience of our sample accounts for 53% of Three Michelin Star Restaurants in the U.S.

Results

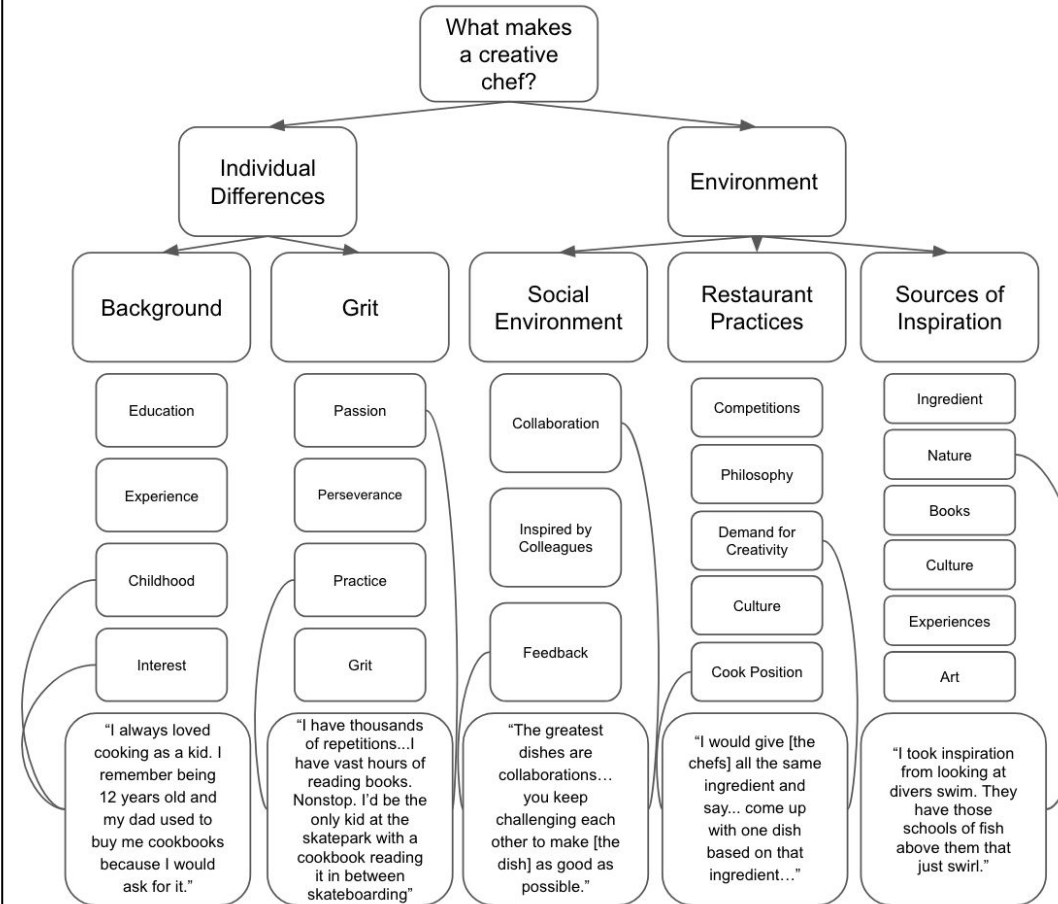


Figure 1. Open, Axial, and Theoretical Codes, with examples of chefs' statements

Discussion

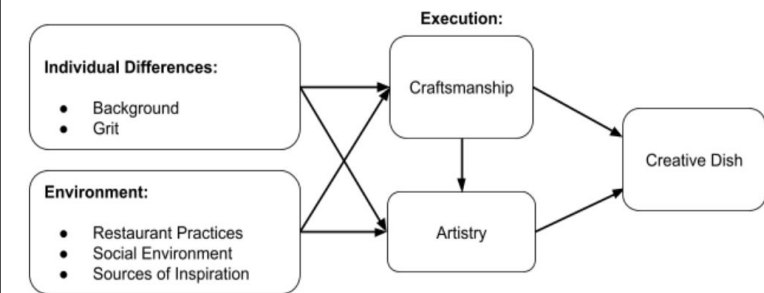


Figure 2. Conceptual framework of the dish creation process in haute cuisine kitchens

Individual Differences and Environment influence craftsmanship and artistry, both required for a creative dish.

Grit, passion and perseverance for long term goals, is a **predictor** of creativity in **world-class fields** and in domains **personally meaningful** to people.

Creative chefs are **passionate** about developing their craft. They show **perseverance** throughout their careers.

Creativity should be **encouraged** and can be **fostered** through **restaurant practices** such as competitions.

Several limitations in the study include that the study was limited to fewer than two dozen interviews, restriction in range, and possible confirmation bias.