

Workplace foodservice; perception of quality and trust

Introduction

The workplace can be a supportive and influential factor in the promotion of a healthy diet. A healthy and vital workforce is an asset to any organisation and initiatives within this environment reflect health promotion strategies advocated by the World Health Organisation (2004). The European workforce is increasingly diverse in terms of gender, ethnicity and culture; it is also increasingly older which implies a greater potential and prevalence of chronic disease (Zwetsloot et al. 2010). Health and wellbeing are key topics in the debate on improving the lives of individuals in society and are directly linked to labour force participation, productivity and sustainability (Eurofound 2013). Health and wellbeing at work are key elements of the overall Europe 2020 strategy for growth, competitiveness and sustainable development (European Commission 2010). A healthy economy depends on a healthy population. Without this, employers lose out on worker productivity and citizens are deprived of potential longevity and quality of life.

The European Treaties legislation (2009) and policy measures recognise the importance of preserving the health of the workforce and it is here where effective menu labelling could support the healthy lifestyle of employees (European Union 2007). Health is seen as a factor that codetermines the functioning of people (human and social capital) and can contribute to an organisations value. The workplace could be a central venue for influencing dietary behaviour and could be instrumental in reducing employee's risk of developing chronic disease (Quintiliani et al. 2010). The workplace is a setting where food is consumed on a regular basis, and can form an important part of the overall diet, as people spend an extensive proportion of their waking hours at work what they consume is of importance (Department of Health 2005). The workplace has been recognised as an important platform for health promotion, and where many employers are investing in initiatives that foster employee wellbeing as part of development of their human resources (Heinen and Darling 2009).

Frequent out-of-home consumption has been associated with higher energy intakes, and a higher prevalence of overweight and obesity (Orfanos et al. 2009). This positive relationship between the rise in consumption of food prepared outside the home and the increasing prevalence of obesity is a major global health and wellbeing societal challenge. Additionally, most consumers seem to underestimate the nutrient content of their dish selection (Bates et al. 2011). Given the possible mismatch between the perceived and actual nutritional value, the inclusion of information from a menu will benefit consumers by effectively transforming the nutrient content, a typical credence attribute, into a search attribute (Karstens and Belz 2006). We would also argue that the

fundamental human right of informing consumers what they are eating is commonly neglected however, from December 2014 there is an obligation under EU FIC 2011 for allergen information to be supplied on the menu or chalk boards in an easily visible and legible format (Mazurkiewicz-Pizo and Pachuca-Smulska 2012). Any initiative encouraging individuals to eat more 'attentively' could help to reduce calorie intake while also allowing those with intolerances and specific dietary requirements such as diabetics the freedom to eat away from home.

Past food scares and malpractices in the food system have affected the extent to which consumers trust the food they eat (Coveney 2008). Trust is an important component of health and wellbeing through its impact on food choice and confidence in expert advice (Coveney 2008). Moreover, in times where the consumer takes a less active role in the food cycle, information allowing transparency of production is important (Kjaernes 2006).

Theoretical Context

The understanding of the role of trust in food is mainly influenced by humanistic understandings of trust with Luhmann (1979) and Giddens (1991) being the most frequently cited authors (Salvatore and Sassatelli 2004). For the purposes of this paper, trust is mainly categorised as interpersonal trust between individuals and institutions (Meyer et al. 2008). It is the latter that has been the main focus of attention (Lassoued and Hobbs 2015). According to these different understandings, trust helps to reduce the complexity of systems (Luhman 1979), can act as a bridge to overcome a knowledge deficit (Giddens 1994) and is of importance in a food context through its influence on health and wellbeing (Ward and Meyer 2009).

Absence of trust in food has an impact on diet through avoidance of certain products deemed to be unsafe or untrustworthy (Coveney 2008). Furthermore, the credence nature of many product attributes makes it difficult for consumers to establish control and is strongly reliant on consumer trust (Karstens and Belz 2006). Luhmann's (2000) understanding of trust as a multidirectional concept, suggests that trust in the system is preliminary to trust in the representatives of the system (Brown 2008). Hence, restoring trust in actors within the food system such as food operators can be used to assure confidence in systems at the macro level, the food system which has been regarded by consumers with a negative attitude (Luhmann 2000). Therefore, institutional trust is of interest due to its impact on the relationship between consumer and operator (Lassoued and Hobbs 2015).

However, Luhmann's theoretical understanding of trust has been criticised for not encompassing active trust in food systems, therefore not taking into account consumer reflexivity when making food choice. Bildtgaard's (2008) concept for reflexive trust shows similarities to the Luhmannian

understanding of trust in a way that it categorises trust into three levels as shown in Table 1. The levels that are most applicable to a food system are the level of habitual trust and reflexive trust. Food selection and purchases are made habitually and consumers generate habitual trust based on their underlying knowledge that the food system is regulated by policy and authority (Bildtgard 2008). Reflexive trust takes into account a degree of reflexivity, where advancements in food production methods and distancing from food sources in this specific context, have led to an awareness of potential risk (Bildtgard 2008).

Table 1 here

Table 1 Comparison of Luhmann and Bildtgart adapted from Luhmann (2000) and Bildtgard (2008).

Luhmann (2000)	Bildtgard (2008)
<p>Familiarity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simple and consistent, reoccurring and unconsciously accepted (eg. Meat is from animals). • Past: religion controlled difference between familiar and unfamiliar • Familiarity less important in modern society due to critical self- reflection • Still part of trust development • Explains cultural an national differences 	<p>Emotional trust</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trust in people that are emotionally connected with the trustee • Child trusts mother to provide food • Trust based on shared norms and values
<p>Confidence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expectation which may lead to disappointment • Possibility of disappointment is neglected due to the rarity of its occurrence • Strongly associated with habit and routine, alternatives are not considered • Can turn into trust when the choice to make a decision is available • Can be placed in systems and seen at the macro-level (food chain) 	<p>Habitual trust</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Everyday practices (food selection or purchase) are made through habitual choice • Food systems are complex; limiting the ability of consumers to take control of food choice • Policy generated habitual trust: underlying knowledge of consumers that authorities regulate the food system
<p>Trust</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Familiarity and its experience form an important part of trust • Placed in interpersonal relationships in a complex society that is associated with risk • Placed after considering alternatives and weighing up risks 	<p>Reflexive trust</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consumers are challenged by multiplex food systems and conflicting information to make reflective choice regarding their food • Includes decision about what information and what actors of the

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not always an active decision, can be associated with routing • Seen at the micro-level: whilst there might be a lack of confidence in the food chain, actors of the food chain (Butcher, Green Grocer) can be trusted 	<p>food chain to trust</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consumers question current food habits due to increased knowledge about food scandals; can lead to a re-evaluation of options available
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Consumers are provided with information which is often perceived as conflicting, or limited forcing an evaluation of what information and which actors of the food chain to trust. However, due to a lack of knowledge about food production, consumers increasingly struggle to act reflexively in regards to trust (Meyer et al. 2012). Although some consumers are able to make a reflexive decision in their food choice such as being a vegetarian, others encounter difficulties caused by a lack of information (Meyer et al. 2012). A further factor influencing trust in food is the degree of embeddedness in the food production, with rural consumers showing greater levels of trust created by a cultural, biographical and social connection to food production (Meyer et al. 2012).

Trust is closely linked to relationships; consumers trust those who they believe to act in their best interest. Trust levels vary between different representatives of the food system as well as sources of information (Meijnders et al. 2009). Outcomes of an Australian investigation into trust in actors of the food chain show that although trust in politicians was low, moderate trust was placed by consumers in media and supermarkets (Henderson et al. 2011).

Problems with food quality can decrease the trust placed in the food chain and in governing organisations (Coveney 2008). Past food scares have had characteristics where it was difficult for the consumer to identify a problem with their food if this was adulterated or unsafe (Papadopoulos et al. 2012). Awareness of importance consumers attach to food choice variables is relevant in any commercial food operation but especially in settings where people eat every day. Consumers live their lives according to their values, have different priorities of importance and have the right to choose foods that meet their expectations. Recently, there have been a number of problems in the food chain, affecting the safety of food or misleading consumers about the true ingredients and their origin. Consequently, this has led to a greater awareness of food in general and particular increased interest in provenance, production methods and nutritional profile of food provided.

Although some research studies have focused on the importance of adequate nutrition information, the focus of these studies has been the retail sector and knowledge about consumer information needs in workplace canteens is lacking (Carbone and Zoellner 2012). Furthermore, consumer

interests go beyond the search for nutritional information with curiosity for information on other quality attributes and origins of food (Lusk and Briggeman 2009).

Advances in technology have ensured a stable and safer food supply through stricter controls of food production systems and efforts to minimise microbiological food spoilage (Michels 2012). However, consumers feel that there is an asymmetry between them and the food industry where they lack information about food, can be provided with misleading information and can be offered food of a substandard quality (Michels 2012). Furthermore, it is felt by consumers that their needs are not taken into account and that the food industry is driven by profit (Holm 2003; Michels 2012). Whilst consumers criticise the lack of nutritional and quality information provided to them, industry stakeholders blame complex food information laws as barriers to information provision and development (van der Meulen and Bremmers 2013). The relationship between consumers and industry in the food system is complex and both parties need to be engaged in order to reflect a more accurate representation of the symbiotic relationship when eating out. The aim of this study is to evaluate consumer-orientated intelligence, identifying key components both positive and negative that consumers require and the subsequent mapping of this to provide a feedback loop to industry for improved workplace food provision.

Materials and Methods

Study Design

Focus groups

Focus groups were selected as the methodology for the study due to their ability to elicit discussion of participants' perceptions that can provide a rich description of viewpoints and experiences from many angles (Then et al. 2014). Structured focus groups (n=4) were conducted with employees who regularly, at least twice a week, use the canteen at their place of work and were recruited using purposive sampling. Email invitations were sent out to various employers in Germany and the UK who offer workplace canteens to their members of staff. The study and questions were approved by the local Ethics Committee, 23 participants took part, 13 female and 10 male, with an age range of 22-52 years. In order to ensure continuity across the four focus groups, specific questions were designed rather than relying on a topic guide. This decision was also made to improve the analysis of data. Questions used for the discussions were influenced by the literature and focussed on factors affecting meal choice when eating at work. These questions were also discussed with key industry stakeholders and included open-ended comment on the influences of food choice in workplace foodservice.

Procedure

Following its development, the question guide was tested and revised in discussion with industry stakeholders. Focus groups were administered in a quiet room in both the UK and Germany and lasted 45 minutes. Data were directly transcribed at the conclusion. Discussion was led by the same researcher and moderated with a colleague at transcription stage.

Data analysis

Data was transcribed verbatim and analysed using the qualitative data analysis programme NVivo 10 (Bergin 2011) as well as researcher experience. A thematic analysis approach was taken and common themes, differences and relationships identified. Data were coded deductively into themes and subthemes based on a coding frame derived from literature on factors influencing food choice in a real life setting. Themes were iteratively reviewed so that coding categories were adapted according to the data to achieve rigour.

Results

Preceding Factors for Making Food Choice

Participants of the study shared their experience from different styles of workplace. There was a common consent that there is less expectation of the food sold at work than food consumed at home or when eating out in a restaurant, especially in regards to taste and quality. Given participants' low quality expectations it was clear that there are preceding factors that act as barriers or facilitators to the use of workplace canteens as illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2 here

Table 2 Factors influencing the decision to eat in the workplace canteen

Factors	Definition
Taking a break	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Having a rest• Socialise with colleagues
Convenience	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Time constraint• Lack of alternatives• Not having to cook at home

Food Scandals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food fraud scandal: horsemeat • Food safety issue: Enterohaemorrhagic Escherichia coli (EHEC)
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Although there is little expectation for the quality of food served in a canteen it is a welcome break and used in order to meet and interact with other work colleagues. Furthermore, a workplace canteen offers many aspects of convenience; leaving work to buy food is often difficult given a lack of alternatives and time for lunch available. Additionally, being able to eat a hot meal at work was valued by participants living in a single household who then don't cook in the evening.

When eating at their workplace, participants are under the assumption that the food offered is going to be of an inferior standard than food prepared at home or in a restaurant. This perception of low quality was also influenced by media coverage of problems in the food chain such as the detection of horsemeat in beef products or the outbreak of Enterohaemorrhagic Escherichia coli (EHEC) in the summer of 2011 (Premanandh 2013; Schulz et al. 2014). Therefore, participants described how they adopted a system to protect themselves such as looking out for whole cuts of meats, staying away from meals such as burgers or opting for vegetarian meals.

Factors Directly Affecting Food Choice

Factors influencing food choice in this setting differ from factors affecting food choice made when preparing food at home or shopping for food. It is directed by the perception of lesser quality of mass produced food served and a setting where, consumers are presented with a whole meal and do not think about individual ingredients in the way they do when shopping for food. There were 11 different criteria that were of importance when making food choice in the workplace which was similar in Germany and the UK as outlined in Table 3, although detail under the themes varied UK to Germany. In the UK, there is acceptance of ethnic diversity and hence the wish for increased menu variety while in Germany there is distrust of additives and preservatives. Surprisingly there was also a greater awareness of environmental sustainability and carbon footprint in the UK. The criteria important to participants are: value for money, variety, naturalness, nutrition, portion size, taste and visual appearance, origin, animal welfare, environmental impact, fair trade and organic.

Table 3 here

Table 3 Criteria of importance influencing food choice made in canteens.

Criteria	Participants` Definition of the Value
Value for Money	Affordability, Criticism of healthy food at high cost Different views on paying premium for higher quality
Variety	Variety of options suitable for different physical needs Flexibility to change condiments Frequent Menu Rotation (GER) Incorporation of ethnic foods into menu (UK)
Naturalness	Fresh ingredients, Less heavily processed foods Limited use of additives and preservatives (GER)
Nutrition	Range of healthy foods, Lighter Options Preparation of food that preserves nutrients (UK)
Portion Size	Sufficient portion size reflecting value for money Criticism of healthy options being a smaller size
Taste & Visual Appearance	Heavy reliance on experience Visual Appearance does often not reflect dish description
Origin	Provenance of food Like to support the local community
Animal Welfare	Food that is produced in a way that respects the fair treatment of animals; especially important for meat products and eggs Avoidance of dishes containing meat that are cheap or heavily processed
Environmental Impact	Carbon footprint (UK) Support of local food and short supply chains
Fair Trade	Welcome of the use of the Fair Trade logo on some food items (UK)
Organic	Use of organic ingredients

Participants welcomed the idea of greater information provision and perceived it as their right to be provided with food information when eating in their workplace canteen. Whilst it was seen as an aid for decision making for some, the use and the ability to understand the information was criticised as being too difficult and inconvenient by others. Although in Germany, more information on additives and allergens is provided, it was criticised as being too difficult to interpret. Information on ingredients, especially provenance is welcomed but views about nutrition information, particularly calorie information were mixed with some consumers welcoming help towards a healthier lifestyle whilst other participants perceiving it as an overload of information impairing their enjoyment of food.

Discussion

Food choice is a complex phenomenon, influenced by the characteristics of the chosen food, characteristics of the consumer making the choice and the context in which the choice is made (Machín et al. 2014). Results of this study show that food choice in the workplace setting is not only influenced by underlying criteria of importance and characteristics of the food itself but also context dependent. Participants expect inferior quality of food but accept this is due to time constraints and the convenience of eating onsite. Although, there is little expectation of the food served, it is valued by employees because it provides a basis for interaction with other colleagues and the opportunity to take a break. The influence of convenience over other factors directing food choice has previously been recognised and plays an important role in the selection of food at work (Kamphuis et al. 2015). Notwithstanding, depending on the context, salient values such as taste and nutritional content are also compared and negotiated. An American study analysing factors influencing lunchtime food choice amongst working Americans, found that convenience was the most important factor followed by taste, cost and health (Blanck et al. 2009).

Participants found food choice difficult and indicated the challenge of identifying certain characteristics of food such as origin, nutritional profile and production responsibility. Food choice in public sector foodservice relates to a meal rather than to individual ingredients, which differs from food choice made in a retail setting. Therefore, there is a stronger reliance on experience and visual appearance of the meal compared to choice made in a retail environment where full information is provided on the label.

Food scandals can have an effect on food choice; the horsemeat incident and outbreaks of bacterial contamination of food are on consumers' minds for the duration of media coverage (Premanandh 2013). Although this influence is short-lived, there will be a temporary cessation of certain food groups such as processed meats. Food choice therefore tends to be based around the avoidance of

certain products and influenced by habit, especially choosing dishes that have been tasted before and are perceived as safe. However, this decision currently is not based on an informed evaluation of foods on offer. Consequently, foods high in salt and saturated fats such as chips and fried foods are chosen based on the assumption that they are safe to eat and additionally will taste good. Although people may be looking for healthy dishes, having adopted a strategy to avoid foods that are perceived to be of an inferior quality adds to the conflict of making a decision between healthy and indulgent food (Mai and Hoffmann 2015). In the absence of available information, making an informed choice is difficult and takes effort on the side of the consumer. It is easier to select dishes that are known, tried and tested.

Greater information provision is welcomed and even if this information is not being utilised it provides transparency and reassurance for the consumer. From a public health perspective, providing nutritional information at the point of purchase can provide the framework for measured food choice decisions (Geaney et al. 2013). However, nutrition information does not always lead to a major change in actual behaviour (Swinburn et al. 2011) and often only receives limited attention (Drichoutis et al. 2005).

Consumers are ambivalent; whilst some welcome the provision of nutrition information, others are either not making use of it due to a lack of understanding or a lack of interest (Visschers et al. 2013). The profile of consumers using nutrition labels varies greatly between a preference for directive and non-directive labels as well as chromacity (Bialkova and van Trijp 2011) but is generally associated with a higher educational background and income (Drichoutis et al. 2005). Nevertheless, improving understanding of information through the use of clear labels can have an effect on the dietary behaviour of those consumers who show an interest although tend not to influence those with little interest in food information (Visschers et al. 2013).

Even so, food labelling is not only a tool to communicate factual information but also acts as a representative of the food system (Bildtgard 2008). Consequently, consumers make inferences from labels about the foodservice operator that it is trustworthy through transparency and their willingness to share information (Tonkin et al. 2015). Furthermore, those consumers who have a low involvement and interest in the content of food might still be reassured through the transparency of providing information and the effort to reach out and establish a relationship. There is a complex interaction between consumer and label through a sequence of messages which consumers interpret with their own understandings (Eden 2011). Thereupon, labelling offers an opportunity to communicate food information and establish trust however, in order to reach out to

different segments of consumers with different involvements further approaches to re-establishing trust should be used alongside food labelling.

Lessons learned from marketing approaches and branding used in private food marketing can be applied to the provision of food information in the setting of the workplace both in the UK and Germany. Marketing approaches such as storytelling require action from operators but are also influenced by good practice and business ethics of actors in the private food marketing sector. This has reduced consumer scepticism towards the use of commercial marketing making these approaches more acceptable (Aschemann-Witzel et al. 2012).

Branding can be a useful tool for operators to communicate their commitment to credence quality signals such as animal welfare and organic sources. Brands act as a heuristic signal when making food decisions and are recognised for their effectiveness of highlighting credence quality attributes. Additionally, strong brands not only serve as a quality cue but also have the potential to influence taste and quality perception which can be low amongst employees eating in their workplace (Paasovaara et al. 2012). As a salient decisional factor, perceived quality influences consumers behavioural intention through attitudes to a positive brand image. Furthermore, brands have the power to provide signals about multiple quality attributes through their management of individual elements which can foster consumer trust (Lassoued and Hobbs 2015).

Encompassing local or green ingredients in dishes is a way of restoring disembedded trust, as consumers feel closely related to food products that come from their local area and perceive these to be of a higher quality (Nuttavuthisit and Thøgersen 2015). Communicating the commitment to meet consumer demands through brand image is a way of reassuring customers that foodservice operators act in their best interest. Notwithstanding, providing food information in such a manner must be accurate and in order to regain consumer trust must refrain from overemphasising and misleading consumers through 'nutri'-or 'greenwashing' (Chen and Chang 2013). As results of this study have shown, consumers are already critical of operators providing information for marketing purposes. Notwithstanding, menu labelling not only portrays food information but also acts as the key communication between operator and consumer. Therefore, as well as the literal message which is of relevance, it can also be used as a tool to make judgements about the food operators (Tonkin 2015) in the absence of face to face contact (Giddens 1994).

In the light of consumer ambivalence it is important to have a rounded approach combining aspects such as menu labelling with efforts to design an environment that fosters better dietary choices (Quintiliani et al. 2010). Therefore, interventions that focus on the individual can be complemented with an environmental approach such as 'nudging' in order to demonstrate understanding that

although individuals are responsible for their actions, choices are made in the context of the larger environment (Panjwani and Caraher 2014).

Although consumers are guided towards making healthier choices, the right to choose is not withheld. Enriching menus in workplace canteens achieves a greater acceptability compared to restricting choice and removing unhealthy dishes completely (Jørgensen et al. 2010). Policies incorporating information provision not only enable consumers to make healthier choices but also allow caterers to demonstrate transparency and foster consumer trust. Furthermore, using the workplace canteen as a setting for health promotion can offer a more economical option compared to interventions targeting individuals (Trogdon et al. 2009). Consequently, from a food operator point adapting strategies that foster a good relationship with their customers can also lead to a competitive advantage through its impact on promoting healthier behaviours in the workplace.

This research was an exploration into criteria that influence food choices made in workplace canteens. Findings of this study need to be considered in light of a number of limitations. The research conclusions are based on a small sample recruited from different workplaces and hence care must be taken with the generalisability of such data. Participants' emphasis on the importance of socially desirable aspects such as animal welfare might have been elevated during the discussions. Although there was a high level of participant engagement across all focus groups an anonymous survey design would allow establishing an order of criteria importance. This will form the next stage of research where the importance of each of the developed criteria will be evaluated through the use of a questionnaire adopting Best-Worst-Scaling.

Conclusion

Food purchasing habits have changed in a retail setting and when eating out commercially, leading to pressure on public sector foodservice to keep up with current consumer demands and expectations. Furthermore, the food service sector is in principle connected to both food producers and consumers which enables an influence in supply as well as a need to satisfy. Contemporary trends demonstrate that consumers put a high emphasis on local and traditional food. Additionally large consumer segments are becoming more socially responsible with high interests in eco-friendly and ethical business practices, sustainability, fair treatment of animals and carbon footprint. However, these trends are not always reflected when eating at work and there is currently very little information provided to the consumer despite a growing demand for more transparency. Consumers have the right to be provided with information about what they eat especially in light of the new EU regulation 1169/2011 where information on allergens has to be available through either labelling on the menu or availability on request. Understanding key drivers of food choice can allow food

operators to align their service with consumer preferences across different market segments. Results from this preliminary study begin to fill a gap in the current knowledge of consumer requirements in workplace canteens. Information provision in the food retail industry makes people believe that they are being given important evidence and currently there is a consumer demand for this information to be translated into eating out of home. Although consumers may not make use of all information provided, they are reassured by its presence. It is also a way for foodservice operators to demonstrate transparency and strengthen the relationship with their customers. This relationship can be encouraged through various forms of providing food information which when combined can enable operators to reach out to different segments of their consumers. The challenge for the foodservice industry is to provide products and services that facilitate and enhance positive food choice in all population segments especially in the workplace where meals are taken on a consistent basis.

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