**Boredom at Work and Job Monotony:**

An Exploratory Case Study within the Catering Sector

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Abstract

This paper presents an exploratory study that examines workplace boredom in monotonous catering sector jobs. It investigates whether or not boredom is associated with monotonous tasks and explores strategies for minimizing it. Data were collected from multiple sources that included observation, company documentation and interviews with management and unskilled staff engaged in simple, repetitive work in the catering department of a British university. The findings indicate that there is no linkage between boredom and monotonous tasks, and that job rotation and management support are the two key organizational mechanisms used to support the work of catering personnel. The reasons for the absence of boredom were found to be related to the workers’ job requirements, their interest in doing their jobs, the organization’s strategies for alleviating workplace boredom and the time lag of the tasks. The implications for human resource development (HRD) are discussed.

*Keywords*: boredom, human resource development (HRD), Investors in People (IIP), monotony, training

**Introduction**

Boredom at work, an unpleasant emotional state, has received little attention from contemporary organizational researchers (Fisher, 1998; Game, 2007; Loukidou *et al.,* 2009; Watt and Hargis, 2010), although research on emotion in the workplace has a long history. Much current emotion-related research has focused on concepts such as stress, morale, happiness and job satisfaction (see e.g., Pienaar and Willemse, 2008; Nadiri and Tanova, 2010), as these are perhaps considered more central to work performance than workplace boredom. However, it has been argued that the neglect of boredom in contemporary organizational studies could hinder theoretical developments relating to emotion at work (Loukidou *et al.,* 2009).

Research shows that boredom in the workplace is associated with various negative consequences. In the short-term, bored employees experience inattention, sleepiness and accidents (Cox, 1980; Drory, 1982; Fisher, 1993; O’Hanlon, 1981). In the longer term, boredom at work becomes associated with absenteeism (Dyer-Smith and Wesson, 1995; Kass *et al.*, 2001), staff turnover (Mann, 2007); low self-esteem, depression (Wiesner *et al.,*2005), dissatisfaction with the job and the working environment (Kass *et al.,* 2001; O’Hanlon, 1981), diminished performance efficiency, counterproductive work behavior (Bruursema *et al*., 2011) and a lack of general life satisfaction (Johansson *et al.,* 1978; Smith, 1981; Taylor, 1998). These consequences could have negative impacts not only on the well-being of employees, but also the operation of organizations. Thus, the causes of boredom and approaches to alleviate it warrant the attention of organizational researchers.

Boredom has typically been seen as the outcome of monotonous or repetitive tasks (Hill and Perkins, 1985; Loukidou *et al.,* 2009; Melamed *et al.,* 1995; Smith, 1981; Wyatt, 1929). For example, O’Hanlon (1981, p. 54) sees boredom as a “unique psychophysical state that is somehow produced by prolonged exposure to monotonous stimulation”. However, most of the research on boredom and jobs, which led to the development of this perspective, was conducted in manufacturing settings using quantitative research methods (Loukidou *et al.,* 2009; Smith, 1981; O’Hanlon, 1981).

Given the importance of the concept of boredom to the development of theory about, and the management of, workplace emotion, this study seeks to answer two research questions. First, is workplace boredom associated with monotonous service job tasks and second, what approaches can managers use to reduce workplace boredom? Specifically, the study has the following objectives:

1. To investigate whether the association between boredom and monotonous tasks found in manufacturing settings also exists in service settings.
2. To explore how organizations alleviate workplace boredom.

Data were collected from multiple sources in a British catering organization, through the exploratory case study approach. The catering industry was chosen as it employs a large number of people and makes a significant contribution to the national economy. The hospitality and catering industry in the UK employs over three million people and is the fourth largest employer (BHA, 2015). Operational staff in the industry, such as catering assistants and dishwashers, are generally neglected in mainstream human resource development (HRD) research and practice, although they play a key role in service delivery. This study is the first to examine the association between workplace boredom and monotonous tasks in the context of the catering sector, using the case study approach. The findings will provide important implications for understanding the causes of workplace boredom, and managerial strategies for minimizing it and for the development of frontline workers.

The paper begins by providing a review of concepts and studies related to boredom at work, relevant HRD issues and the key differences between manufacturing and service operations. It then explains the research methods used and the findings from the case study organization. It concludes by discussing the findings, limitations and implications of the study.

**Review of the Literature**

Within economically-rational scientific management, monotony and boredom at work have become a significant industrial relations problem (Johansson, 1989). Early in the 20th century, assembly line manufacturing saw jobs reduced to mindless routines across the industrial world (Ritzer, 1996; Taylor, 1947) in order to facilitate the quantification of the production process and maximize outputs (Ford, 1922; Starkey and McKinlay*,* 1993). Today, simulating assembly line management principles, neo-Fordist service and knowledge industries seek efficiency, predictability and worker control by scheduling simplified tasks in ways that are equally easily controlled. The fragmentation, specification and regulation of functions is thus becoming embedded across *all* sectors of the job market, from high status professional occupations to operational and support service work (Carroll *et al*., 2010; Fisher, 1993; van der Heijden *et al*., 2012). Scholars have warned of the dangers linked to increasing task repetition and to the overall monotony of work, as staff undertakes fewer and ever more simplified tasks (Coburn, 1979; Johansson, 1978; Ritzer, 1993; Shah and Mehta*,* 1998).

**Workplace boredom and monotonous tasks**

Boredom, a basic human emotion, has been seen as an unpleasant and deactivated emotional state (Fisher, 1993; O’Hanlon, 1981). There is no universally-accepted definition of boredom; Leary *et al.* (1986: 968) commented that various approaches have been used to conceptualize boredom “in terms of its situational antecedents, physiological correlates, phenomenological concomitants and behavioural consequences”. For example, Mikulas and Vodanovich (1993) defined boredom as “a state of relatively low arousal and dissatisfaction which is attributed to an inadequately stimulating environment” (p. 3). On the other hand, O’Hanlon (1981) saw boredom as a unique psychophysiological state which “comprises a set of interrelated emotional, motivational and cognitive reactions having a common biological basis” (p.76). Fisher (1993, p. 396) defined boredom as “an unpleasant, transient affective state in which the individual feels a pervasive lack of interest in and difficulty concentrating on the current activity and feels that it takes conscious effort to maintain or return to that activity”. Although boredom has been given various definitions, the core idea is that it is an unpleasant, negative, and dissatisfying emotional state, wherein jobholders feel a lack of interest in the tasks they are performing.

Job monotony refers to tasks or jobs characterized by repetitiveness or lack of variety (Game, 2007). Johansson (1989) differentiated between ‘uneventful monotony’ and ‘repetitive monotony’. ‘Uneventful monotony’ is characterised by “almost constant stimulus conditions, with few and/or hardly noticeable events or changes” (Johansson, 1989, p. 366). These conditions may be found in the control rooms of process industries, where operators supervise complex technical systems, such as those used to produce electrical power. On the other hand, ‘repetitive monotony’, the focus of this paper, is defined as the “frequent repetition of the same stimuli, the same sequences of events, and body movements” (Johansson, 1989, p. 365). This is found in assembly line work, and in clerical work such as computer data entry.

The duration of the work cycle is the most frequently used criterion for the measurement of repetitive monotony. Extremely repetitive tasks – e.g., those carried out along an assembly line – may present cycle times of five to ten seconds. It was found that short-cycle (less than one minute) repetitive work had the highest impact on job satisfaction, psychological distress and sick leave (Melamed *et al.,* 1995). Akin to manufacturing tasks, some aspects of catering work are highly repetitive and have very short task cycle times. For example, in this case study, the cycle times involved in handing out food from the service counter to customers during peak hours and in clearing any uneaten food from the plates deposited on a conveyor belt were found to be as short as seven and five seconds respectively. A detailed description of catering workers’ duties is presented in a later section dealing with the participants’ work tasks. Unlike their manufacturing counterparts, however, catering workers need to interact with customers while carrying out their repetitive tasks. This study considers both the task similarities and differences and examines how these may influence the catering workers’ experience of boredom.

**Causes of boredom**

Research on the causes of boredom at work has focused on three aspects: task characteristics, individual differences (for example, personality, capacity and mental health) and the work environment (for example, colleagues and organizational control practices). This section focuses on task characteristics, as this study focuses on examining the association between boredom and simple repetitive catering sector tasks (for example, counter service of food, table clearing and cleaning).

Task characteristics have been seen as the main cause of workplace boredom. Jobs with characteristics such as repetitiveness and monotony provide job holders with low external stimulation which, in turn, results in a low level of internal arousal (Barmack, 1937; Fisher, 1993; Smith, 1981). This can lead to deterioration in attention (Fisher, 1993, 1998; Leary et al., 1986) and a lack of interest in the task. Two types of job characteristics are frequently mentioned to cause feelings of boredom. First, jobs which are simple, repetitive and can be carried out with little thought and attention, such as some assembly line jobs (Cox, 1980; Smith, 1981). Secondly, jobs which require vigilance and surveillance, such as keeping watch, inspection and security work (Fisher, 1993; Melamed *et al.,* 1995; Thackray *et al.,* 1977). These tasks require continuous attention but provide very little variety or stimulation in return.

Fisher (1993) identified three task variables which may explain why task characteristics may contribute to the feeling of boredom. The first is ‘quantitative underload’ which occurs when individuals have nothing to do, particularly when they are accustomed to performing a high level of activity. The second is ‘qualitative underload’ which results from tasks that are simple, repetitive and unchallenging. This is the focus of this study. The third is ‘qualitative overload’, which happens when individuals are asked to perform tasks that are too complex.

Catering workers are susceptible to boredom due to ‘qualitative underload’, as their task content has limited variety, and the interactions with customers can be common and repetitive. The performance of limited repetitive tasks can lead to a decrease in arousal, which in turn increases the likelihood of experiencing boredom.

**Empirical research on boredom and monotonous jobs**

Several empirical studies conducted in manufacturing settings show that workplace boredom is associated with simple, repetitive and/or monotonous tasks. For example, O’Hanlon’s (1981) review of studies on boredom and repetitive tasks reports that, in both actual and simulated working environments, there is empirical evidence that assembly tasks are associated with the experience of boredom. Geiwitz’s (1966) experiment found that boredom caused by a simple repetitive task is associated with low arousal and increased feelings of constraint, repetitiveness, and unpleasantness. A survey conducted by Caplan et al (1975; cited in Fisher, 1993) shows that boredom is positively associated with simple tasks. A number of other surveys found that 20% to 50% of assembly workers said that they were bored in their jobs (see e.g., Kornhauser, 1965; Smith, 1953; Turner and Miclette, 1962; Walker and Guest, 1952).

Empirical evidence from the service sector is very limited. As indicated earlier, very few studies on workplace boredom have been conducted in recent years, particularly in the service sector. Walker (2009) carried out an empirical study in the call center setting examining the influence of job boredom on employee incivility. Collecting data from an employee survey and a recorded sample of employees’ interaction with customers in a call center, the study found that repetitive interactions with customers and the service quality monitoring practices used in the firm contributed to employee boredom, which was found to be positively associated with incivility towards customers.

In general, research on the link between boredom and task characteristics mainly used quantitative methods to collect data and studied factory workers, individuals who perform vigilance or inspection tasks or volunteers for lab experiments. This approach cannot clearly explain the reasons behind the statistical results and the results are difficult to extrapolate to monotonous working situations in service settings. This study used a case study approach to collect qualitative data from both workers and management in order to overcome this weakness.

**Approaches to alleviating workplace boredom**

Since the mid-1960s, the most widely-used approach to alleviating boredom at work has been to change task characteristics through job redesign (Hales, 1987; Shackleton, 1981). Three common modes are: job enrichment, job enlargement and job rotation (Shackleton, 1981). Job enrichment involves changing the job content to increase the incumbent’s control and responsibility. Job enlargement increases the variety of similar tasks so that the incumbent can undertake a more extensive work role. Job rotation enables people to perform different tasks of similar complexity on a daily, weekly or monthly basis. Research has shown that these approaches alleviate boredom in monotonous manufacturing work by providing variety and additional stimulation (Bhadury and Radovilsky, 2006; Fisher, 1998; Johansson *et al.,* 1978). A small number of empirical studies conducted in service settings have indicated that job rotation has positive effects on employees and has the potential to reduce boredom. For example, Kelliher and Riley’s (2002) study of functional flexibility systems in two hotels reported that increased job satisfaction was achieved through a greater variety of work and opportunities to learn new skills. Nafei’s (2014) survey of 382 employees working in commercial banks showed that job rotation increased employee morale and motivation.

The essence of the three approaches mentioned above has been included in Hackman and Oldham’s (1976, 1980) Job Characteristics Theory (JCT). It indicates that jobholders will feel their work to be meaningful and become internally motivated to perform well if their jobs have characteristics such as skill variety, task identity and task significance. However, the nature and causes of boredom are not well-understood (Fisher, 1993), thus job design should not be seen as the only remedy to workplace boredom. One of the objectives of this study is to explore other approaches that may alleviate it.

Perceived organizational support (POS) and supervisor/management support have often been shown to be associated with positive employee outcomes (e.g., commitment, engagement and satisfaction). POS refers to the employees’ perception of the extent to which the organization values their contribution and provides them with adequate organizational support (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Based on social exchange theory, it is argued that employees tend to repay organizational support with their ongoing effective performance; therefore, those who positively perceive organizational support will present positive employee outcomes (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005; Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002). Research into POS found that it is positively associated with employee outcomes such as increased job satisfaction, increased organizational commitment and reduced withdrawal behaviours, such as turnover rates (Rhoades and Eisenberger 2002; Riggle *et al.,* 2009; Shanock and Eisenberger 2006).

Supervisor support is defined as ‘an interpersonal transaction that involves emotional concern, instrumental aid, information, or appraisal’ (Carlson and Perrewé, 1999, p. 514). A number of empirical studies have shown that supervisor support influences the degree to which employees’ engage in their work (Karatepe and Olugbade, 2009). For example, Bakker *et al*. (2007) found that those Finnish teachers who received adequate supervisor support were more engaged in their work. This study explores the role played by organizational and management support in promoting positive employee emotions and reducing boredom.

**Human Resource Development and unskilled workers**

In the field of HRD, there is a large amount of literature on the training and development of managerial and professional staff, but hardly any on workers in mundane and monotonous jobs. For many organizations, the principle of developing human resources is based on the theory of human capital, which views people as a resource equivalent to money or land. It is widely advocated that training increases employees’ capacity to contribute to companies’ competitive advantage, as well as productivity, profits and other returns (Berhman, 1996; Psacharopoulos, 1995). However, there is generally far greater investment in training and development for executives and management than for operational employees (Storey and Sisson*,* 1993). This may be because, for many organizations, the practical benefits of investing in people are to raise productivity and eventually increase profits or other returns. Therefore, from the perspective of ‘investment and profit’, organizations may not necessarily see the advantage of regular investments in low-grade staff performing routine tasks. Such attitudes may explain why the relief of workplace monotony and the development of people doing routine work are generally neglected among core HRD activities. The present research attempts to understand how HRD can better support an under-researched group of workers in HRD (i.e. workers who perform simple and repetitive catering tasks).

**Differences between manufacturing and service operations**

The literature has long noted that there are some fundamental differences between manufacturing and service operations. This section describes these differences and shows how they shape workers’ roles, to provide a basis for subsequent examination of catering workers’ experience of boredom.

The major distinctions between manufacturing and service operations have been explained as the nature of objects that are processed, the degree of customer contact, the characteristics of outputs, and the simultaneity of production and consumption (see e.g. Morris and Johnston, 1987; Murdick, Render and Russell, 1990; Nie and Kellogg, 1999; Sampson, 2000). In the manufacturing process, the objects that are being processed are usually raw materials or components (Morris and Johnston, 1987). For example, a food manufacturer transforms raw materials into cheese; a car factory assembles parts and components into cars. In service processes, the object that is being processed is people/customers (Morris and Johnston, 1987). For example, clinics provide services to patients and careers services provide career counselling to graduates. Customer processing operations require a high degree of customer contact and are typically labor-intensive (Murdick et al., 1990; Ellram, Tate and Billington, 2004), as services require the interaction of human beings. This is quite unlike material processing operations, where customers are usually away from the manufacturing process and less labor is required, as productivity can be gained through automated machinery.

Another main difference between manufacturing and service contexts is the tangibility, perishability and variability of outputs (Morris and Johnston, 1987; Sampson, 2000). The outputs of manufacturing are tangible (e.g. cars) and can be touched and seen, whereas those of services are intangible (e.g. counselling and consultancy services). The outputs from manufacturing can be stored if not sold while those from services cannot be stored or transported, as the service is intangible and perishable. Manufacturers generally produce homogenous end products through standardized production; in contrast, service provision tends to be heterogeneous: the service customers receive from workers may not always be the same.

The simultaneity of production and consumption is often cited as another fundamental difference between manufacturing and services (Sampson, 2000). In manufacturing, production does not occur at the same time as consumption. For example, car manufacturers produce cars then sell them to dealers or customers. Services, however, are generally produced and consumed simultaneously.

Some industries, such as the catering sector in this study, are a mixture of both manufacturing and service provision, and produce products (e.g. food) as well as provide services (e.g. counter service of food). This study focuses on the latter and on the workers who provide these services. In the catering industry, the workers’ key task is to provide service to customers; the outputs are intangible, perishable and variable; and production and consumption take place simultaneously. Compared with workers in manufacturing, catering workers have frequent contact with customers and provide intangible services to customers who consume the services at the same time as they are produced. Like most manufacturing workers, however, a significant part of catering work is performing repetitive tasks (e.g., fetching food from the counter and clearing tables). Does the performance of repetitive tasks lead catering workers to experience boredom like that found in the manufacturing setting? Do the different task requirements in catering services (e.g. frequent customer contact and delivering intangible services) influence workers’ experience of boredom? These task characteristics are unique to the service setting and have not been addressed in previous boredom research which has mainly been conducted in manufacturing firms. The next section presents the methods used to investigate the research questions.

**Research Methods**

**Research design and philosophy**

The present research employed a qualitative exploratory case study method. This approach was used as the aims of the study were to explore in depth a certain organizational phenomena (i.e. the association between boredom and repetitive catering sector tasks) and to gain detailed, contextual descriptions of how workers see their jobs and how they view the relationship between boredom and monotonous work. Exploratory case studies are often used to explore new insights, to expand understanding of phenomena and/or to assess the phenomena in a new light, with the goal of developing pertinent ideas and hypotheses for further inquiry (Scapens, 1990; Yin, 1984, 2003). In light of the lack of in-depth field studies on workplace boredom in the service sector, the present study used the method to study one catering organization in depth to examine the association between workplace boredom and monotonous tasks. The relationship between boredom and monotonous jobs was examined by analyzing data collected from interviews with individuals who performed simple and repetitive jobs and observing them at work. The organizational approaches to alleviating boredom were investigated through analyzing primary data collected from managerial staff and secondary data collected from a range of sources.

The use of the qualitative approach is in line with the author’s philosophical position of interpretivism (Burrell and Morgan, 1979; Denzin and Lincoln, 2011; Schwandt, 2000). The author believes that, ontologically, workplace boredom, a human emotion, does not exist objectively and independently from human experience. Rather, it is an emotional state that is subjective and can be influenced by external factors. Epistemologically, our knowledge of boredom should therefore be obtained through the understanding and interpretation of workers’ opinions, experience and feeling. Methodologically, therefore, qualitative data collection and analysis methods are considered more appropriate for studying boredom than quantitative methods which are more suitable for investigating objective facts but have limited capability to capture subjective emotional experience.

**Research setting and participants**

The research was conducted at University Catering [1] (UC), in the catering department at a British University. UC is a private company that started business in 1994 (UC, 2011) [2]. It was chosen for study as most employees, such as catering assistants and dishwashers, carry out repetitive, monotonous work. UC is a university-wide franchise for restaurant, bar, conference and other hospitality services.

At the time of the research, the catering department employed four managers, ten supervisors, 30 catering assistants, eight dishwashers and 25 students on part-time contracts. In total, 29 employees participated in the study, including one HR manager, two supervisors, 21 catering assistants and five dishwashers. A combination of purposive and snowball sampling was adopted. The workers’ job titles and job content were the main criteria considered in selecting the sample. The study focused on the experience of boredom in the tasks of washing up and catering assistance as these tasks resemble typical repetitive industrial jobs and involve a potential for high levels of monotony and lack of stimulation. One catering assistant, who is a friend of the researcher, acted as an important gatekeeper for this research; with her help, one supervisor, two dishwashers and six catering assistants were contacted and subsequently interviewed. The HR manager and the other supervisor were approached by the researcher. The remaining participants were referred by the workers who had been interviewed.

The interviewee profiles are shown in Table 1. The majority of the catering assistants are female, and all of the dishwashers are male. About 70% of the interviewees are aged between 35 and 45. The length of time they have been working at UC varies from four months to 14 years.

**Participants’ work tasks**

The traits of the work tasks of the catering staff were identified by the researcher through observations, and confirmed by the research participants in the interviews. The job responsibilities of the catering assistants involve counter service of food, and table clearing and cleaning. The main working location of the catering staff is the restaurant, which is located on the central campus and can accommodate about 200 people at any one time. The restaurant serves meals for students during term time, but is only open to conference attendees during vacations. There are about 17 people on each shift, including one supervisor, 13 catering assistants and three dishwashers.

The catering assistants usually perform only one main task each day – either counter service of food, or table clearing and cleaning. The task of serving food at the counter involves fetching and placing on a plate up to five kinds of food, according to customers’ requests. This task is highly repetitive in terms of frequent repetition of the same stimuli, events and body movements. During peak hours, the task can become very intense, with short time lags between customers: the catering assistants repeat the same routine about every seven to 18 seconds at these times. The task of clearing and cleaning tables is also highly repetitive; workers walk around the tables to collect used dishes and take them to the cleaning point. This task requires little thought and attention, and can also become very intense during peak times.

The dishwashing room is located at the exit point of the restaurant; used and dirty trays and plates are placed on a conveyor belt by customers or catering assistants, and then sent to the dishwashers. Dishwashers’ responsibilities include tray and plate clearing, placing plates and cutlery in the dishwashing machine, taking washed items out of the machine, and rubbish disposal. The dishwashers usually take on one or two tasks at each shift. Like an assembly line, one dishwasher stands beside the conveyor belt to collect trays and plates and clear rubbish into bins; another puts the cleared plates and cutlery into the dishwashing machine; and another takes out washed items when they are done. Their tasks are also characterized by high levels of monotony; in particular, clearing rubbish from plates can become extremely repetitive, with cycle times of about five to ten seconds.

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**Data collection**

The data were collected via observation, secondary sources and interviews with staff in the catering department. The researcher observed the catering assistants and dishwashers at work on several occasions, both before deciding on the research population, and during the data collection phase. Details of their job content and how they performed their work tasks were recorded. The secondary data collected included UC company documents, reports and website information. The background information on UC was collected from its website. Company documents and reports were collected from the HR department, which provided information about the policies for developing human resources, and the training and development programs provided for the catering assistants and dishwashers. The company reports and documents collected included the *UC Induction Training and Job Review*, the *Five-Year Training Plan*, *Job Talk* and the *Performance and Development Review*.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted on a one-to-one basis with the 29 research participants, who were categorized into three occupational levels: (1) catering assistant and dishwasher level, (2) supervisory level, and (3) HR management level. Interviews with catering assistants and dishwashers aimed to discover how they viewed their jobs and how they maintained interest in them. During these interviews, in order to avoid bringing bias into the research and labelling their jobs as repetitive/monotonous, the respondents were asked to describe their job content and to explain how they felt about it. Only when a respondent replied that his/her job was repetitive, routine or monotonous were more details sought. Sample questions included “How do you feel about your job?”, “When you are working, what are your typical feelings/emotions?”, and “What keeps you interested in the job?”.

Interviews with supervisors were conducted to explore how they dealt with workplace boredom, if any; how they motivated staff; and how training and development were provided at lower levels of the organization. Sample questions included “Do any staff complain about feeling bored?” and “What methods do you usually use to motivate them and keep them interested in their jobs?”. The purpose of interviewing at the HR management level was to explore UC’s policies and strategies for the development of catering assistants and dishwashers. Sample questions included “What strategies does UC use to develop catering assistants and dishwashers?” and “What training and development activities have been provided for catering assistants and dishwashers?”. Three sets of interview questions were designed to match the three levels of informants.

Before the interviews, the aims of the study and the methods of data collection were explained to the interviewees. In addition, confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed to all the research participants. Permission to record interviews was given by all the interviewees. The interviews varied in length from 32 to 53 minutes.

**Data analysis**

The transcript of each interview was analyzed using thematic analysis. The analysis involved reading the transcripts several times to become familiar with the data, generating codes and labelling data, categorizing similar topics together, and identifying and analyzing themes relevant to the research question. It focused on three main themes: the relationship between monotonous work and boredom, management practices used to alleviate boredom, and related training and development issues.

A matrix was used to help identify themes and events. The respondents were placed along the top axis, and the main questions asked during the interviews were placed on the vertical axis. In the resulting grid, the details of responses were entered. Similar topics were clustered and turned into categories which were then reduced by grouping together related topics and identifying interrelationships. This enabled the researcher to compare, contrast and identify common themes and patterns. The themes identified in the documentation collected from UC were likewise reviewed, then sorted and grouped into categories.

The methods allowed the identification and analysis of the relationship between boredom and repetitive tasks that reflect the experience of catering workers, without unnecessarily imposing findings from the manufacturing setting. A potential risk of this type of analysis, however, is the researcher’s subjective selection and reporting of the themes (Braun and Clark, 2006). To minimize the potential bias, two approaches were used in the process of data analysis: 1) searching for and identifying themes that are directly relevant to the research questions; and 2) presenting themes and results that have a strong evidence base through triangulation of multiple data sources. The data collected from observations, interviews and documents were cross-checked to examine the nature of catering work, the association between boredom and repetitive tasks, and organizational approach to minimize boredom. Representative quotes from the interviews were used to support the analysis. The next section presents the empirical findings.

**Findings**

In this section, the findings are summarized and presented through two main themes and several sub-themes.

**Theme 1: Repetitive tasks, but not associated with boredom** The analysis of the interviews with the 21 catering assistants and five dishwashers gave a surprising result: when asked about the nature of their jobs and how they felt about them, all workers said that their jobs were repetitive, but they were not bored. Two main reasons emerged from the interviews to help explain why the workers did not feel bored as a result of performing their repetitive tasks. Firstly, those repetitive or routine tasks were not seen as boring undertakings in which things were always being done the same way, but as activities in which to settle. One catering assistant said:

*I don’t feel uncomfortable with the routine […] You get yourself all set in a different way into a routine.*

(Catering assistant F, 40-45 years old)

Due to their predictability, repetitive tasks also help workers perform tasks correctly. Routine seems to bring some measure of order to their work and helps them find security in predictability. One dishwasher said that he liked the routine because it was predictable:

*It helps you to do things correctly […] because you always know what to expect […] you know what people expect of you, you know what to do […] I was told what to expect and I accept it.*

(Dishwasher C, 40-45 years old)

Secondly, the workers were not bored because they were kept busy during working hours. Two catering assistants said how their tasks kept them busy and prevented them from developing feelings of boredom:

*It’s routine, same thing day in, day out […] I don’t feel bored, I don’t get a chance [I am] always busy.*

(Catering assistant A, 35-40 years old)

*Personally, I enjoy the job […] I like it when it is busy. I don’t like it when there is nothing to do […] You can’t be bored because there is work to be done all the time […] I haven’t heard of a single person who has complained about the boredom.*

(Catering assistant N, 30-35 years old)

This indicates that UC’s job design was effective in preventing quantitative underload (i.e. not having enough to do) by keeping workers busy.

Overall, the workers’ attitudes towards their jobs were positive; no one indicated that they felt bored. The result is contrary to what has been found in manufacturing settings and suggests that repetitive catering sector tasks do *not* necessarily lead to boredom. This also implies that the jobs were well designed to fit workers’ ability and that the planning of manpower was efficient in keeping people busy during working hours. To explore further what caused them to enjoy their work without experiencing feelings of boredom, the workers were asked what kept them interested in their jobs. Below, the aspects that contribute to the workers’ positive attitudes towards their jobs are presented.

**Aspects that keep workers interested in their jobs** The worker gave many reasons for what kept them interested in doing their jobs including interest in working in service industries, the need for money, supportive management, good staff welfare, teamwork and the job rotation system (see Table 2). Of the six reasons, interest in working in service industries was mentioned by all the respondents. Money, supportive management, and job rotation were mentioned by the majority of the respondents.

Nine catering assistants said that serving food at the counter and opportunities to talk with customers were among the main reasons why they enjoyed doing the catering service tasks. One respondent said:

*You meet people, it’s nice talking to people. I like meeting them, I like giving them a service.*

(Catering assistant O, 45-50 years old)

Because of this, the respondent did not mind that most of the job was repetitive in nature. This indicates that social interaction is an important factor contributing to the absence of boredom in the service setting, which is often limited in manufacturing settings. The need for money was another key factor for keeping the workers interested in the job without causing the feeling of boredom. As one dishwasher said:

*It’s dirty, clammy, you get soiled […] it’s very tiring. For you to be interested in the job […] a high sense of motivation must be there, otherwise you can very easily give up […] the fact that I need money, which is the main motivation […] that helps me to close my mind to anything else […] I can soil my hands, I know that is how to earn the money that I want.*

(Dishwasher A, 35-40 years old)

The support they received from management was identified as another key boredom-alleviating factor. Respondents appreciated the fact that managers did the washing up and cleaned the tables alongside them at busy times. A dishwasher described how the supervisors and managers worked with them and how he felt about it:

*When there are a lot of people [customers], managers just take off their jackets and come into the wash room and you do the washing up with them […] So if a supervisor or manager is doing the kind of thing that you’re doing, why can’t you do it? […] They won’t leave you alone, they never stand around […] you find them clearing up tables, pushing trolleys together with you […] I feel very happy when they come […] because it makes you realize that they know the job is very important.*

(Dishwasher D, 30-35 years old)

He continued to describe how he felt about his supervisors and managers:

*The supervisors and managers are very good, they are appreciative, they always say thank you very much at the end of the day […] they’ll tell you what to do, they’ll encourage you to do things […] if you are not working fast enough, they’ll simply say ‘Can we speed up? We are behind time; people [customers] are coming’.*

One catering assistant expressed similar appreciation towards the management:

*They [the supervisors and managers] are excellent […] In the first few days working here, I remember being impressed by the managers and supervisors […] they helped to clear tables during the busy hours […] I appreciated that they could give us a hand when we were really busy. I felt that they were worthy of respect because they did not just ask their subordinates to do the jobs [...] All the staff worked hard to achieve the same goals […] we wanted to ensure that the customers had their meals during their limited break time.*

(Catering assistant K, 30-35 years old)

In summary, the findings from the interviews with the catering assistants and dishwashers furnished a surprising result: they did not experience workplace boredom during the routine performance of highly repetitive catering tasks. The main aspects that kept them interested in their jobs were their interest in working in a service industry, financial reward, supervisory support and the job rotation system. The first two aspects are related to the workers’ motivation for doing the job whilst the latter are organizational approaches to alleviating boredom.

**Theme 2: Organizational policies and practices for alleviating boredom and developing employees**

UC’s approaches to minimize the risk of staff being bored and the training and development activities provided for workers were explored through interviewing two supervisors and the HR manager and collecting company documentation. It was found that the use of job rotation and the gaining of the Investor in People award were the two main approaches used by UC to minimize staff boredom and facilitate staff training and development. The details of these two organizational approaches are reported below.

**Job rotation** The supervisors’ main responsibilities include the daily allocation of jobs and tasks to workers, helping staff to solve problems, and checking to ensure that appropriate standards were achieved. They stressed in the interviews that the workers for whom they were responsible did not suffer from boredom at work resulting from the repetitive nature of the tasks. They stated that the only time staff complained was when the restaurant was quiet – i.e. there were no customers to serve. This indicates that boredom was caused by *quantitative* underload (i.e. not having enough to do) rather than *qualitative* underload (i.e. tasks characterized by repetitiveness or monotony). They attributed the lack of overall boredom to the job rotation system. One described how it operated and prevented boredom:

*In here [a coffee bar], six people are employed, so we split the shift into six jobs, so each day they change around. They don’t have the same job each day […] for example, one day you work on the counter, then you move on to cleaning up or tidying up […] So it is important to allow change, not making it repetitive, not making it boring.*

(Supervisor A, 40-45 years old)

The other supervisor mentioned that the job rotation system made staff move around between tasks and between units (the restaurant and the coffee bar), which prevented them from getting bored:

*So on the day-to-day job rotation, there are not only different jobs but also different units in their own working areas […] so a lot of movement is going on there, stopping people from getting bored […] so they [the workers] won’t get stuck in the one job.*

(Supervisor B, 35-40 years old)

She indicated how the job rotation system benefits the workers:

*In one way, we call it multi-skilling. This means that your staff member has more than one role, which makes them better at their job, makes them feel more secure.*

As part of a supervisory performance and development programme, the supervisors were given training in people management skills. Maintaining motivation was an important component of their work. The supervisors said that they used verbal encouragement and non-verbal action to motivate people. They praised staff on a day-to-day basis, saying things like “you did really well today” or “that’s a really good job”. In addition to verbal encouragement, they stated that they made an effort to work with their staff as a team, sharing their work. The supervisors saw helping and sharing their subordinates’ tasks as part of their work, but they did not realize that working with their subordinates (e.g., cleaning tables and pushing trolleys together with their subordinates) made a powerful impact on maintaining workers’ interests in their jobs and avoiding the feeling of boredom – to almost the same extent as job rotation (see Table 2).

**Investors in People** The key finding from analyzing the company documents and the data collected from the interview with the HR manager was that UC employs a linked HRD and HRM strategy to motivate and develop its catering assistants and dishwashers. The approaches used include staff welfare, appraisal, job design, developing the motivation and commitment of employees, systematic manpower planning, and affiliation with the Investors in People (IIP) scheme.

Among the approaches, IIP was seen as an important tool for developing staff at all levels. UC has received the IIP award three times. IIP is the UK’s national standard for the quality of training and development. It was introduced in 1991 with the aims of raising employer commitment to staff development and helping employers to improve performance by linking people development to the objectives of their businesses (Investors in People, 2013). To obtain the award, organizations have to work with the areas in the IIP framework that suit their business needs and to demonstrate that they have sound learning and development practices in place to allow employees to contribute to the performance of the organization.

Some researchers have examined IIP’s impact on hospitality and tourism services, and concluded that it may help organizations to generate training activities and deliver a quality service (see e.g., MacVicar and Brown, 1994; Maxwell *et al.,* 2001). Others have been more critical (see e.g., Berry and Grieves, 2003; Emberson and Winters, 2000), they see IIP as a prohibitively costly, over-marketed panacea, doubt claims that the award is an effective change-management tool, and see no connection between IIP and improved training, skills and productivity. In spite of this, there were strong claims at UC for what had been achieved in the process of gaining IIP recognition. The HR manager claimed that IIP allowed UC to strengthen its linked HRD and HRM strategies. Rationalizing the company's success, she saw IIP as a framework for taking the company forward, serving as a standard to test commitment to the training system and identify ways in which it might be improved. For her, IIP helped to make training efficient and effective, through better evaluation and targeting. The HR manager described how IIP contributed to the organization:

*A lot of IIP is about structure, process […] It has provided a lot of business benefits as well as structure […] because if you follow the systems you put in place to get IIP […] consistently, automatically some training and development issues will be addressed as long as you just follow the systems; and I think IIP makes it easy to do that.*

IIP at UC existed to support not only organizational, but also individual, growth and development. IIP was seen as a means to encourage people to undertake more tasks and responsibility in their work area and get more training and development in return. For an individual’s learning and development planning, IIP made sure the training activity was well structured. The HR manager indicated that IIP provided, indirectly, a better service to customers; she explained why IIP benefits customers:

*Because you develop more consistent training and development […] it might not be perfect, but you’ve got a way of measuring how consistently you deliver something now […] So I think in the long term it does deliver a benefit to the customer because it means people are more consistently trained.*

The HR manager admitted that the process of winning the IIP standard took effort, in terms of time and money, but the advantages were thought to be considerable and would continue in the long term to benefit both individuals and the organization.

In brief, consistent with the findings from interviews with the workers, the supervisors reported that their subordinates were not bored. Their main strategy for minimizing staff boredom was the job rotation system and the main methods used to motivate their subordinates were working with them as a team and praising them every day. The findings gained from analysis of the company documentation and from the interview with the HR manager indicate that UC employs a linked HRD and HRM strategy as an approach to developing its catering staff. Among the strategies, IIP was seen as an important tool in developing staff at all levels.

**Discussion**

Most research on workplace boredom has been conducted in manufacturing settings (Loukidou *et al.,* 2009; Smith, 1981; O’Hanlon, 1981) and task monotony has been seen as the main cause of boredom (Hill and Perkins, 1985; Loukidou *et al.,* 2009; Melamed *et al.,* 1995; Smith, 1981; Wyatt, 1929). In contrast with the arguments and findings in the literature, this study found that boredom was *not* associated with simple and repetitive tasks within the catering organization. Based on the result of the data analysis, the absence of boredom found by this study can be explained by a combination of five main reasons. These were related to the workers’ job requirements, their interest in doing their jobs, the strategies adopted by the organization to alleviate workplace boredom and the time lag of the tasks.

The first explanation for the absence of boredom among the catering workers is that their jobs require and enable them to interact with customers, which is in contrast to the low customer contact required of manufacturing workers (Murdick et al., 1990). For example, catering assistants need to interact with customers when serving food at the counter. Many of them said that they enjoyed the social interaction and gave accounts such as ‘it’s nice talking to people’ and ‘I like giving them a service’. Although their tasks involve the repetitive element typically observed in the manufacturing setting, the social interaction gave them intangible emotional rewards stemming from the customers’ greetings, smiles and thankfulness. Such human interaction and emotional rewards are generally absent in manufacturing contexts. Hospitality is seen as a behavior that involves showing a friendly and generous reception of guests (Hemmington, 2007); it is evident from the present study that the workers enjoyed being hospitable by providing services to customers and interacting with them and that the social interaction required in the catering industry increased the workers’ emotional arousal and helped reduce feelings of boredom. This thus indicates that monotonous tasks do not necessary lead to boredom and that social interaction can help mitigate the potential negative effect of repetitive tasks.

The second explanation is that the workers are interested in doing their jobs. All of them expressed that they were interested in working in service industries. Interest is considered to share conceptual space with intrinsic motivation (Fredrickson, 1998; Deci and Ryan, 1985); it generates “a feeling of wanting to investigate, become involved, or extend or expand the self by incorporating new information and having new experiences with the person or object that has stimulated the interest" (Izard, 1977: 216). Interest is one of the four positive emotions included in Fredrickson’s (1998) seminal broaden-and-build model, which posits that positive emotions help broaden an individual’s scope of attention and action and build his or her physical, intellectual and social resources. It can be argued that people who are interested in what they are doing are less likely to experience boredom, because they are likely to concentrate on their tasks, find them stimulating, and/or experience pleasant, positive and satisfying emotions.

The third explanation for the absence of boredom is management support. The interviews with the workers revealed that they were highly appreciative of the support given by their supervisors and managers. They praised the management for helping their work and working with them (e.g., washing up, cleaning tables and pushing trolleys). Through the support they received, the workers realized management valued their work; in return, they were more engaged in their work, which prevented disengagement and boredom. This result is consistent with the finding that supervisor/management support can promote positive employee outcomes (such as work engagement, see, e.g., Bakker *et al*, 2007).

The fourth explanation is the continual change in task and skill variety through job rotation. In UC, job rotation was used to provide variety and opportunities to learn new skills, and was seen by the supervisors as a main contributor to the absence of boredom. This supports the large amount of job design research embedded in Hackman and Oldham’s (1976, 1980) Job Characteristics Theory (JCT). JCT indicates that the presence of certain job characteristics (e.g., skill variety, task significance) increases the intrinsic motivation of jobholders, which over time leads to greater overall job satisfaction and higher-quality work outcomes (Oldham and Hackman, 2010).

The fifth explanation may be that the catering staff’s work has a longer and uneven time lag between repetitive tasks. Although they were performing repetitive tasks, the time lag between the repetitive tasks is longer and uneven (i.e. cycle times vary during peak and off-peak time) compared with that of typical assembly line work. The result, therefore, suggests that prolonging the cycle time of repetitive tasks is helpful in mitigating boredom.

Based on the discussion and the findings of the previous studies reviewed, a model of the factors influencing boredom was developed for future research, and is shown in Figure 1. The model shows that repetitive tasks positively influence (I+) boredom (i.e. repetitive tasks lead to boredom). This relationship is based on the findings of the previous research reviewed earlier. It also shows that customer contact and social influence, interest in the job, management support, job rotation and long and uneven time lags between tasks negatively influence (I-) boredom (i.e. these factors mitigate feelings of boredom). These relationships are based on the findings of the present study as discussed above.

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Insert Figure 1 about here

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**Implications for Research and Practice**

This study has three main implications for research and practice. First, it indicates that the association between boredom and task monotony found in manufacturing settings may not be applicable to service settings because of a key difference in task requirements: customer contact. A significant difference between catering and manufacturing tasks is that the former require interaction with customers and therefore working in a more open and dynamic context. In the latter, however, such interactions are typically limited and workers are mostly confined in a closed context. It is evident from the workers’ responses, such as ‘you meet people, it’s nice talking to people’ and ‘I like it when it is busy’, that social interactions with customers contributed to their positive emotion and reduced the risk of boredom. This major task difference means that the finding from research conducted in manufacturing settings that boredom is associated with repetitive tasks may not be widely found in service settings. Further research comparing service and manufacturing organizations is needed to verify this.

Second, the study suggests that boredom can be regulated by changing workers’ perceptions of the job and the intensity and variety of their tasks. Management support had an importance influence on the catering workers’ perception of the value of their job. The outcomes of this study would have been very different if management in UC did not work with the workers and provide support when necessary. HRD professionals are therefore suggested to ensure that line managers and supervisors are aware of the importance of providing employees with support when necessary, and showing employees their work is valued. Furthermore, the study shows that UC’s job design was effective in preventing both quantitative and qualitative underload by keeping workers busy and using job rotation respectively. This suggests that it would be beneficial for organizations and HRD professionals to devote greater attention to the job design of frontline workers in order to mitigate negative workplace emotions.

Third, this study raises questions of how HRD can better support groups of people often ignored in HRD research and practice. Mainstream HRD research and practice has largely focused on the development of management and professional staff with very little attention on operational employees. Operational staff, such as catering assistants in the catering sector, often play a boundary-spanning role and are critical in the service delivery process. They represent the organization to customers and act as an important source of information about customers’ needs and requests (Karatepe, 2012). Their developmental needs, therefore, should not be neglected and a planned and proactive approach should be taken to support and develop them. UC’s efforts in raising the quality of training and development through the IIP framework shows that the organization recognized that people at all levels of the organization were crucial to its business goals, and that improved operational performance may be associated with continual investment in employee development across the organization, including those in low grades doing monotonous work.

**Limitations**

This study has two main limitations. First, the finding that boredom is not related to monotonous tasks cannot be generalized to other service settings because only a single organization was studied. Nevertheless, this study is concerned with generating an initial relationship between boredom and monotonous tasks in the service setting, to provide new insights for future research, rather than providing statistical generalizations. Yin (2003) explains that the aim of doing case studies is to make “analytical generalization, in which a previously developed theory is used as a template with which to compare the empirical results of the case study” (p. 32-33), rather than making statistical generalizations as “cases are not ‘sampling units’ and should not be chosen for this reason” (p.22). Scapens (1990) also expresses a similar view, stating that those researchers who adopt a sampling logic seek to provide statistical generalizations, while researchers who adopt the logic of replication seek to produce theoretical generalizations.

Second, the study examined only one potential cause of boredom (i.e. task characteristics with a specific focus on qualitative underload), and did not cover other factors, such as individual differences and organizational control mechanisms (e.g. service quality monitoring). This is because it is only feasible for a study to focus on a small number of independent variables if it is to provide an in-depth analysis and explanation for the issues under study. To fully understand the causes of boredom at work, further research is required to examine more potential causes and investigate the effect of such causes in the context of the service sector.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

This study suggests the need for further research into workplace boredom in unskilled and service sector jobs. Previous research on boredom largely employed quantitative approaches and was conducted in either manufacturing organizations or experimental settings; to gain a better understanding of workplace boredom, it is suggested that further research is carried out in a range of service organizations and using qualitative methods. In addition to job rotation, the present study found that social interaction with customers, management support, and worker interest are also important factors in alleviating boredom, and further investigation of these is recommended for future studies.

There are still many unclear aspects to workplace boredom; for example, why boredom is not always associated with monotonous tasks, what determines the experience of boredom, how boredom relates to other workplace emotions, how organizations alleviate workplace boredom, how individuals cope with boredom and the process through which they do this. All of these issues are worthy of scholarly attention, and a more complete examination of the issues would contribute to the theoretical perspectives on HRD, workplace well-being and emotion.

**Conclusions**

Boredom is a common emotional state in workplaces in both industrial and post-industrial knowledge economies. Research into workplace boredom, however, has been neglected by contemporary organizational researchers – even in light of Fisher’s (1993) call for more studies two decades ago. This study offers an important insight into catering frontline workers’ experience – an under-researched group of actors in HRD - and makes a contribution to the research on boredom by increasing our understanding of the association between boredom and monotonous tasks, and organizational approaches to alleviating boredom. This study was the first to explore the association between boredom and repetitive tasks in the context of service jobs using the case study approach. Through the collection of data from multiple sources, it provides a detailed contextual explanation as to why boredom is not experienced by catering staff and what organizational approaches have been used to prevent workplace boredom. The phenomenon of boredom requires the attention of HRD researchers and practitioners because many jobs are characterized by routine and repetition (Phillips, 2008) as organizations continue to formalize and routinize work procedures. A good understanding of workplace boredom and approaches to alleviate it is central to constructing and realizing a full picture of emotion in the workplace, and to tailoring task arrangement and training interventions for individuals whose jobs contain monotonous elements.

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**Notes**

[1] This name is a pseudonym.

[2] The UC reference has been anonymized.

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**Table 1 Demographics of the research informants**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Interviewee** | **Sex**  **(M/F)** | **Age**  **(years)** | **Job seniority**  **(years-months)** |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| **Level 1** | Catering assistant A | M | 35-40 | 10*-*0 |
|  | Catering assistant B | F | 30-35 | 1*-*8 |
|  | Catering assistant C | F | 40-45 | 6*-*6 |
|  | Catering assistant D | F | 40-45 | 2*-*0 |
|  | Catering assistant E | F | 35-40 | 3*-*0 |
|  | Catering assistant F | F | 25-30 | 1*-*6 |
|  | Catering assistant G | F | 40-45 | 6*-*0 |
|  | Catering assistant H | F | 40-45 | 2*-*6 |
|  | Catering assistant I | F | 35-40 | 1*-*3 |
|  | Catering assistant J | F | 40-45 | 4*-*0 |
|  | Catering assistant K | F | 30-35 | 1*-*0 |
|  | Catering assistant L | F | 35-40 | 0*-*10 |
|  | Catering assistant M | F | 45-50 | 11*-*0 |
|  | Catering assistant N | F | 30-35 | 4*-*6 |
|  | Catering assistant O | F | 45-50 | 9*-*0 |
|  | Catering assistant P | M | 40-45 | 5*-*0 |
|  | Catering assistant Q | F | 40-45 | 1*-*0 |
|  | Catering assistant R | F | 25-30 | 0*-*5 |
|  | Catering assistant S | M | 35-40 | 0*-*7 |
|  | Catering assistant T | F | 35-40 | 5*-*0 |
|  | Catering assistant U | F | 40-45 | 1*-*2 |
|  | Dishwasher A | M | 35-40 | 7*-*0 |
|  | Dishwasher B | M | 30-35 | 0*-*4 |
|  | Dishwasher C | M | 40-45 | 1*-*6 |
|  | Dishwasher D | M | 30-35 | 3*-*0 |
|  | Dishwasher E | M | 35-40 | 1*-*10 |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| **Level 2** | Supervisor A | F | 40-45 | 14*-*0 |
|  | Supervisor B | F | 35-40 | 0*-*5 |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| **Level 3** | HR manager | F | 40-45 | 5*-*0 |
|  |  |  |  |  |

Table 2. Reasons given by workers for remaining interested in their jobs

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Reasons** | **Number of employees**  **(N= 26)** |
| Interest in working in service industries | 26 |
| The need for money | 21 |
| Supportive management | 21 |
| Job rotation system | 20 |
| Teamwork | 17 |
| Good staff welfare | 14 |

**Figure 1. A model of the factors influencing workplace boredom**

**Repetitive/monotonous tasks**

**Customer contact and**

**social interaction**

**Workplace boredom**

* An emotional state of relatively low arousal.
* An unpleasant, negative, and dissatisfying emotional state.

**Interest in doing the job**

**Management support**

**Job rotation**

**Long and uneven time lags between repetitive tasks**

Notes: I+ represents a positive influence.

I- represents a negative influence.

**Appendix. Interview Guide**

***Interview questions for catering assistants and dish washers***

Q1: How long have you been working here?

Q2: Why did you choose this job?

Q3: Was your previous job the same as this one? What kind of job was it?

Q4: Could you please describe your typical working day (what you do from arriving at work until you leave).

Q5: How do you feel about your job? Do you like it?

Q6: When you are working, what are your typical feelings/emotions (e.g., happy, bored, satisfied…)?

(If answer is ‘bored’: Q7–Q12)

Q7: How often do you feel bored? Rate the frequency with which you have felt bored while at work during the past week.

Q8: When you feel bored, what do you usually do?

Q9: How do you keep yourself interested in the job?

Q10: Do you think the feeling of boredom has any influence on your job performance? How?

Q11: Do you think your boredom is due to the nature of work (e.g. lack of variety or complexity), your personality, or your work environment (e.g. people or organization control)?

Q12: What are the main characteristics of your personality?

(If respondents answer they do not feel bored: Q13–16)

Q13: Is this because of the nature of your work, your personality or your work environment? What keeps you interested in your job?

Q14: What do your co-workers think of their jobs? The same as you?

Q15: Do you think the attitude you have has been influenced by your co-workers or supervisors?

Q16: Do you think you influence each other?

Q17: Did your organization provide any on-the-job training in the past six months? If so, what kind of training was it? About how many times? When was the last time you attended a training course?

***Interview questions for supervisors***

Q1: How long have you been working with UC?

Q2: Was your previous job the same as this one? How long did it take to become a supervisor?

Q3: Did the company provide you with training in how to supervise people?

Q4: In this job, what workers do you supervise (give titles, e.g. catering assistants, dish washers…)? Please describe their job content.

Q5: Does the company provide any pre-job or on-the-job training for them? What kind? How long? How often? Any future plans?

Q6: Do you think they need more training or motivation?

Q7: Could you please tell me how you supervise them? Do you have a particular strategy?

Q8: Their jobs are repetitive in nature. Do any staff complain about feeling bored? If so, how do you deal with this? What methods do you usually use to motive them and/or keep them interested in their jobs?

Q9: Do you think the feeling of boredom at work is a problem for the hospitality industry?

Q10: What is the best way to deal with the feeling of boredom?

***Interview questions for the Human Resource manager***

Q1: What is the relationship between UC and the University?

Q2: What HRD and HRM strategies does UC use to develop managers and catering assistants? What kind of training and development activity is provided for catering assistants and dish washers? How often? Any future plans?

Q3: One staff member that I interviewed mentioned that supervisors/managers always work with them as a team. What makes them do this? Has any special training/motivation been provided for supervisors and managers?

Q4: In general, does the training and development plan apply mainly to managerial staff or all staff?

Q5: What is the turnover rate for full-time catering assistants and dish washers?

Q6: What are the advantages and disadvantages of having the IIP standard?

Q7: What are the benefits of IIP to the organization and staff?

Q8: Having been awarded IIP, what is the next stage of HRD and HRM strategy?