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**Offering a managerial perspective on stress
management in the restaurant industry**

How do managers perceive and handle stress in their daily work?

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Offering a managerial perspective on stress management in the restaurant industry

How do managers perceive and handle stress in their daily work?

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Abstract

Stress management is a significant topic to study within management as employee well-being and stress experienced at work is rising. One industry where work stress is increasingly rising is the restaurant industry. Restaurant workers face many demanding obligations in their daily work such as managing orders, rapid working tempo and complaining customers. Traditional stress management research has studied stress through a psychological lens and focused on developing stress management frameworks, including best practices and step-by-step models, implemented regardless of context. However, these traditional frameworks are too static and standardized to sufficiently accommodate real work life. As this study illustrates, the restaurant industry is characterized by unpredictability and rapid changes. Few studies have studied stress management from a management perspective and to address this research gap, this study uses an organizational lens to add to the existing stress management literature. This is done by using coordination theory to better serve the complexities inherent in restaurants. This qualitative study addresses the following research question: How do managers perceive and handle stress in their daily work? By collecting primary data from interviews we reach four conclusions. First, we conclude that managers have a united perception of stress appearing from a sense of lost control. Second, we conclude that managers mitigate stress by coordinating personnel using preparations and routines to create accountability and predictability. Third, managers also handle stress by fostering a common understanding. We show how restaurant managers adopt organizational bricolage by consciously considering how to organize restaurants efficiently, and mitigating the risks of crowded areas. Lastly, we emphasize that routines play an important role in creating order and control, but perhaps what our findings highlight even more, is the ability to deviate and adjust from the routines, rather than solely relying on them as strict protocols, that may be vital to handle stress in daily work.

Key words: Stress management, coordination, accountability, predictability, common understanding, routines, flexibility, adaptation, restaurant industry

Introduction

Stress management is a significant topic to study within management as employee well-being and stress experienced at work is rising (Ganster & Rosen, 2013). A recent survey conducted by the European Union shows that more than four out of ten workers experience increased stress related to work (European Union, 2022). This is also evident by looking at previous research trends indicating that researchers have become more and more interested in studying the connection between stress and work (Ganster & Rosen, 2013). One industry where stress is increasingly rising, and is consequently in need of improved stress management, is the restaurant industry (King & Bottorff, 2022). Personnel in the industry face several demanding obligations in their everyday work such as managing orders, dealing with complaining customers and cooking meals on strict deadlines. Needless to say, restaurant workers have to navigate through several difficult tasks on a daily basis. In recent years, many restaurant workers have fled the industry, posing managerial issues such as lack of staff and competencies, thus making it hard to organize and structure daily work in the restaurant business (Palm, 2021). Consequently, there is a great need to develop strategies to mitigate and manage stress in the restaurant industry which is what this study will focus on.

Stress management has been extensively researched from the perspective of health and psychological studies (Hargrove et al., 2011; Richardson & Rothstein, 2008; Kinnunen-Amoroso & Liira, 2016; Chunhui et al., 2014; Mellor & Smith, 2013) where stress has been categorized into frameworks that identifies what triggers stress and how organizations can mitigate it by adopting best-practice models, or stress management interventions. For example, Hargrove et al. (2011), draws on Quick and Quick's (1979) theoretical framework which categorizes factors that cause stress into four groups: role factors, job factors, physical factors and interpersonal factors. Furthermore, they build their research under the assumption that the four groups of stress can be identified and mitigated in all contexts. Excessive research within stress management has focused on psychological stress (Hargrove et al., 2011; Richardson & Rothstein, 2008; Kinnunen-Amoroso & Liira, 2016; Chunhui et al., 2014; Mellor & Smith, 2013), but there is a research gap in understanding stress management through an organizational lens. An organizational lens can provide new knowledge on how organizing and stress are actually interlinked.

Previous researchers on stress management (Richardson & Rothstein, 2008; Hargrove et al., 2011; Quick and Quick, 1979; Mellor & Smith, 2013) has also mostly studied stress through a static perspective, suggesting that stress can be dealt with through normative, step-by-step models and best practices, regardless of contexts. However, past studies have not adequately considered the complexity and unpredictable nature inherent within practical organizing (Ferraro et al., 2015). Rather, it is assumed that managers can implement prescribed, tactical steps in any organizational context (Mellor & Smith, 2013). Using static models and best-practices to study stress management comes with theoretical and practical limits as the external environment may not be as predictable as the models prescribe. This comes with the risk of imposing interventions that are not suited for the specific situation that has to be coordinated at hand (Van De Ven et al., 1976). Differing from this best practice view, Weick

(1998) criticizes traditional theories of being too static when looking at the concept of organizing. In his view, traditional scholars focus too much on understanding how routines and control contribute to better order within organizations while missing how other mechanisms also are vital elements in organizing. Weick (1998) suggests improvisation and flexibility as necessary parts of creating order and coordination. Consequently, there is a need to extend the previous literature by analyzing stress management from a different perspective, one that accounts for more flexibility which allows practitioners to revise their strategy for dealing with stress in practice. This study therefore aims to address this research gap and add to the body of stress management literature by providing an organizational and managerial perspective, using coordination theory as a theoretical lens.

To illustrate our case, we show how the restaurant industry is working under different, more unpredictable, assumptions (Occhiogrosso, 2022) than what the static stress management theories tend to suggest (Richardson & Rothstein, 2008; Hargrove et al., 2011; Mellor & Smith, 2013). To accomplish this, we use coordination theory to more adequately accommodate real work environments that may be complex and uncertain. Coordination is defined as “integrating or linking together different parts of an organization to accomplish a collective set of tasks” (Van De Ven et al., 1976, p.322) but exactly how this is done practically in the restaurant industry, has not been addressed in previous studies. Therefore, we conclude that coordination theory constitutes a rather new, previously unexplored, theoretical lens for addressing stress management. With this in mind, the restaurant industry provides a suitable context to view how tasks cannot always be executed according to a fixed plan, but rather requires adaptation (Van De Ven et al., 1976; Feldman et al., 2012)

By conducting a study within the restaurant industry, where stress management is a highly evident problem (King & Bottorff, 2022), we investigate how managers deal with stress, their perceptions of it and what they may actively do to alleviate it. This is done through the lens of coordination theory as it allows us to capture how managers adapt their tactics and actions in order to manage stressful situations at hand. The purpose of this study is to provide a better understanding of how managers perceive and handle stress in their daily work within the restaurant industry. Furthermore, our study contributes to better insights in how managers can mitigate experienced stress related to work. To fulfill this purpose we pose the following research question: **How do managers perceive and manage stress in their daily work?**

This qualitative study focuses on stress management in restaurants within the city of Gothenburg. In our research, we emphasize the importance of being able to adjust and deviate from standards and routines (Weick, 1998; Feldman et al., 2012) and instead use flexibility and coordination to mitigate stress in the restaurant industry. Our study concludes that established routines serve to create order (Bechky & Okhuysen, 2009), but as our results indicate, mitigating stress is also highly dependent on the possibility to adjust behavior and be flexible from standardisations (Feldman et al., 2012).

Theoretical framework

Coordination to navigate the unexpected

In early coordination theory, Van de Ven et al. (1976), argue that all organizations need some type of coordination to achieve collective goals in order to operate. This is especially true for organizations operating under conditions of unpredictability where creating order becomes vital to manage events not being planned for (Bechky & Okhuysen, 2011). To handle organizational surprises, individuals engage in organizational bricolage, through role shifting, reorganizing routines and reassembling the daily work. Bricolage refers to “making do by applying combinations of the resources at hand to new problems and opportunities” (Bechky & Okhuysen, 2011, p.240). The core essence of bricolage lies in the bricoleurs' capacity to utilize the available pool of resources to construct processes that effectively address the situations they encounter (Bechky & Okhuysen, 2011). Organizational bricolage requires a multifaceted understanding of bricolage that accommodates not only material resources, but also social and cognitive. Examples of social and cognitive resources used to manage unplanned events are shared task knowledge, in terms of everyone knowing how to execute certain work tasks, and common workflow expectations, in terms of a collective understanding of when and in what order tasks should be completed (ibid). Furthermore, cognitive and social resources are crucial to enable organizational members to switch roles and collaborate with each other. Given that restaurant managers operate under rapidly changing organizational settings (ClearCOGS, n.d.) and the recently high staff turnover within the industry (Palm, 2021), it may be vital to ensure that personnel know how to execute various tasks and take on different roles. Having a wide competence regarding how tasks are to be performed can in turn handle situations of missing staff or unexpectedly high numbers of customers to serve. For this study, we therefore see the need of organizational bricolage, fostered by social and cognitive resources, as the capacity of the bricolour becomes necessary for managing unexpected and stressful events.

Building on Van de Ven et al's. (1976), view of coordination theory, more contemporary research (Bechky & Okhuysen, 2009) suggest that coordination is based on integrating various interdependent tasks into a collective activity within an organization. To achieve coordination, it is vital to account for the three conditions of predictability, accountability and common understanding as they facilitate stability. In order to enact this stability, the three conditions of coordination have to be integrated and are further facilitated by several coordination mechanisms such as meetings, schedules, plans and routines. Bechky and Okhuysen (2009, p.472) define coordination mechanisms as “the organizational arrangements that allow individuals to realize a collective performance” and include various elements that unite different processes or activities into a common accomplishment. Some of these mechanisms used to achieve accountability and predictability are especially focusing on defining roles and responsibilities within an organization. Having specified roles facilitates coordination as it prescribes certain expectations and responsibilities associated with a certain position. This also leads to predictability since the workers know what they are responsible for. These roles may be more loose or tight depending on the situation. One of the most

important functions of roles is to define responsibilities since clear responsibilities create possibilities for substitution and facilitates a common understanding among the people within a group. This is important for coordination as it enables people to switch between roles (substitution) when they are certain about what roles include what tasks and expectations. This also enables employees to cover for each other if someone is sick or cannot fulfill their tasks (ibid). Within the restaurant industry, substitution between employees may potentially be used to mitigate stress as it allows for personnel to handle unexpected situations by stepping in and helping each other. The opportunity to substitute each other may therefore mitigate stress among employees and managers as they can trust that someone else will perform the work tasks in a similar fashion.

Along with clear roles, Bechky and Okhuysen (2009) highlight routines as an equally important coordination mechanism described as consisting of repeated patterns. In this view, routines facilitate coordination as it creates stability and a common perspective among organizational members. Organizational routines can be defined as "repetitive, recognizable patterns of interdependent actions, carried out by multiple actors" (Feldman & Pentland, 2003, p.93). Building on this, Pentland et al. (2012), suggest that all routines are generated by actions performed by various actors in a repetitive way. Traditionally routines have been associated with stability but the authors argue that repeated patterns of actions may as well result in change and dynamics. By studying actions, rather than actors and individuals, one may hence get a better understanding of how routines change and how behaviors can generate new routines and ways of acting. Changing a routine or pattern of action is not always done intentionally. Rather, natural deviations and adjustments can result in new routines if the actions become retained. This leads to the suggestion that established routines can generate non deliberate organizational changes as actions are performed outside the standardized routine and become repeated over and over (Pentland et al., 2012). In relation to stress management, having work roles with defined responsibilities and routines to achieve accountability and predictability, may be implemented by managers to reduce stress as it creates a sense of control and order in the workplace. When managers delegate responsibility to their employees, the restaurant can mitigate the risk of misunderstandings and other errors that could potentially lead to stress. Also, by making predictable task assignments and work expectations, managers can assist their workforce by planning and managing their workload, thus mitigating ambiguity.

The third coordination mechanism, common understanding, is used to create a unified image of the organization and the situation in which the organizational members find themselves (Bechky & Okhuysen, 2009). This is feasible as it allows for better collaboration and more efficient autonomous execution of tasks. A common understanding is achieved by having open dialogues and clear communication among people, which in turn also mitigates misunderstandings and enhances workflow. The authors claim that common understanding is attained when collaborators engaged in an interrelated task share collective comprehension of the work to be performed, how it is to take place, and the goals to be achieved. Therefore, the relationship between individuals and tasks that are embedded in the routine serves as important elements that enable the creation of shared understanding (ibid). Connected to

stress management, a common understanding is vital in situations where unexpected events occur and things have to be handled rapidly. Managers and employees have to communicate and explain what has to be done and in what ways in order to facilitate collaboration when routines cannot be followed as planned. Without a common understanding, stress may increase as workers do not share a collective image on how to execute tasks and therefore making cooperation harder. In situations like this, managers can coordinate the employees and find a mutual image of the situation to link various parts of the organization together again to reestablish order. To conclude, we consider accountability, predictability and common understanding to operate as valuable tools to deepen our understanding of stress management in the restaurant industry.

Expanding coordination theory

Similarly to Bechky and Okhuysen (2009), Feldman et al. (2012), see coordination as something emergent that may be performed differently as work conditions change. Given the previous sentence, Feldman et al. (2012), bring a new perspective on how coordination is achieved. To achieve coordination, they do not argue for the need to fulfill the three conditions of predictability, accountability and common understanding. Rather coordination and its preconditions is viewed as more dependable on the context. In contrast to Bechky and Okhuysen (2009) who argue for the possibility to create stability by using the three specified coordination mechanisms, Feldman et al. (2012), sees coordination and coordination mechanisms as even more fluid and variable. Coordination mechanisms should not be treated as something stabilized that can be implemented identically in all situations, but rather has to be adaptable to fit with each specific context. Coordination mechanisms such as rules, roles, and routines are not static entities but rather seen as socially produced and may therefore differ and fluctuate along with changing circumstances. As conditions of novelty, uncertainty and changeability disrupt existing ways of organizing, the mechanisms have to be adapted and performed differently to fit with the changing context in order to facilitate coordination (ibid). For our study, understanding coordination as an emergent and adaptable phenomenon, highly dependent on the context, is suitable as we are studying an uncertain and flexible industry where organizational conditions fluctuate rapidly. Feldman et al. (2012), further deepens our understanding of how context is crucial for the use of various coordination mechanisms to create order, to deal with stress in the restaurant industry.

To nuance the discussion regarding coordination, Bouty and Drucker-Godard (2019) studies management and order in a dynamic setting that shares similar characteristics of unpredictability and need of flexibility, as the restaurant industry. Their study takes place on a race sailboat and showcases two relevant types of managerial patterns used to create order and integrate execution of tasks. Similar to Feldman et al. (2012), their study emphasizes the need of viewing coordination as adaptive when circumstances change. Bouty & Drucker-Godard (2019) define coordination as “the integration of organizational work under conditions of task interdependence and uncertainty” (Bouty & Drucker-Godard, 2019, p.568). They conclude that the one giving orders (the manager) employs two different patterns of coordination, labeled as “loose” and “set” patterns, similar to Mintzberg & Waters (1985)

emergent and planned strategies. In the loose coordination pattern the manager initiates and largely sustains the ongoing dialogue, direct communication and information sharing with the crew. This ongoing information by the manager is pivotal to sustain accountability and common understanding with the crew. This loose coordination resembles the importance of adapting coordination mechanisms to the specific situation as unpredictable events unfold, as emphasized by Feldman et al. (2012). In contrast, in the set coordination pattern, the manager only speaks a few words and the crew must follow, creating great intensity where the crew members have to know the protocols, and how and what they shall perform at their post to maneuver the boat (Bouty & Drucker-Godard, 2019). Thus, the crew has to rely on protocols and role structure, no further instructions are given and common understanding is therefore fierce and taken for granted (ibid). For this study, the example of how work is organized on a sailboat can be related to the context of the restaurant industry. Much like waves exist on a sailboat (ibid), restaurants also deal with flow of demand fluctuating throughout the day. Breakfast, lunch and dinner are all examples of stressful hours, and the hours in between are more calm.

From a more critical perspective, other scholars have a different view on how routines and control function in practice. Weick (1998) criticizes traditional theories of being too static when looking at the concept of organizing. In his view, traditional scholars focus too much on understanding how routines and control contribute to creating order within organizations while missing how other mechanisms also are vital elements in organizing. Weick (1998) suggests improvisation and flexibility as necessary parts of creating order and coordination. By using jazz musicians as a metaphor for his argument, Weick (1998) shows how improvisations can deal with unexpected events that occur in organizational life. Jazz musicians do not always follow notes line by line but rather sometimes, depending on the situation, play the tones and rhythms they feel in the moment. By relying on past competencies and previously learnt sounds, the players deviate from the planned tune and improvise for some time before they regress to their ordinary notes. These improvisational sections are not planned for in advance but rather produced in the specific moment. They start from what they already know, what is familiar and what is learnt, but then based on their previous competences and intuitions they deviate from the standards. In that way, jazz musicians adapt to the context and improvise just like restaurant workers must be flexible to unforeseen and unplanned events unfolding in situ. Since things often turn out in unplanned ways, organizations all require mechanisms that allow for adaptivity and a continuous process of organizing, to be able to manage unexpected events (Weick & Suitcliff, 2015).

Methodology of the study

Research design

To fulfill our purpose and answer our research question regarding how managers perceive and handle stress in their daily work, we have conducted a qualitative study at 14 restaurants within the inner city of Gothenburg. A qualitative study was used as it could better

encapsulate perceptions and opinions in contrast to a quantitative method that instead focuses on compiling numbers and quantifiable data (Bryman et al., 2022). Furthermore, a qualitative method allowed us to understand the studied phenomenon in its context, as the method is especially useful for studying details and behaviors (ibid). As we aimed to study stress within the restaurant industry, a qualitative research approach was chosen as it allowed us to analyze stress in its specific context that varies between different restaurants. Although, in contrast to a quantitative research method, the generalizability became much lower (ibid) but as our research question is addressing “daily work”, generalizability was not our aim of the study.

The reason for choosing to study restaurants is described in the introduction which indicates that restaurants operate in a stressful industry that encounters many uncertainties including unpredictable customer behaviors, unforeseen number of guests, ingredients that are out of reach and kitchen equipment breaking down. All of which contribute to work stress (Maslach & Leiter, 2016; ClearCOGS, n.d.). Based on this, it is reasonable to assume that organizations operating in the restaurant industry are in need of finding techniques to deal with stress as uncertainty and lack of control can lead to high levels of stress. Therefore, restaurants provided a suitable context to study stress management, since stress is prominent within restaurants and the industry is in need of finding management methods to deal with stress (King & Bottorff, 2022).

Conducting a qualitative study to research stress management in the restaurant industry allowed us to deepen our understanding of the experiences and perspectives of individuals (Bryman et al., 2022) in the industry. This method brought nuanced descriptions of the various stress perceptions that were unique to the industry, as well as coping strategies. A qualitative approach also enabled more flexibility than quantitative research in terms of adjusting to unexpected findings or changing circumstances (ibid). This was particularly important in a fast-paced and dynamic industry, such as the restaurant industry, where the environmental conditions could change rapidly throughout the day. A qualitative study provided a deeper understanding of stress management in the restaurant industry, which ultimately led to more effective stress management insights through this study.

A qualitative study also allowed for the use of an inductive research design (Bryman et al., 2022), which was used in our case. Instead of having a prespecified theory that we tried to match to our result, we conducted interviews and gathered data without selecting a theory beforehand. As stress management has not been sufficiently studied in the restaurant industry, it was not apparent in the beginning of our study what theory would contribute to deepen our understanding the most. Therefore, starting by gathering data and letting the data speak for itself was a suitable method as it enabled us to think outside of the traditional stress management models and apply new concepts to contribute with something new. Furthermore, using an inductive research design helped us to get started with our research and enabled us to focus on new and interesting narratives rather than just trying to confirm a prespecified hypothesis regarding the theoretical framework (ibid).

Data collection and term definitions

When selecting participants to include in our research, we chose to primarily study managers as they have the most influence in setting a strategy and implementing tactics to handle stress (Jackson & Parry, 2018). However, as the managerial decisions and strategy making affect employees, we also found it important to study and interview employees. The research question aimed to investigate how managers deal with stress in their daily work, and since part of a manager's work includes training, managing, supporting, and scheduling of personnel, the employees were vital to study to better understand the management of daily work tasks. Therefore, to understand how employees were affected by the stress management at work and how they experienced stressful work situations, we also included employees' perceptions and stress management techniques. The employees were also the ones most engaged in the personal and social contact with customers in their daily work and were therefore closer to the field (Bryman et al., 2022).

To study how managers perceive and handle stress in daily work, we used primary data collected from interviews (Silverman, 2020). Primary data was suitable for this study as it revealed the perceived stress of managers unfolding in everyday organizational situations. Stress varies between different specific contexts as stress is subjective and determined by an individual's perceptions of it (Christensen et al., 2019). Therefore, it was reasonable that different people in different contexts carried their own interpretation and response to stress. In order to understand how managers in the restaurant industry perceive and manage stress, we therefore used the respondents' own definition of the concept of "stress". As this study investigated the perception and management of stress in the restaurant industry, it was important to use the definitions defined by the field experiencing the stress rather than to impose our own definition. The methodological choice of letting respondents themselves define their perceptions of stress allowed us to see how perceptions' might affect actions in practice, thus impacting the use of stress management tactics in the restaurant industry. Through this lens, we then studied stress management from a managerial perspective and asked how they responded to the stress they had defined themselves. To do this, we began by asking managers how they defined and perceived stress in their practical work, in what situations they experienced stress and what they practically did to mitigate it.

As stress sometimes varies largely between different people and different contexts we chose to include various types of restaurants in our study. The restaurants differed in both size and type and the data consequently consists of everything from small Thai restaurants, large family diners, hotel restaurants, and sophisticated fine diner restaurants. Having a wide range of different types of restaurants allowed us to gather situational-specific information that deepened our understanding regarding how the context may affect stress management within the industry. Interviewing respondents operating within different restaurant contexts further enabled us to answer our research question that focused on the "daily work" of managers which differs depending on contexts and circumstances. Interviewing different types of restaurants also led to several additional benefits when studying stress management. Firstly, different types of restaurants faced unique aspects of stress and challenges that contributed to employee stress, such as busy peak hours, demanding customers, or understaffing. By interviewing a variety of restaurants, it was possible to gain a comprehensive understanding

of the amount of stress that employees faced in different settings. Secondly, different restaurants had different approaches to managing stress, and by studying a diverse sample, we could identify strategies that could be applicable across different types of organizations. Finally, interviewing a range of restaurants increases the possibility that the study results can be applicable to a wider range of workplaces. By studying only one type of restaurant, the findings may not be relevant to other industries or organizations. Therefore, a diverse sample helped improve the external validity of the study and contribute to wider theoretical contributions.

Semi-structured interviews

To gather primary data, we conducted semi-structured interviews, consisting of prepared questions (Silverman, 2020), based on topics related to stress management. Semi-structured interviews allowed the respondents to respond freely (ibid), which we considered advantageous to gather respondents' interpretations, experiences, and stories. These insights were important as they affected the techniques and actions incorporated by managers for managing stress. As interpretations or personal experiences are difficult to find online (ibid), or to grasp by only using yes/no-questions, the interview guide consisted of open questions that allowed for examples and stories to be expressed by the respondents. Some examples of questions we asked were: "*What does stress mean to you?*", "*Do you ever experience stress at work and if so, can you give us examples of stressful situations and how you manage it?*" and "*How do you plan a working day to be able to handle all customers?*"

These questions also produced a dynamic conversation between the interviewer and the respondent, which allowed respondents to provide answers to any follow-up questions. Simultaneously, this enabled us as researchers to pick up thoughts and clues that were not foreseen, which is why we were open to revise the interview guide continuously after conducting interviews (ibid). All of the interviews were recorded (after permission was granted), transcribed, and analyzed from the chosen theoretical framework. By recording the interviews, the process of coding and finding patterns was facilitated since it was difficult to recall interviews (ibid), especially when conducting several interviews within a short period of time.

We conducted a total of 26 interviews from different managers and employees to study how stress could be understood, perceived, and handled in the restaurant industry. We made use of Silverman's (2020) argument that a qualitative study is often inductive, and we could not beforehand know what theories and codes would emerge. Therefore, the amount of primary data that had been collected could not be fully determined before conducting the research. We decided on the appropriate sample size of data as the research proceeded and kept conducting interviews until we reached data saturation, i.e., until we did not find any new deviances in the data material that could be insightful for answering our research question and fulfilling our purpose (Silverman, 2020). We chose to only include restaurants within the inner city of Gothenburg as this was our local area of living. To gain access to respondents, we started by digitally searching for different restaurants, using google and google maps, close to the inner

city as we wanted the opportunity to do the interviews at the physical restaurant if the respondents would prefer that. When searching digitally for restaurants we also aimed to include various types of restaurants. When we found restaurants considered appropriate for our study, based on physical location and uniqueness from the rest of our interviewed organizations, we contacted them by email. This tactic enabled us to reach out to several respondents in an effective and efficient way but it also came with the risk of not receiving response from the selected restaurants. However, we still considered this method as appropriate as it facilitated getting information about restaurants before conducting the interviews and helped us get in contact with respondents in a quick and easy way. Along with doing interviews physically at restaurants, we also gave the respondents the option to perform the interviews digitally through Zoom, which enabled us to perform several interviews in a day due to travel time savings. The interviews lasted between 20-35 minutes depending on the respondents' answers and time schedules.

The interview table below provides an overview of all the interviews conducted for this study. The table shows each respondent's working role. e.g if they are working as a manager or an employee, their level of experience in terms of years they worked, and what type of restaurant they work in. All managers are further labeled as Manager 1-17 and for employees 1-9. These codes have been randomly selected when assigning an interview a specific code. When referring to the respondents in the following of the report, we will add references such as, "(Manager 2, Fine dining, January 17, 2023)". By using this reference system we show which manager and employee says what when quoting their statements.

Interview compilation

Labeling	Date DD/MM-YY	Role	Experience	Type of restaurant
Manager 1	16/1-23	Restaurant Manager	5 Years	Fine dining
Manager 2	17/1-23	Restaurant Manager	15 Years	Fine dining
Manager 3	20/1-23	Restaurant Manager	<1 Year	Fine dining
Manager 4	7/2-23	Restaurant Manager	8 Years	Fast food
Manager 5	13/2-23	Restaurant Manager	3 Years	Fast food
Manager 6	14/2-23	Restaurant Manager	7 Years	Fast food
Manager 7	15/2-23	Restaurant Manager	8 Years	Restaurant & bar
Manager 8	15/2-23	Restaurant Manager	2 Years	Restaurant & bar
Manager 9	16/2-23	Restaurant Manager	13 Years	Fine dining
Manager 10	17/2-23	Restaurant Manager	19 Years	Greek restaurant
Manager 11	23/2-23	Restaurant Manager	1 Year	Hotel restaurant
Manager 12	24/2-23	Restaurant Manager	<1 Year	Fine dining
Manager 13	24/2-23	Restaurant Manager	10 Years	Thai restaurant
Manager 14	10/3-23	Restaurant Manager	8 Years	Fine dining
Manager 15	16/3-23	Restaurant Manager	13 Years	Hotel restaurant

Manager 16	14/03-23	Restaurant Manager	4 Years	Hotel restaurant
Manager 17	24/03-23	Restaurant Manager	5 Years	Fine dining
Employee 1	19/1-23	Restaurant Employee	1 Year	Fine dining
Employee 2	7/2-23	Restaurant Employee	3 Years	Fine dining
Employee 3	9/2-23	Restaurant Employee	2 Years	Fast food
Employee 4	10/2-23	Restaurant Employee	4 Years	Fast food
Employee 5	17/2-23	Restaurant Employee	1 Years	Fine dining
Employee 6	21/2-23	Restaurant Employee	5 Years	Greek restaurant
Employee 7	01/3-23	Restaurant Employee	4 Years	Greek restaurant
Employee 8	13/3-23	Restaurant Employee	6 Years	Greek restaurant
Employee 9	23/03-23	Restaurant Employee	37 Years	Hotel restaurant

Data analysis

After each interview, we transcribed the material in a document, word by word. When the transcription was done, we started to analyze the material without a theoretical lens, but rather letting the material speak for itself. Drawing on grounded theory, we asked ourselves “what is this an example of?” when coding and analyzing the data line-by-line (Charmaz, 2006). This process involved inductive reasoning, starting from the bottom-up, rather than analyzing the data in accordance with a preconceived theory. The coding was done in an excel-sheet using a pivot table to structure and filter the data. As qualitative methods often include a large amount of gathered data (Bryman et al., 2022), using Excel facilitated the process of seeing patterns and frequencies of the codes. Although this process was time-consuming, we still believe that using excel is a supportive method to understand the data deeper and see new patterns that would otherwise not be identified (Charmaz, 2006). This also helped us to select a theoretical framework that could enrich the understanding of stress management within the industry, as the codes revealed frequent patterns of creating order using coordination. This brought us to our second focused coding, where we produced themes by compiling the codes that were frequent and referring to similar subjects (ibid). Some examples of the codes we found were: *planning to avoid stress, clear roles and structure, distribute personnel based on competence, collaboration, adaptability, communicating with guests in advance to adjust expectations, and no general tactic to deal with stress*. After identifying and compiling our various codes into focused codes, we started to group them into wider categories by familiarizing ourselves with the codes through comparing them to each other and trying to find similarities between them (ibid). This was an iterative process that took a lot of effort and time, but once finalized helped us to understand our wider categories. The first categories then emerged into: *perceptions, communication, unpredictability, flexibility and tactics of handling stress*. By this stage, we knew that *perceptions* could remain as a group to become a theme since these codes were easier to separate from the rest of the material. For *communication* we noticed that other codes such as *collaboration* were actually strongly linked to *communication* so therefore we combined

these into one theme. For *unpredictability* and *flexibility*, we also saw advantages in combining these into one theme since flexibility was described by the respondents as being used to manage unpredictability. For *tactics* we decided to keep this as a separate theme but made a division within it where we separated *common tactics* from *locally adopted tactics*. This decision was made to separate *common tactics* (tactics that most restaurants have in place) from *locally adopted tactics* (tactics that are unique to a specific restaurant). Finally this process of coding, compiling and analyzing the data evolved into our four large themes 1) *perceptions of stress*, 2) *communication and collaboration*, 3) *unpredictability and flexibility*, 4) *tactics of handling stress*. *Perceptions of stress* showcased how managers and employees perceive and experience stress. The second theme, *communication and collaboration*, covered different ways to communicate about stress as well as how personnel communicate and collaborate during stressful situations and develop mutual understandings about the situation. *Unpredictability and flexibility* explained how the industry is unpredictable and varies in various ways such as the amount of people coming, things breaking down, things not going according to routines, and how this in turns requires the employees and managers to be flexible and adaptable to uncertainties. The final theme, *tactics of handling stress*, covered various ways and tactics used to deal with stress at the restaurants. The data included in the final theme was further divided into two subcategories as we noticed that restaurants were using both general and locally adopted tactics. By the term common tactics we refer to a tactic that most restaurants adopt, regardless of what type of restaurant (fast-food, fine-dining etc.), and locally adopted are tactics that are unique to a specific restaurant in Gothenburg. The themes then worked as guidelines for structuring the empirical material and contributed to us finding a theory that could be usable for analyzing the data to deepen our understanding about the phenomenon.

Ethical reflections

Our study has throughout the entire research process taken the four principles of ethics into consideration described by Bryman et al. (2022),: 1) whether there is harm to participants, 2) whether there is a lack of informed consent, 3) whether there is an invasion of privacy, 4) whether deception is involved.

To fulfill the first principle, we were careful not to reveal any information that could be of personal harm for the restaurant, such as strategy plans or confidential or non-public information as this could harm the success of those involved in the organization or the restaurant itself. The second principle was fulfilled by explicitly stating all relevant information that may affect the respondents willingness to participate before conducting the actual interviews. For example, we informed about the purpose of the study, the way the interview would be conducted, their right to be anonymous, and what type of questions they would be asked. Before receiving access from a restaurant, we informed them by email that we wanted to study stress management in the restaurant industry and why we thought it was important. Participation in the study was voluntary, and participants were not coerced or pressured to participate in any way, owing to the informed consent principle. Beforehand we

explained that we provided anonymity and that they could always decide to stop the interview, which also contributed to the third principle being followed. Finally, as we were open about the purpose, what we wanted to study, and how we would use the information received, the last principle was also fulfilled (Bryman et al., 2022).

Risks and limitations

We have focused on studying the phenomenon of stress through an organizational perspective as the field has already been excessively studied through a psychological perspective (Hargrove et al., 2011; Richardson & Rothstein, 2008; Kinnunen-Amoroso & Liira, 2016; Chunhui et al., 2014; Mellor & Smith, 2013). Moreover, an organizational lens allows us to understand stress and how it relates to the overall organizational goals and its managerial implications. Our greatest limitations when conducting the study was in regards to time and access. Stress is a subjective topic that may be experienced differently by different people (Christensen et al., 2019) and in order to capture a broader picture of stress management within the restaurant industry in Gothenburg we would have needed significantly more time. Having more time would enable us to collect a greater sample of restaurants which in turn could potentially cover more perspectives and angles (Bryman et al., 2022). However, by conducting interviews at widely different restaurants, working under distinct circumstances and targeting various customer segments, we managed to grasp a wide perspective of the topic even though we were working under strict time constraints. Due to time constraints and limited number of pages for the study, we were also throughout the study mindful of who we interviewed in order to capture the most insightful data for our research question and purpose. In regards to access, we were constantly risking that it would be hard for managers and employees to make time to participate in interviews as they potentially would prioritize other things that they felt more important. Another risk we encountered was that some restaurants or managers did not consciously deal with stress management to a high degree, or did not explicitly know how to express their tactics verbally. If this was the case, we asked the respondents to talk more freely about stressful situations and give examples of how they solved it in that context. This was feasible as it made the respondents more easily think about their practical ways of dealing with stress and usually contributed to them discussing more openly about stress and their perceptions of it.

Empirical findings

Stress in the restaurant industry

According to all managers and employees participating in our research, the restaurant industry is characterized by being very stressful and unpredictable. Managers and employees refer to tough working conditions, long working hours, and a working environment defined by unexpected happenings. This is explicitly concluded by one manager when asked about the working environment “Yeah you know it is the restaurant industry so it is a really stressful industry, which I think everyone is aware of” (Manager 7, Restaurant & bar,

February 15, 2023). Furthermore, an employee states that “This is definitely the most stressful job that I have ever undertaken in my whole life” (Employee 2, Fine dining, February 7, 2023) and that “Even a simple day is not a stress-free day and eventually you just learn how to cope with so much pressure” (Employee 2, Fine dining, February 7, 2023). Although all respondents agree on the industry being extremely stressful, they all seem to have their own perception of how stress is experienced and what type of feelings it results in, as one manager explains

[...] there are multiple layers to stress. Too much stress can really be like draining I think, but sometimes stress can result in really like positive outcomes, things that you thought you were not capable of and you just delivered or provide. But too much of it over a prolonged period of time can definitely deplete you (Manager 1, Fine dining, January 16, 2023)

While some restaurant managers viewed stress as causing anxiety and panic “[...] for some people stress is experienced as anxiety and in those situations it becomes obvious if you get tunnel vision or if you get excited. It’s like an instinct where you either choose fight or flight” (Manager 3, Fine dining, January 20, 2023), others saw it as a positive feeling of motivation and inspiration to work and perform even harder as one employee described “I like high tempo, I see it almost as fun to always have something to do and then the time just runs and it makes me feel so productive” (Employee 6, Greek restaurant, February 21, 2023). Although managers and employees held various interpretations of their perceptions of stress, most that we interviewed perceived stress as something positive in general because it means that they have something to do.

Ten restaurant managers and four employees referred to having control as an important factor, when deciding whether stress is perceived as positive or negative. One restaurant manager explained that “I think when I feel stressed at work is when I feel out of control. And always having to catch up on things not being done in time. Never feeling in control. So for me that’s much more important.” (Manager 10, Greek restaurant, February 17, 2023). Loss of control was described by both employees and managers as occurring when many things fall apart in the restaurant, for example when the staff do not know certain routines, complaining customers, or when internal conflicts take place between the kitchen and the service area. As explained by one manager, this feeling of lost control may lead to anxiety and result in tunnel vision. Another manager explained that stress appears when people do not know how to solve easy tasks and do not have the required competence. This is exemplified by one manager who referred to a situation where one employee did not know how to blend a standardized drink which caused him to “[...] start to panic a bit.” (Manager 7, Restaurant & bar, February 15, 2023)

The restaurant industry is described by all respondents as highly unpredictable and characterized by unanticipated happenings appearing on everyday basis, which ultimately leads to stress. This unpredictability is exemplified by the following story expressed by one restaurant manager:

It was a Sunday. So we didn't know that when we opened the door, 250 people would come in, who are the cheerleaders for the whole Häcken team or IFK, I can't remember. Anyways, two to three hundred people have come in and there was only one bartender and one waitress who were supposed to start their shift on a normal Sunday. So they haven't even been able to call me or anyone else, but one of the guests who had come in and seen the disaster called me. Then I went into our cameras, and saw the disaster, so I started calling around. But before there were two or three people who jumped in, two of the guests, two regulars, who had worked in the restaurant before, had jumped into the bar and started serving beer. (Manager 9, Fine dining, February 16, 2023)

Furthermore, another restaurant manager gave us the following story when describing how things within the restaurant industry almost never goes according to plan

It can be anything from things going wrong in the kitchen and communication being lacking, to instead of us working towards solving the problem, you end up having to stand and argue your case. It can be a stressful situation. It can also be rude guests, or they complain about the food, such as fish chips that taste too fishy, or that their hamburger that they ordered well done is too dry. And where you might have preferred to call the guests idiots, but can't solve it in any other way than just trying to say "yes, I hear you" and then just being able to let it go, it's stressful. (Manager 1, Fine dining, January 16, 2023)

In most cases the uncertainty is related to the amount of customers coming to visit the restaurant as this is described by ten managers as being very unforeseen. This is expressed by one manager who stated that "Sometimes we get 20 guests, sometimes we get 120 guests and often there just comes a wave of people out of nowhere when you were least expecting it" (Manager 4, Fast food, February 7, 2023). Adding to this, another manager also concurred that

Some days you think that you have everything planned out but then there is suddenly a conference at the hotel next door and it just says boom. So you never know. A tired Tuesday in January like this, you can hit a cash record, but you can never expect that beforehand. So that is very stressful, you never know if it will be calm or chaos. (Manager 1, Fine dining, January 16, 2023)

One restaurant employee, who recently stepped into a new role, explained how she experiences stress coming from feeling uncertainty about what her role includes and what type of responsibilities and tasks she is expected to have. As the restaurant she works at has suffered from big losses of personnel, due to Covid19, she has been required to take on new responsibilities outside of her traditional role as chef. For example, she now has to do the purchases of goods, scheduling of personnel, and increased planning and setting of menus.

This has resulted in a lot of uncertainty and ambiguity, causing increased stress, loss of sleep, and pressure according to the employee. This uncertainty regarding responsibilities and tasks also makes her stressed as she does not know whether she is doing a good job or not. This indicates that having clear roles and responsibilities may mitigate stress at the workplace.

Tactics in restaurant

The most common ways of organizing a restaurant

To handle the stress coming from unpredictable situations and uncertainties, managers and employees use several tactics. Some of these tactics are mentioned by all respondents and are further referred to in our study as common tactics. The common tactics involve using booking systems where customers reserve tables before arriving to the restaurant as a way to create predictability for the personnel as it allows them to better plan how many people will be visiting the restaurant at once “If you have booking systems then you know a bit beforehand how the night will go and how many will come.” (Manager 6, Fast food, February 14, 2023) as described by one manager. All restaurants try to prepare as many practical tasks as possible in advance before the customers arrive. For example, they staff in relation to the reservations, cut the raw ingredients, prepare as many standardized dishes as possible, and set the tables.

Another common tactic is to divide the restaurant into sections and different zones for the restaurant workers. To accomplish this, every employee needs to know how to execute tasks autonomously and the separation between work sections is described as providing a sense of responsibility and accountability. Most restaurant employees and managers also seems to have an continuous dialogue with each other as a way to create a common understanding in regards to experienced stress. For example, one employee described that the colleagues explain to each other before the shift starts how many guests will come and in what sections there will be most stress. This was also described, by several managers, as a tactic to minimize stress as communication and common understanding enables the workers to be more forgiving if their colleagues are stressed and also enables them to step in and help in these extra hectic areas. One manager exemplified this by stating the importance of everybody having their own station that they are responsible for while simultaneously describing the need of the employees being flexible and sometimes leaving their station to help others.

When I say that no one should leave their station, it is more like they have the responsibility of it, but of course during the night you have to help each other and be flexible, but it is still important that someone has the most responsibility because otherwise things may end up between chairs. (Manager 11, Hotel restaurant, February 23, 2023)

Furthermore, all managers pointed to the importance of ensuring everyone is clear about what they are going to do during their shift and that they are aware of the work tasks they are

expected to perform. Moreover, a manager concluded that “You should know when to be here and what you should do, because that is also something that can be stressful if people do not know their responsibilities”. (Manager 13, Thai restaurant, February 24, 2023)

Locally adopted tactics

Besides the common tactics mentioned by all managers and employees, there are also more locally adopted tactics. By this we refer to tactics developed by a specific restaurant or individual, not a general working method that covers the whole Gothenburg area. For example, one manager described how they always ask the guests what they want to eat in advance when they make the reservation as a way to more easily prepare the food beforehand, minimizing stress and uncertainty. At the same restaurant, which is of the smaller size working with fine dining, they also try to really get to know their employees, to find out what their strengths are, how experienced they are and how much authority they have when dealing with rude customers. For example, the manager explained how some guests may act arrogantly towards younger employees and in those circumstances they often let more experienced, older personnel deal with those guests and their complaints as they exude more authority. Adding to this, the manager thinks it is vital to have the right person, at the right place, at the right time. If the situation turns out to be unsolvable by ordinary personnel, the manager steps in to help clear out the situation. By doing this, the manager manifests support to the personnel and encourages them to seek help if needed. The manager concludes by saying that “[...] planning and collaboration is key to managing stress” (Manager 2, Fine dining, January 17, 2023)

Two other restaurant managers mentioned how they deal with unexpected situations, in terms of many guests arriving at the same time unexpectedly, by delegating guests to other areas within the restaurant. They direct them to the bar or temporary tables that they place in the restaurant when needed. This was described by one manager as a tactic to mitigate stress for the service personnel as the customers tend to relax and become more patient once they get something to drink as they wait to be seated.

We work a lot with placing guests at the bar so that we then can just go grab them when their tables are ready and when we have time, and that is great because then we keep their consumption at ours instead of having them go to another restaurant while we buy time (Manager 1, Fine dining, January 16, 2023)

Another restaurant manager, working at a bigger restaurant with over 400 seats, tries to mitigate stress by having an easygoing attitude towards customers. “I always remind the staff to have fun, joke with customers, get to know them and then customers will develop this understanding, they will know that you have a lot to do and things might take a while.” (Manager 9, Fine dining, February 16, 2023). Adding to this, the same manager exemplified that if a customer is dissatisfied and complains (resulting in stress for the staff), or if the staff

make a mistake, then they should make up for it by “friending” the customer. By being fun and easygoing, the staff can mitigate the situation using jokes and offer a smile when they serve the food. The reasoning is that it is more important that both parties create a relationship that ends with a positive attitude, rather than that the customer and staff leave the situation with a negative attitude.

Another specific tactic used by a manager is to always follow the motto “it must be easy to do the right thing” (Manager 14, Fine dining, March 10, 2023). This strategic mindset involves standardizing and simplifying processes for the service staff so they can perform their work more efficiently. This reduces stress since the employees know how to perform their tasks. To accomplish this, the manager optimizes the physical space in the restaurant. The manager makes sure that service stations have close distances to the customers and the kitchen so the kitchen and service staff can easily communicate and interact, without having to walk long distances. By shortening the amount of steps the personnel have to walk, stress is in general reduced in the restaurant since the employees are not running around the customers and can thus provide better service to the customers. The manager highlights "It's essential to optimize the physical space in the restaurant, finding better ways to improve efficiency for both employees and customers, which reduces stress levels for all parties." (Manager 14, Fine dining, March 10, 2023). This physical optimization is also done by having several payment desks, making sure that menus are close to being grabbed by personnel handling them to customers, and placing the tables in ways they are not blocking the main alley in the restaurant.

A small Thai restaurant was also interviewed. Here the context of stress was rather different. The restaurant barely made it during Corona and the employees felt stressed of losing their jobs. Now, the manager of the restaurant requires everyone to join the unemployment fund, in case the restaurant must shut down. Since the pandemic, they made several strategic choices to mitigate risk and thus mitigating the stress of not being able to continue with the restaurant. One tactic was to reduce the amount of dishes on the menu and only focus on keeping the best-sellers. This resulted in the ingredients becoming more accessible and the staff learned to perform their tasks easier and faster, since many dishes use the same accessible ingredients.

One of the employee’s interviewed described a tactic for dealing with stress on a personal level by making mental to-do-lists in her head. This is described by the employee as a way to stay calm as it makes her aware of what she has to do next and makes it easier to always be one step ahead and organize the tasks in specific orders. The employee exemplified this by telling how she prioritizes the tasks by placing them at the top of her list if they are the most urgent and always rearranging the mental list according to how the evening unfolds and what situations appear as more acute. As an example, she described how she always places cleaning things in-house (in the service and kitchen area) at the bottom of her to-do-list as this is not immediately urgent or visible to the customers. Making sure customers are happy, taking orders, and dealing with complaints, on the other hand, is constantly prioritized and always has a place at the top of the list. The same tactic of using to-do-lists to mitigate stress

was also used by another employee, although instead of having the list mentally, she prefers to write it down on paper. This was described as a way to structure the work tasks as she gets a better overview of what has to be done during the work shift. Having the list on paper also enables other colleagues to substitute for her when she has to unexpectedly leave her station to perform more urgent tasks elsewhere.

A manager at a hotel restaurant in Gothenburg, emphasized the importance of having a continuous dialogue with guests to proactively mitigate stressful situations and gain mutual understanding. Furthermore, he underlines

As long as I have control, I can manage the stress. But when many things fall apart, like during breakfast the other day. The coffee machine broke down, we were understaffed and the guests built a long queue that was even exceeding the physical restaurant into the rest of the hotel, then I got tunnel vision. In situations like that, I encourage my employees to be open to the guests and explain what is going on. Tell them that the machine is broken but that they can go sit down in the meantime until it gets fixed, and then we will serve them their coffee. (Manager 15, Hotel restaurant, March 16, 2023)

Using this kind of conversations with the guests are described by the manager as making both the personnel and the guests feel more calm as the guests get a better understanding of the situation and in turn become more patient.

Unpredictability necessitates flexibility

The general and locally adopted tactics described by managers and employees above highlights various routines and approaches practically used in their daily work. However, in most cases, respondents do not point to a specific practice that can be used in all various situations but usually start by saying “it depends on the situation” when asked about how they deal with stress or what tactic they use to handle stress at work. Although various ways of dealing with stress are apparent in our interviews, all respondents make the claim that there is no general or explicit strategy that they adopt in stressful situations. Rather, the respondents point to the importance of being flexible and being able to adapt to situations as they occur. One of the restaurant managers underlines that:

Yes, but what I know, it is not written in any book about any tactics, but it is what has been done. You have done it for many years, built up routines, so if you follow them then it becomes less stressful. People who have worked five, six years with us, they have learned our ways and how to adapt their actions and adjust the routines when needed. They know how to prepare to avoid stress. There are many who know what to do. (Manager 10, Greek restaurant, February 17, 2023)

In relation to this, another manager also expressed that since the industry is so variable the best thing one can do is sometimes just to trust the gut feeling saying “I still believe in using your gut at the end of the day.”

The lack of specific tactics for dealing with stress is expressed by another manager emphasizing the importance of everyone knowing their tasks and how to execute them individually while also saying that “[...] it is even more vital that employees know when to deviate from the specified routines” (Manager 16, Hotel restaurant, March 14, 2023). The same manager continues to explain that

[...] when you work with people the staff often have to deviate from the routines and it is hard to work in a too structured way as you always have to be flexible. You can never control what other people and guests will do so you always have to adapt. But of course we have routine lists so that everybody knows their roles and their tasks but as flexibility is so important we even have it written at the bottom of the routine lists that you have to deviate from the routines and adjust to how the restaurant looks. (Manager 16, Hotel restaurant, March 14, 2023)

In another interview, when being asked if they employ a certain tactic to deal with stress, a restaurant manager expressed the following:

No we do not have a specific tactic, not exactly like that, but it's more to solve it then and there with the available means that you have. Then whether it's a tactic or not, I don't know. But then again, I guess it all depends on the situation as well. What type of stressful situation is important to consider. I mean, we don't have a step-by-step program so that first we do this and then we do that, if this happens, we do that... But it is to take care of the most urgent, and that is the tables; making sure that the guests leave and guests come in according to the time we have to fit, that is the most important thing. (Manager 1, Fine dining, January 16, 2023)

As indicated by both quotes, managers in the restaurant industry do not follow a certain step-by-step protocol, or strategy, but rather they act swiftly in the moment, drawing on routines and experience when trying to make sense of a situation and then mitigate the stressful situation. A small restaurant manager concurred that “We deal with it as it comes. I don't really have, what do you call it? A standard for how to deal with a situation. We deal with it when it happens.” (Manager 13, Thai restaurant, February 24, 2023)

Several respondents explained that unpredictability requires employees to be flexible and adapt to various situations on a daily basis. When being asked about how routines can mitigate stress, a restaurant manager chose to discuss her view on unpredictability

You can never not be flexible in the restaurant industry, it is like every day is a new day. There is nothing predictable. We're going to be sometimes overstaffed. Sometimes we're going to be understaffed. So it is all about being flexible and I think. I think it's about being in balance because if you're too much not sticking to the routine, it's going to be really annoying to work with you and if you are too strict on the routines, [...] So I think it's really important to be flexible in the restaurant. (Manager 3, Fine dining, January 20, 2023)

Every manager also explained that the working tempo is varying over various times during the day which once again creates the need for employees to be able to adapt and always be prepared for a rush “You have to get used to it fluctuating between the amount of people coming in and it is vital that you can adapt to the rush that comes” (Manager 4, Fast food, February 7, 2023)

When one manager was asked to explain his working environment he immediately referred to the high uncertainty that his everyday consist of in terms of not only the number of guests “You can never know how many that you will be serving at once, it does not stand anywhere, you never know” (Manager 6, Fast food, February 14, 2023) but also other unpredictabilities such as things breaking down “Sometimes I come to work a Saturday and there is a pipe that have broken so the whole restaurant is full of water or other days you start working and the soda machine shut down and there is just catastrophe” (Manager 6, Fast food, February 14, 2023). One employee also expressed this unpredictability stating that “You never know what is going to happen, it comes in waves and it makes you feel stressed but you just have to be flexible and solve the situation the best way that you can at the moment” (Employee 9, Hotel restaurant, March 23, 2023)

All restaurant managers had great difficulties hiring and retaining staff. After the pandemic, many sought work elsewhere since the restaurant industry was dying in many areas in Gothenburg. In relation to this, seven restaurant managers talked about the importance of finding flexible personnel that are willing to step in when there is extra much to do during rush hours which often occurs unexpectedly during evenings and weekends. However, they seem to have various opinions about the ease of finding these extra staff and for most restaurants participating in our study, this seems to be a challenging task for the manager.

When people get sick or people are on holidays, or when it just gets extra many guests it feels that we don't have enough extra staff who can just come that are full time or like permanently contracted. It is hard since you know often we feel like we would need someone that works like two shifts a month which is not a good job for most people. So it's very difficult to find those types. (Manager 12, Fine dining, February 24, 2023)

One manager explained how they solve situations when personnel get sick by calling people that are not permanently employed at the restaurant, such as friends and

relatives “We usually contact a lot of relatives, no matter if they are employed here or not” (Manager 8, Restaurant & bar, February 15, 2023). Adding to this, another manager mentioned how they sometimes ask employees that have previously been working at the restaurant to step in. Two other managers described how they think students are the perfect hiring candidate as they are willing to work uncomfortable hours. The restaurant can get help when needed and the students can make some extra money by being flexible to work since they usually do not have a family to look after. A restaurant manager explains that “Students are the perfect candidate since they are often willing to work and want to earn money, they are very flexible and often have no family to adapt to, if you find one, it's gold.” (Manager 5, Fast food, February 13, 2023).

Discussion

As the empirical findings show, stress originates from a sense of lost control coming from unexpected events that clearly seems to characterize the restaurant industry. To mitigate stress, managers try to create order by communicating clear roles and responsibilities. However, as the findings show, there is no single best way to regain structure and mitigate stress but rather it is to draw upon the built up experience and knowledge of routines to deal with situations as they come. The empirical findings highlight how managers use routines along with several locally adopted tactics to deal with the specific situations that they encounter daily. Routines play an important role in structuring the daily work, but it is even more emphasized by the respondents that knowing when to deviate from routines and be flexible is crucial to handle stress. Every situation is different, which is why routines act as a foundation to structure the daily work but should be deviated from depending on the situation at hand. This is why the respondents underline flexibility as key to mitigate stressful situations, since every day is a different day. Things will not always go as planned, you will most likely lose control since you cannot control how many customers will arrive or if the weather is sunny. To this background, the most prominent empirical findings will be discussed below in relation to the theoretical concepts.

Perceptions, accountability and substitution

Based on our empirical findings it becomes clear that all respondents, no matter position or role, share the perception of stress being highly evident in their daily work in the restaurant industry. However, the experiences and perceptions of stress vary between the respondents and consequently also their tactics to mitigate it. While some view stress as posing anxiety and pressure, others see it as motivating and contributing to a feeling of productivity. Although the experience of stress differs between the respondents, they all share the image of stress coming from a sense of lost control. The loss of control often appears when there is uncertainty regarding roles and responsibilities, when there are too many demands simultaneously, when people do not have adequate competencies or know their routines, when customers are complaining or when unexpected events happen that have not been

planned for. This ultimately results in increased levels of stress for employees and managers. The respondents perceive too much unmanageable stress as draining, causing anxiety and loss of sleep. These perceptions, along with the various tactics to mitigate stress, indicate that restaurant workers have a common goal of reducing pressure and creating order. According to Van de Ven et al. (1976), achieving a collective goal like this in turn requires some form of coordination. This is also argued by Bechky and Okhuysen (2009, p.472), stating that the fulfillment of a common goal requires certain coordination mechanisms defined as “the organizational arrangements that allow individuals to realize a collective performance”. Examples of such coordination mechanisms given by Bechky and Okhuysen (2009), are routines, communication and substitution. These mechanisms can in turn be recognized in our empirical findings as part of the tactics used by restaurant managers to handle stress and loss of control. For example, routines are set by restaurant managers as guidelines for how employees are expected to perform their work tasks and by whom they should be executed, i.e what roles everyone has. Communication is seen when employees communicate with each other before a starting day, to prepare for what is to come and how to divide and separate the work. Continuous dialogues with customers to proactively mitigate stressful situations and gain mutual understanding, is also a form of communication that is used by managers. Substitution can be interpreted as taking place when employees help each other with various tasks, when they call in extra personnel to cover for someone being sick or when there is need for extra workforce and additional workers come to facilitate at the work shift. The ways in which respondents describe their approach to stress by having clear roles, communication and routines, which in turn facilitates substitution, suggests that managers use ideas similar to those expressed in coordination theory to mitigate stress perceived as coming from lost control.

The most common tactics are the use of booking systems, dividing the restaurant areas into physical sections, communicating and having clear roles that define responsibilities among the employees. In relation to Bechky and Okhuysen (2009), the common tactics can be considered as coordination mechanisms in terms of roles as they help to achieve predictability and accountability. Predictability is facilitated by the use of booking systems that work as a tool for managers to schedule personnel in accordance to how many guests can be expected and therefore makes preparations easier. By having clear communication and dividing tasks and responsibilities among the employees’ managers define roles that they appoint the workers. This creates clarity about who is responsible for what and who has the accountability for performing various tasks. Not having clear responsibilities and feeling uncertainty about expectations, is described by one employee as causing stress. Therefore, using the coordination mechanisms of defining roles and responsibilities is clearly a way to mitigate stress.

Bechky and Okhuysen (2009) also argue that defined roles can facilitate substitution between the employees and based on our empirical findings this statement seems to hold in practice within the restaurant industry. When the employees know what has to be done by their colleagues, they describe it as easier for them to step in and help when unexpected things happen. One employee exemplifies this by describing that when her colleagues know what

has to be ticked off the to-do-list, they can collaborate and execute tasks in her place. Consequently, the to-do-list functions as a means which enables the personnel to execute tasks individually to reach a collective performance (ibid).

However, it is not only routines, roles, and clear responsibilities that seems to facilitate substitution. As Feldman et al. (2012), argue, coordination and coordination mechanisms are not a static phenomenon that is to be achieved equally in all situations. Rather, coordination mechanisms should be adapted to fit the specific situation encountered. The necessity of adapting coordination mechanisms are evident in the empirical material when respondents talk about how they constantly have to be flexible and adjust to specific situations. When analyzing the empirical material through the adaptable perspective of Feldman et al. (2012), their theory contributes to the insight that it may not necessarily be the three conditions of predictability, accountability and common understanding that per se creates coordination. Rather other contextual factors may also contribute to the ease of creating order and organizing. For example, as Bechky and Okhuysen (2011) argue, organizational bricolage may also serve as a means to facilitate collective organizational understanding and management of uncertain events. Organizational bricolage does not strive to explicitly retain predictability, accountability and common understanding but are rather facilitated by other social and cognitive resources. In the empirical material these resources are given by a collective image of how things are to be performed and in what order tasks should be executed by having meetings, open dialogues, clear responsibilities and routine instructions. This image may require one of the three conditions (common understanding) for coordination argued by Bechky and Okhuysen (2009), but the collective image is not mentioned to also be solely dependent on the other two mechanisms of coordination (predictability and accountability). For example, as seen in the empirical results, a collective image of the organizational work tasks can also be facilitated by routine actions and learned habits. Managing various events in ways that one previously handled a similar situation before may, just as the three coordination mechanisms (Bechky & Okhuysen, 2009), facilitate substitution and switching of roles. This is seen as possible from the empirical section as the personnel have observed other colleague's performances, been staying at the same workplaces for several years, learnt the routines, or because they can trust their intuitions and gut feelings, as expressed by one respondent. Building on these ideas from Bechky and Okhuysen (2011) and Feldman et al. (2012), our empirical results can be interpreted as emphasizing tacit knowledge as facilitating coordination. As several managers communicated, they do not have a specific tactic but rather they refer to the experience of being in the restaurant industry where they built up routines over time. The tactics are not written in any books, rather it is what has been done for many years, built up routines that employees can follow to mitigate potential stressful situations. This can be interpreted as tacit knowledge where people just know what to do in stressful situations, because they have many years of experience or exposure in the field. Therefore, it is not only the routines and roles that facilitate coordination (Feldman et al., 2012) that enable them to handle stress but rather it is the experience and built-up knowledge.

Common understanding & Organizational bricolage

Preparation meetings and having a continuous dialogue about stress, are examples of the coordination mechanism referred to as common understanding (Bechky & Okhuysen, 2009). Common understanding is achieved when participants in an interdependent activity share knowledge of the work that is to be done, how it is to take place, and the goals and objectives of the work (ibid). Preparation meetings and open communication allows restaurants to consider the team and where everyone should be put according to their competences. This sort of open dialogue among the personnel enables the staff to know what tasks and duties everyone should have throughout the day. To achieve common understanding regarding organizational goals, to ensure that everyone works for a collective performance (ibid), one restaurant manager communicates the mindset “it must be easy to do the right thing”, as a common motto shared among the personnel. This is also communicated in practice by physically organizing work according to this. Through optimizing the physical space and shortening the distance between each service area and its respective customers, it becomes easier for the personnel to know which guest they should serve and what sections they are responsible for. When thinking of organizational bricolage, the restaurant managers clearly try to “making do by applying combinations of the resources at hand to new problems and opportunities (Bechky & Okhuysen, 2011, p.240). Deciding on how to structure a restaurant can be done in many ways. The outer shell is usually difficult to change, but how you rearrange the available resources within (tables, kitchen, cashiers etc) can positively impact the efficiency by mitigating crowded areas through smart spacing between elements such as employees workstations and customers’ placing. One can imagine that there are numerous ways to structure a restaurant, and the dimensions of material resources must be accounted for when designing the restaurant. Organizational bricolage (Bechky & Okhuysen, 2011) can for example be interpreted as taking place when restaurants delegate guests to the bar or put up extra bar tables to serve drinks while guests are waiting to be seated. By utilizing all resources and tables available, the personnel create space for more guests while also creating order and mitigating stress as they can split the work tasks between those working in the service area and those working in the bars. This in turn reduces the individual workload and amount of stress. By adopting the mindset of the bricoleur, managers can, as seen by the example, use resources to handle situations in new ways than previously been done. Finding new ways of utilizing resources can, when being constantly repeated, generate new routines and ways of performing tasks within the organization. As understood by how managers restructure restaurants and utilize extra tables, organizational bricolage can be discussed as a phenomenon that encourages improvisational actions. By finding new ways to manage stressful situations, in this case through delegation of guests to extra tables, the improvisational method destabilized the previously existing routines and generated new routines (Pentland et al., 2012), as it became the new standard of coordinating guests in rush hours.

Another example of how common understanding can be fulfilled in practice, is seen by a small Thai restaurant standardizing the menu to achieve better agreement on how things should be cooked. By standardizing and simplifying processes for the service and kitchen

staff, the personnel get an easier understanding of how to execute tasks and allows them to work in a more unified way, creating better workflow and less misunderstandings. This shows how simplifications of various processes in the restaurant may facilitate coordination and proactively mitigate stressful situations as everyone shares an understanding of how to execute tasks efficiently (Bechky & Okhuysen, 2009; Bechky & Okhuysen, 2011).

The mechanisms of coordination described above, facilitates common understanding and workflow for the staff since they know where to be, what is expected of them and in what ways they should perform their tasks (Bechky & Okhuysen, 2009). It is therefore vital that the restaurant industry ensures that their organization has a common understanding, to not only achieve coordination, but rather use coordination to effectively manage stressful situations as they occur. If the restaurant fails in their mission to achieve common understanding, the staff will experience significant stress due to miscommunication. An example of this, put forth by a restaurant employee, states that it is important to know what your role is and what is expected of you, otherwise this ambiguity will lead to stress. The coordination mechanism of common understanding serves as an example of how important it is for managers to be clear about what is anticipated of their staff and that they can have an open dialogue if something is unclear.

Furthermore, common understanding is in our empirical findings not only found among the personnel, but also between the personnel and the restaurants' guests. Respondents describe how stressful situations can be managed by having open dialogues with guests. As explained by (Bechky & Okhuysen, 2009), these kinds of dialogues foster common understanding as the guests become more aware of the circumstance and what is intended to be done by the staff. An empirical example of this refers to a situation of when the coffee machine broke down and the employees openly told the guests what was going on and that they were trying to fix it. By being clear and explaining why things may take longer than usual, openly compensating guests with other dishes when something is no longer available, and explaining to guests when the restaurant is full and they may wait in the bar in the meantime, guests develop more patience and understanding towards the employees. By being transparent and sharing information with the customers, a common understanding is developed and can in turn mitigate stress. However, exactly how this common understanding is created varies between restaurants. While some jokingly explain the stress levels or ask customers to engage in the service, others are more serious and use professional dialogues or apologizes. For example, to deal with dissatisfied customers, a manager encourages his employees to make up for it by "friending" the customer. This type of "friending" the customers illustrates how the personnel continuously must adapt to the situation and the customers they are encountering in various situations. This shows that workers use adaptive coordination (Feldman et al, 2012) where they adapt their behavior depending on the situation and its fluctuating circumstances. Although the employee might strongly disagree with the customers' reasons for complaining, he or she must adapt to coordinate the situation forward (ibid) by being service-minded and create this common understanding. It is certainly difficult for the customer to maintain a negative attitude outward towards a person who is nothing but pleasant in a stressful situation. This "friending" example showcases how managers and

employees can handle impatient customers by making them understand their point of view in a stressful situation.

Established routines and exploring adaptive coordination

Both managers and employees underline that routines, seen as coordination mechanisms (Bechky & Okhuysen, 2009), are fundamental for allowing individuals to accomplish tasks independently during uncertain work conditions, very similarly put to Bouty and Drucker-Godard's (2019) definition of coordination. A restaurant manager explains that following established routines will mitigate stress, since routines create stability and bring groups together (Bechky & Okhuysen, 2009). This is possible as every individual can use the routines to execute tasks independently while striving to fulfill the common organizational goals. However, as our empirical evidence shows, the restaurant industry is very uncertain and difficult to predict. Although routines serve as a stabilizing role in structuring the daily work, our results indicate that the possibility to deviate and adjust from the routines also plays an important role when employees encounter unprecedented situations. As argued by Pentland et al. (2012), routines are established and maintained through repeated actions performed by individuals. As actions change and tasks are performed in different ways, routines may change and generate new organizational patterns of performance. When restaurant managers and employees constantly adapt and adjust their actions in a flexible way, to encounter various unpredictable situations, their behavior leads to the establishment of new routines. For example, one manager describes how they trust their gut feeling and do what they previously have been doing in similar situations. However, as every situation comes with slightly different circumstances due to the unpredictable nature of the industry, they respond by performing actions in slightly different ways than they previously did (Pentland et al., 2012). Over time, this in turn leads to new ways of performing tasks and by repeating these patterns of actions, new routines become implemented in the organization (ibid). Understanding that routines are not only for stabilization, but also generates changes as actions become adapted, can have important managerial implications. An example of this is seen in the findings as management decided to explicitly encourage employees to deviate and adjust the routines. This is a good example of where managers have adapted static routines to better serve real life situations that occur within the restaurant context. Consequently, following routines too strictly may not be the best tactic for dealing with stress within the restaurant industry as the daily work encompasses uncertainties.

The elements of unpredictability and workflow fluctuating and coming in rushes, illustrates similar characteristics as waves on a racing sailboat (Bouty & Drucker-Godard, 2019). The loose coordination pattern takes the context much more into account, something that previous stress management research has neglected (Richardson & Rothstein, 2008; Hargrove et al., 2011; Mellor & Smith, 2013). The loose coordination pattern (Bouty & Drucker-Godard, 2019), similar to Mintzberg and Waters (1985) emergent strategy, is however apparent in the restaurant industry by studying how the restaurant communicates stress. For example, before a working shift starts, the manager and employees explain how many people will come, and

in what sections there will be the most stress. By communicating beforehand, a manager expressed that it is important that everybody knows their workstation for the day and what responsibilities it comes with. However, along with this they also communicate the need of the employees to sometimes be flexible and leave their station to help others experiencing much stress. This example illustrates the loose coordination pattern where information is continuously shared (Bouty & Drucker-Godard, 2019), members talk with each other and look around their station to see if anybody else needs help. This on-going communication allows the team to become adaptive in their coordination activities (Feldman et al., 2012), which not only facilitates the process of anticipating sudden changes in the environment (Bouty & Drucker-Godard, 2019) but also helps to mitigate experienced stress. Granted, stress will only be mitigated if what is said is being done, that employees are willing and able to leave their station to aid someone else's work responsibilities.

Although loose patterns of coordination may be more emphasized in our data, there are also patterns of set coordination taking place in some restaurants. For example, set coordination can be seen as communicated through routine documents where the documents work as a protocol which employees can rely on. The routine documents help employees if they forget how to accomplish certain tasks and in what order they should be performed. Although patterns of set coordination exist to some extent (Bouty & Drucker-Godard, 2019), the loose elements of coordination seem to be more emphasized as showcased by how managers encourage flexibility and deviation of routines, when needed. This signifies that restaurant managers trust their employees to make their own judgment and that they can appropriately adapt their way of working to a given situation, thus not only relying on protocols as the set coordination pattern suggests (ibid). Therefore, the restaurant workers (similar to the crew on a racing sailboat) do not only rely on protocols and on role structure (ibid) but rather they constantly have to adapt to unpredictable happenings (Feldman et al., 2012).

The encouragement of adapting and improvising in order to serve situations as they occur, resembles the jazz musicians described by Weick's (1998) metaphor. Jazz musicians compose using notes, but which they may deviate from as they improvise and follow the flow, just like restaurant personnel have routine lists they deviate from to better act according to the situation. Having this freedom of adaptation and flexibility clearly serves to mitigate stress as workers can do whatever they feel suitable for the moment, as seen from the way employees said to prioritize what they experience the most urgent. Yet, while having established routines, responsibilities, and delegated stations to lean back on to handle stress, order is still possible to maintain as coordination mechanisms of accountability, predictability, and common understanding are not lost through total departure of routines, communication, roles and responsibilities (Bechky & Okhuysen, 2009).

Moving away from traditional theories towards adaptation

While some tactics can be considered as more general, most examples describing ways to deal with stressful situations indicate that organizing and coordination requires great amounts

of flexibility and adaptability. The empirical findings within the restaurant industry are therefore in stark contrast from the traditional stress management frameworks described in the literature review. Instead of following gradual step-by-step models or implementing a best practice, suggested as stress management tactics by Mellor and Smith (2013), Richardson and Rothstein (2008), and Hagrove et al. (2011), managers do not act similarly in all situations. Rather, respondents express that they do not have any specific tactic but rather draw on the available means at their disposal to handle the situations they encounter. Managers, therefore, adopt the use of organizational bricolage to respond to stressful events (Bechky & Okhuysen, 2011) as they act like bricoleurs by drawing on the available means at hand to mitigate stressful situations as they occur.

Building on the theory by Feldman et al. (2012), as well as Weick's (1998) ideas of adaptability, improvisation and flexibility to create coordination, this study contributes to ideas of how stress can be mitigated in the restaurant industry. The empirical material highlights various common tactics implemented by specific restaurants or individuals which can be understood as managers having to adapt to their specific context and use means suitable for their environment. The implementation of local tactics that varies between various restaurants indicates, just like theorized by Feldman et al. (2012), that not all tactics or coordination mechanisms can be implemented identically in all situations. Rather, tactics to mitigate stress have to be adapted to the specific restaurant using it (Feldman et al., 2012). This becomes evident by looking at the various restaurant contexts described in the empirical material and seeing how different circumstances lead to different outcomes in regards to organizing work. For example, a small Thai restaurant implements other tactics than a fine-dining restaurant which in turn differs from a hotel restaurant or a very large restaurant with hundreds of seats. However, even locally adopted tactics that have been designed for specific needs and contexts, may not be stabilized and viable during all circumstances. This point is also made clear by using the insights from Pentland et al. (2012), regarding generative routines. Routines in themselves do not only serve as means for stabilization but can also generate new organizational patterns as actions are performed in slightly different ways (Feldman et al., 2012; Pentland et al., 2012) as employees find new ways to manage their daily work. As Feldman et al. (2012), emphasize, unexpected conditions can disrupt existing mechanisms and routines which suggests that in order to facilitate coordination, and in turn mitigate stress, even local routines have to be deviated from.

Conclusion

This qualitative study of stress management within the restaurant industry has, by using the theory of coordination, contributed to filling the gap of managerial studies regarding how stress can be dealt with in daily work. With the aim to answer the research question of "How do managers perceive and handle stress in their daily work?" this study contributes with four conclusions regarding stress management within the restaurant industry. First, as an answer to how managers perceive stress, we conclude that managers have a united perception of stress appearing from a sense of lost control. The loss of control often appears when there is uncertainty regarding roles and responsibilities, when there are too many demands

simultaneously, when people do not have adequate competencies or know their routines, when customers are complaining or when unexpected events happen that have not been planned for. This in turn imposes stress on both managers and employees and restaurant managers strive to mitigate this stress and gain control as a daily part of their work.

Second, as an answer to how managers handle stress in their daily work, we conclude that managers mitigate stress by coordinating personnel using preparations and routines to create accountability and predictability. Accountability in terms of everyone having stated responsibilities and tasks that colleagues can count on being performed, and predictability as plannings, substitutions and preparations are easier if everyone knows what various people are responsible for accomplishing and hence can schedule and prepare according to that. However, how this is done in practice varies between restaurants and there is no standardized tactic to handle stress that may be used in all situations due to high levels of uncertainty and unpredictability characterizing the industry. Consequently, our findings suggest that there is no best-practice to handle stress in daily work in the restaurant industry. This is a conclusion that is in stark contrast to traditional stress management models.

Third, managers also handle stress by fostering a common understanding. Common understanding manifests in how restaurants simplify various processes and openly communicate. Having these kinds of dialogues facilitates coordination and in turn proactively mitigates stressful situations as everyone shares a mutual understanding of how tasks are to be executed. We show how restaurant managers adopt organizational bricolage by consciously considering how to organize a restaurant most efficiently. This is further done by making use of all material, social and cognitive resources available to streamline work and create a collective image of how and in what order tasks should be executed. This way of improvising with resources to mitigate stress can further destabilize existing routines and contribute to the establishment of new organizational patterns that become the new standards when actively being repeated. The coordination mechanism of common understanding serves as an illustration of how crucial it is for managers to be clear about what is expected of their workers and that they are able to share a continuous dialogue throughout the day. By continuously communicating, the restaurant manager uses either loose or set coordination patterns to better organize the workflow throughout the day, thus mitigating stress. Loose coordination patterns in terms of ongoing information sharing where flexibility and adjustment to the situation may be encouraged, and set coordination patterns in terms of established routines acting as mutual protocols to rely on without further instructions. These forms of organizing, using set and loose coordination patterns, opens new perspectives regarding how managers and employees actively communicate and manage stress in their daily work through various types of communication.

Fourth, as the industry is characterized by unpredictable events and variable working tempo, it is vital that the personnel are coordinated in ways that allow them to be flexible and adapt to the current situation. Instead of instructing the personnel to always follow strict routines, managers should encourage employees to adapt and rely on built-up knowledge to best serve the situation at hand. However, as earlier concluded, routines are vital to create order and

reduce stress as it serves for accountability, predictability and common understanding and should thus not be totally deviated from. Encouraging flexibility, and adaptability along with having established routines and responsibilities allows for the possibility to handle stress. When encouraging flexibility, it is however important to be aware of routines' generative capability and how performing work tasks in an adaptable way leads to new patterns of organizing and new routines to be established. Yet, even though routines can not provide total stability as they can constantly generate new ways of managing work. order can still be maintained by having routines as a framework that every worker expires from. Having routines as a guideline while simultaneously, allowing deviations and adjustment from the routines, ensures that the coordination mechanisms of accountability, predictability, and common understanding are not lost through total departure of routines, communication, roles and responsibilities. Therefore, it is emphasized that routines play an important role in creating order and control, but perhaps what our findings highlight even more, is the ability to deviate and adjust to the routines, rather than solely relying on them as strict protocols, that may be vital to handle stress in daily work.

Theoretical Contributions and Practical Implications

Theoretical Contributions

As our analysis concludes, there is no single best way to deal with stress from a managerial perspective within the restaurant industry. This conclusion differs from traditional step-by-step models (Mellor & Smith, 2013; Hargrove et al., 2011) and best practices (Richardson & Rothstein, 2008), previously used within stress management research. From a theoretical view, our research therefore suggests further studies to step away from the traditional stress management frameworks focusing on best-practices and implement models that allow for adaptations. Using coordination theory to study stress from an organizational perspective allows researchers to understand how organizations organize and respond to stressful situations that really come to light in the restaurant industry. As our study suggests, stress management in the restaurant industry requires lots of flexibility. There is much physiological and health inspired research within stress management (Hargrove et al., 2011; Richardson & Rothstein, 2008; Kinnunen-Amoroso & Liira, 2016; Chunhui et al., 2014; Mellor & Smith, 2013), but stress has not been adequately studied from an organizational perspective. This paper offers insights, through the use of coordination theory, as to how managers and employees actively perceive and act upon stressful situations, to mitigate stress in their daily work.

From a more general perspective, the results from this study focusing on stress management within the restaurant industry may inspire further research within other businesses operating under conditions of uncertainty and unpredictability. Our contributions of using coordination theory to explain how routines can be used as guidelines to create accountability and common understanding as a way to mitigate stress, may be tested in other stressful contexts as well. Furthermore, our results indicate the need to deviate and adjust from established routines to better serve an unpredictable situation. This in turn may lead to the establishment of new

routines and organizational patterns of actions and routines may therefore not only be taken as means for stabilization. Therefore, from a theoretical perspective, we suggest implementing routines that are less robust and more open for flexibility, which creates opportunity for further research within routine studies.

Practical Implications

Several practical managerial implications can be made by the analysis of our study. To begin with, managers must understand that things will never go according to plan within the restaurant industry and hence develop a mindset that accommodates adaptation and flexibility. Coordination in the form of routines and plans should be created in ways that everybody understands and are clear about, but that are free to deviate and adjust from when needed. To create a common understanding and a climate that allows for open dialogues, the personnel can also practice various communication tactics and get to know each other more personally to understand each other's needs. In practice, managers can also consider the possibility of utilizing social and material resources in new ways. While doing this, it is vital to be open to improvisations and the possibility to re-establish routines if they find new, more effective ways to perform work tasks. Another practical implication is to create a pool of students willing to work extra shifts as several restaurants encounter the problem of not having enough personnel during rush hours or when employees unexpectedly get sick. This was inspired by a restaurant manager who explained that students are perfect to hire due to their willingness to work and earn money, as well as lacking a family to look after, making them flexible and easy to coordinate.

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