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What is the Recipe for Leading Successful Creative Restaurants?

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About the Author



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Photo Source: Michelin Guide (2022)

Introduction

After the pandemic, UNWTO (2021) has stated that creativity could contribute to the success of hospitality firms; for instance, creative strategies in leading restaurants provide innovative and unique experiences (WFTA, 2021). This type of restaurant uses creativity as an effective tool to offer innovative menus and interactive services. Most restaurants included in the Michelin Guide are excellent examples of creative restaurants because they innovate to offer amazing experiences, have a great creative mind, and an exclusive team that can carry out their culinary project. However, becoming a leading restaurant and being successful is not always easy. For this reason, it could be a challenge to know the ingredients of successful leadership in creative restaurants, i.e., what is the recipe to be successful in these restaurants?

Factors that contribute to successful leadership in restaurants include:

- inspiring, motivating, and understanding the team;
- believing in the project and sharing the skills with the team to obtain a better performance;
- training the team to be physically and mentally prepared to dedicate the necessary time to each menu;
- innovating;
- monitoring the quality and elaboration of the recipes;
- not forgetting the customers because it is necessary to create new offers, services, and dishes while thinking about what customers are expecting.

One of the keys to success in creative restaurant leadership is getting employees to believe in the project to share their emotions and motivations with customers. In this sense, to measure the outcomes of the strategies of these leading restaurants, knowing whether the leadership of the team is really identified from the consumers' perspective, an essential element could be to examine how customers perceive the leadership efforts of these restaurants through their creative experience. A measurement of pull (restaurant innovativeness) and push factors (expectation personal goals) as well as their relevance in the design of the creative food experience can be performed. Data from customers who visited creative restaurants included in the Michelin Guide were collected, distinguishing between starred (1, 2, or 3 stars) and non-starred restaurants (e.g., Bib Gourmand).

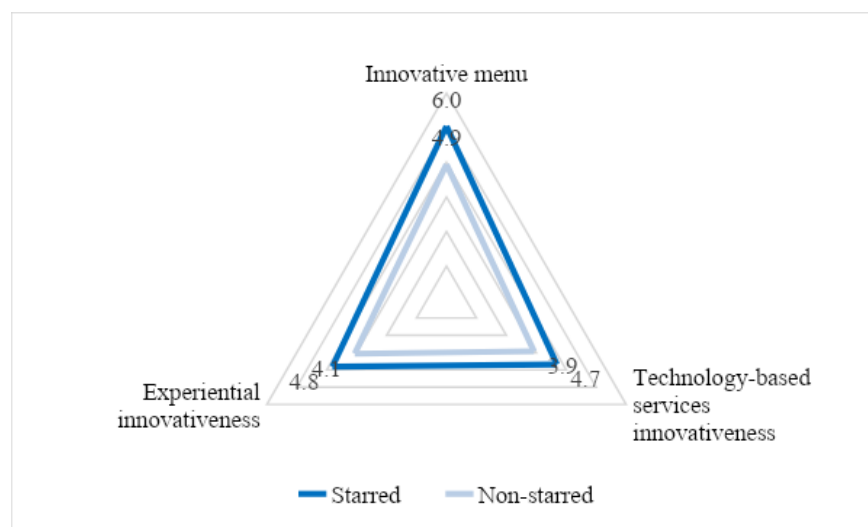
Restaurant innovativeness as a leadership tool

Restaurant innovativeness is considered a pull factor of the gastronomic experience provider. Creative restaurants should focus on innovative services if they want to improve the service value. In this sense, it is essential to pay attention to the customer's perspective and avoid myopia in the hospitality industry by considering only the manager's perspective (Kim et al., 2021). Those restaurants which adopt innovative strategies will be more prepared to get customers to enjoy the creative experience. How do customers evaluate the innovativeness of the restaurants? Figure 1 shows that leading-starred restaurants included in the Michelin Guide obtained better scores than those without stars in the three dimensions that make up restaurant innovativeness: the menu, technology-based services, and experience.

Innovative menu refers to new combinations of food, innovative customized menu, new flavors, the restaurant being on the leading edge of current trends in menus, and innovative presentation of food. Technology-based services innovativeness includes aspects such as new apps of online ordering tools or integration of innovative

technologies into services. And experiential innovativeness contains elements such as innovative physical designs, innovative ways of interaction between employees and customers, and being well-known for innovative events. All the scores go from 1 to 7.

Figure 1. Innovativeness in Michelin-starred and non-starred restaurants



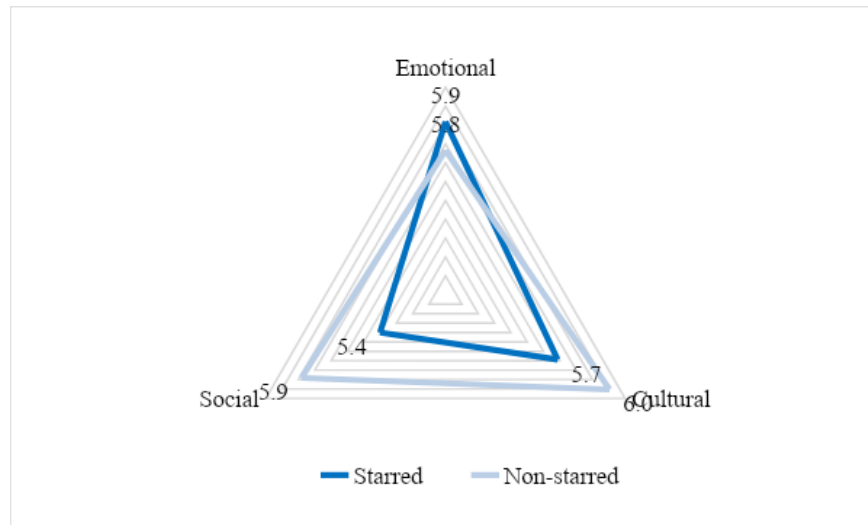
Source: Molina-Collado (2021)

Personal goals of the food experience

What are the personal goals or push factors that make customers enjoy a creative experience? They can be classified into emotional, cultural, and social goals. Emotional goals include sensory appeal, cultural goals refer to escaping from routine and knowing local cuisine, and social goals consider the importance of networking. Specifically, the indicators that define these personal goals are related to the following aspects: experiencing and discovering something new, tasting gastronomy not tried before, discovering the taste of local food, increasing knowledge about different cultures, having a unique opportunity to understand local culture, transmitting experiences with local food, and enjoying unique moments with family and/or friends. The teams of leading restaurants need to understand those personal goals to define the employee tasks that will get customers motivated to enjoy the experience. The greater the achievement of personal goals, the more immersed the customers will be (Chang et al., 2020). Figure 2 reveals that there is no difference in emotional goals when customers visit a starred or non-starred restaurant. However, contrary to expectations, customers present higher social and cultural personal goals when visiting non-starred restaurants. Maybe the justification can be found because Michelin-starred restaurants move away from local

cuisine to offer more international cuisine. Moreover, customers who visit non-starred restaurants fundamentally value the experience without exceeding the price.

Figure 2. Personal goals when visiting Michelin-starred and non-starred restaurants



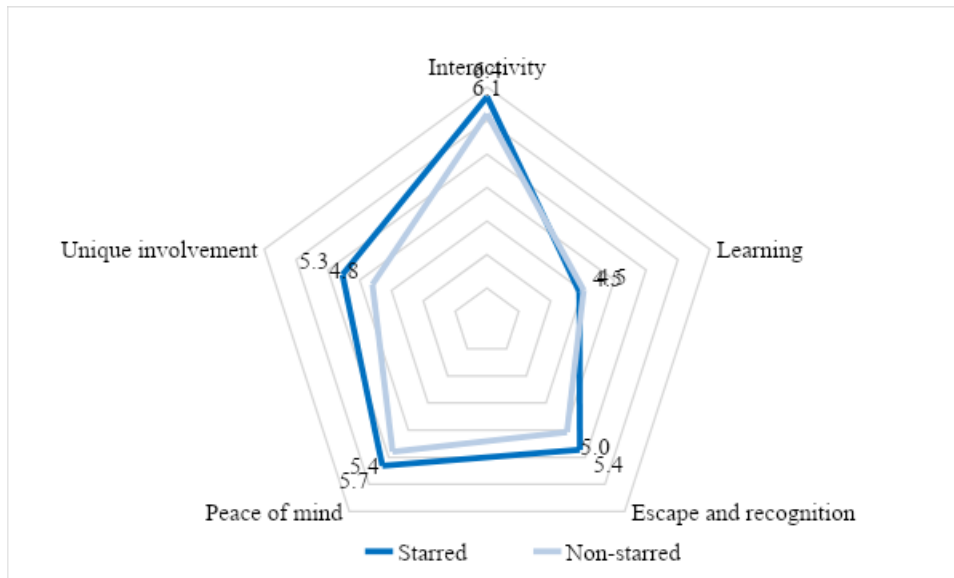
Source: Molina-Collado (2021)

Creative food experience in Michelin Guide restaurants

A successful creative food experience is the result of high restaurant innovativeness (pull factors) and the achievement of personal goals by customers (push factors). Creative food experience underlines customer involvement and the learning process associated with tasting activities (Gómez-Rico et al., 2022). Customers engage with leading restaurants and learn about them when they offer a unique, interactive, and immersive food experience. In this context, it can be said that a creative food experience is an offer of innovative menus and interactive services. A creative restaurant designs menus, food preparation processes, and food delivery styles that have not been offered yet (Viljoen and Kruger, 2020).

Leading restaurants create value and experiences for customers through cuisine innovation. Wang et al. (2020) proposed a scale for measuring the creative food experience, and it includes these five dimensions: interactivity, learning, escape and recognition, peace of mind, and involvement. Figure 3 shows that interactivity is the outstanding dimension in Michelin-starred and non-starred restaurants. The learning dimension obtained the lowest score, and there are no differences between starred and non-starred restaurants.

Figure 3. Creative food experience in Michelin-starred and non-starred restaurants



Source: Molina-Collado (2021)

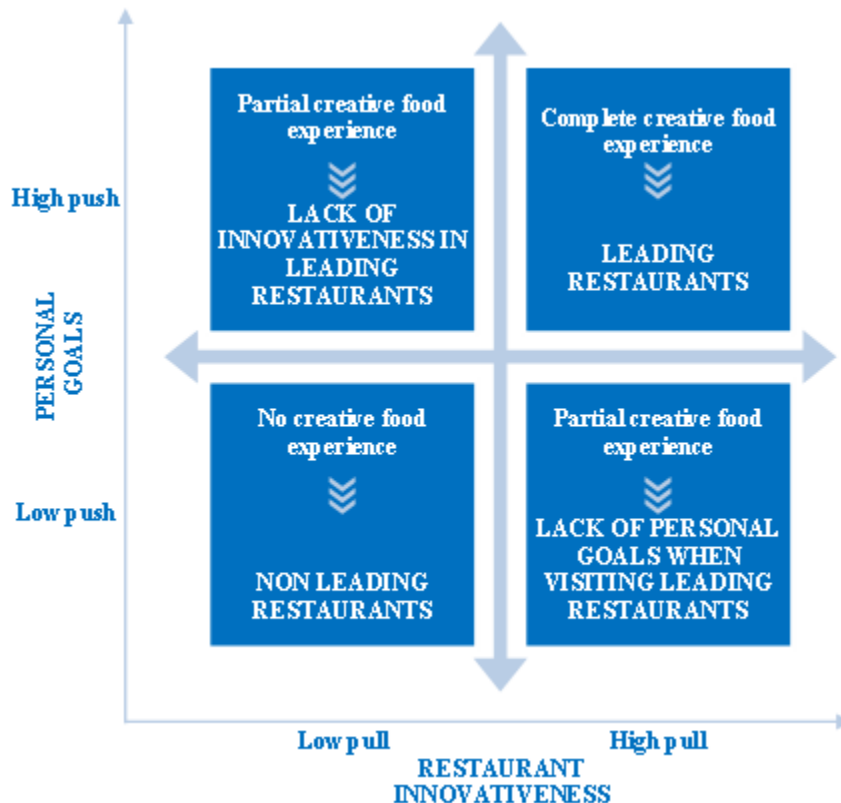
Strategic framework for leading creative restaurants

From the results of restaurant innovativeness (pull factors) and the achievement of personal goals by customers (push factors), we can create a framework that measures whether restaurant leadership reaches the customer and turns this interplay into a complete creative food experience. For this purpose, the variables of this study (pull and push factors) can be combined to design a matrix with four quadrants that represent the different levels of compliance according to the scores obtained (Figure 4). The median of the scale will determine the midpoint of each axis (e.g., the midpoint on a seven-point Likert scale will be 4). Scores above the median are considered high, and those below are considered low.

- **High pull-High push:** a complete creative food experience due to high restaurant innovativeness and high personal goals to enjoy. It means that consumers perceive the efforts made by the leader and, consequently, by the employees.
- **High pull-Low push:** partial creative food experience because clients have not achieved their expectation personal goals despite the high restaurant innovativeness perceived.
- **Low pull-High push:** partial creative food experience as well, but in this case, there is a lack of innovativeness in leading restaurants while personal goals have been achieved properly.

- **Low pull-Low push:** creative food experience has not been achieved due to low restaurant innovativeness and low compliance with personal objectives.

Figure 4. Strategic framework for leading creative restaurants



Source: Molina-Collado (2021)

Implications for leading restaurants

This research suggests relevant implications for creative restaurants seeking to offer outstanding experiences for their customers: (1) Managers should use the above strategic matrix to diagnose how to lead creative restaurants using the degree of compliance with customer goals and perceived innovation. (2) Restaurants with low pull factors should focus their attention on monitoring innovativeness, adopting a disruptive approach to the menu design, incorporating new service technologies, and so on. (3) Managers do not forget the customers, and those restaurants with low push factors should focus their attention on customers' personal goals to understand the experience they perceive. That is, restaurant managers should examine the personal goals that customers seek when they visit restaurants in order to understand how a complete food experience is developed. In this context, managers should work on internal marketing

strategies with employees so that they interact with customers in an appropriate way to achieve their personal goals and, consequently, have a complete creative food experience based on involvement, interactivity, or learning. Finally, it is essential to highlight the importance of working on a leadership strategy to inspire and motivate the team to obtain a better performance in the customers' creative food experience.

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