

# Amuse-bouche Thinking: Big Ideas, Tiny Bites in Haute Cuisine

## Introduction

The value of creativity as a business commodity increases each year as global markets, diversified consumer habits, and new ways of living with technology stoke an insatiable appetite for the new, the next.

Haute cuisine exemplifies the unrelenting need to churn out appealing, practical ideas in a competitive market. Its most salient challenges are heightened manifestations of phenomena that exist across industries: social activity with many stakeholders, demanding work environment, and a highly institutionalized culture prone to toxicity.

**Research Question:**  
What is the creative process haute cuisine chefs use to repeatedly produce novel dishes?

## Methodology

- ◊ Grounded theory qualitative study
- ◊ Multi-disciplinary literature review
- ◊ Semi-structured interviews
  - ◊ Four participants
    - ◊ Norman Fenton: head chef, Brass Heart, Chicago, IL
    - ◊ Kaz Edwards: concept chef, Hai Hospitality (Uchi, Uchiko, Uchiba and Loro), Austin, TX (virtual)
    - ◊ Phillip Foss: head chef, EL Ideas, Chicago, IL (virtual)
    - ◊ Brad Barnes: director, The Culinary Institute of America – Consulting, Hyde Park, NY (virtual)
  - ◊ Approximately 1-hour duration each

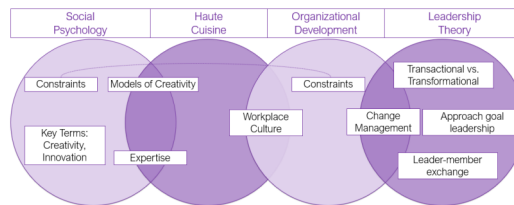
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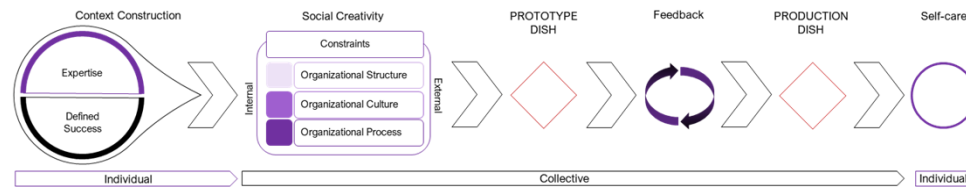
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## Findings

### Synthesis of Literature



### Model of the Creative Process in Haute Cuisine



"It's one thing: exposure. When I teach people about how to learn their career path and learn about food, it's exposure. If you don't go out and try a lot of different things, you're never going to understand. And that's a really key piece to being good at what we do, because there's so much to understand." Brad Barnes

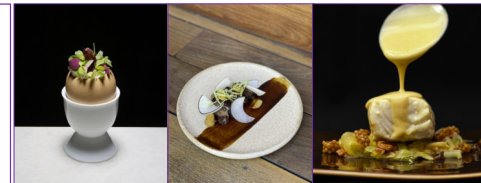
"Learning how to manage people on a person-to-person basis and learning how to lead has made creativity a lot easier because it made trusting people easier. It made empowering people easier, and then that creates an easier space to finish these things, and make these dishes, and be creative." Norman Fenton

"You can ask somebody for their feedback all day. That is a positive question, "Give me your feedback. What do you think?" But that becomes very negative if zero action was taken, and that person sees that zero action is taken. And so, for us, it is not just lip service." Kaz Edwards

"There's a price to pay for being a creative person. It's taxing. It takes part of you. I think you have to have a fire in you to be creative, and the fire can be extinguished. I think you really have to have a healthy mindset towards how you take care of yourself." Phillip Foss

## Acknowledgments

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## Summary

|                      |                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|----------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Context Construction | <i>Expertise</i>                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◊ Head chefs emphasize developing breadth of expertise for themselves and depth of expertise for their teams.</li> <li>◊ Head chefs have immense trust in their own depth expertise.</li> </ul>                                                                                                  |
|                      | <i>Defined Success</i>          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◊ The head chef must define what constitutes a successful output of the creative process. Making that standard clear to the team enhances creativity.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                 |
| Social Creativity    | <i>Constraints</i>              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◊ Most chefs emphasize internal constraints over external ones.</li> <li>◊ Aesthetic and intra-menu variation (ingredients, textures, temperatures, etc.) are prominent internal constraints.</li> </ul>                                                                                         |
|                      | <i>Organizational Structure</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◊ Scale greatly affects structure.</li> <li>◊ Chefs benefit from being cognizant and intentional about the nature of the structure they build.</li> <li>◊ Chefs believe that current structures across the industry are not sustainable.</li> </ul>                                              |
|                      | <i>Organizational Culture</i>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◊ Shared hardship, both in the kitchen and beyond it, unify teams.</li> <li>◊ Chefs want team members to feel agency to create.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                       |
|                      | <i>Organizational Processes</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◊ Scale greatly affects processes.</li> <li>◊ The <i>doing</i> (processes) should be grounded in the <i>being</i> (structure, culture); conflict arise when they are misaligned.</li> <li>◊ Processes enable the individual-to-collective action transitions.</li> </ul>                         |
| Feedback             |                                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◊ The guest often enters the creative process in this phase, but the weight given to guest feedback varies.</li> <li>◊ This is often the most social phase, and chefs solicit feedback from a variety of sources.</li> <li>◊ This phase often happens concurrently with other phases.</li> </ul> |
| Self-care            |                                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◊ Burnout is high, at least in part because the creative process is emotionally taxing.</li> <li>◊ A dominant culture of partying and substance use further augments issues of self-care.</li> <li>◊ A focus on self-care and measured effort enables long term creativity.</li> </ul>           |