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Standing in the Queue, Seeing the Gaps: Rethinking Job Design and Staffing in Campus Foodservice

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Abstract

This study investigates the effectiveness of job design and workforce planning in a campus-based foodservice unit through a qualitative case study approach. Using observations, the research identifies critical operational inefficiencies stemming from understaffed kitchen roles, unclear task delegation, and inadequate coordination among service personnel. Drawing on established theories in human capital management, the study analyzes how these gaps in manpower planning and job clarity directly contribute to service delays and reduced customer satisfaction. Empirical findings are aligned with prior studies on university cafeterias, affirming that service quality and role effectiveness are essential to operational performance. The study proposes the concept of *responsive job design* as a theoretical refinement, emphasizing the need for adaptive staffing and dynamic task structuring in high-demand service contexts. Practical recommendations include role-specific task protocols, communication tools, and performance-linked scheduling strategies to enhance service efficiency. This research offers both theoretical and actionable contributions to the management of human capital in institutional foodservice settings.

Keywords

Job Design, Workforce Planning, Campus Cafeteria, Human Capital Management, Service Efficiency, Role Effectiveness.

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Introduction

On-campus food service operations are increasingly required to balance affordability, service efficiency, and nutritional quality to meet the evolving expectations of university communities. One such food service unit, located within a private university in West Java, Indonesia, offers a wide range of freshly prepared, health-conscious meals at prices accessible to students. Its offerings span across breakfast, lunch, and dinner, including local staples, pasta, desserts, and beverages. This positioning has made the cafeteria a highly frequented destination throughout the academic day. However, its growing popularity has exposed critical operational challenges - particularly during peak hours - such as late meal availability, long service queues, and delayed transactions. These inefficiencies point to underlying human capital management concerns, especially related to job design and workforce planning, which constitute the central focus of this study.

The operational challenges faced by campus-based food services underscore the critical importance of effective job design and workforce planning as integral components of human resource management. As highlighted in Dessler's framework, job analysis serves as the foundation for nearly all HR practices, including staffing, performance appraisal, compensation, and training. A well-conducted job analysis enables organizations to define the duties, responsibilities, and qualifications required for each role, facilitating both strategic planning and day-to-day operations. Moreover, Dessler emphasizes that job design must consider not only task allocation but also employee motivation and operational efficiency. This aligns with the view that job roles should be structured to optimize both individual performance and organizational output. Complementing this, a study stresses that performance management systems are most effective when they are closely aligned with job expectations and organizational goals. Their study underscores that clear communication of performance expectations, strategic alignment, and role clarity are essential to improving employee effectiveness (Dixon et al., n.d.). Accordingly, the present study integrates these theoretical perspectives to examine how structured job analysis and workforce planning can mitigate service delays and improve operational performance within campus food service settings.

Building upon the foundational concepts of job analysis and strategic alignment, contemporary human resource management further emphasizes the integration of workforce planning into broader organizational goals. According to HR Business Professional (Ann Gilley, 2009), workforce planning involves a systematic process of analyzing current workforce competencies, projecting future workforce needs, and developing strategies to bridge the gaps. This approach ensures that talent acquisition, role assignments, and performance expectations are not only functionally appropriate but also strategically aligned with service outcomes. Dessler (2020) reinforces this by positioning job design as a crucial mechanism for enhancing motivation and operational efficiency, especially in labor-intensive environments such as foodservice operations (Dessler, 2020). Additionally, performance management literature underscores that performance expectations must be derived from clearly defined job roles and regularly updated based on observed service delivery metrics. Taken together, these arguments

affirm the need for structured job descriptions and dynamic workforce plans in mitigating task ambiguity, particularly in fast-paced service contexts such as campus cafeterias.

Empirical studies across various university cafeteria settings further substantiate the relevance of structured job design and workforce planning to student satisfaction and service efficiency. A study by Cha and Seo (2019) identified menu variety, taste, price, and cleanliness as significant determinants of student satisfaction in campus dining environments (Cha & Seo, 2019). These factors closely relate to staff task clarity and resource planning, where clearly delineated responsibilities in food preparation, service, and maintenance directly impact operational performance. Similarly, Smith et al. (2020) found that food quality, ambience, value for money, and service quality all significantly influence dining frequency and satisfaction, suggesting that workforce structure plays a pivotal role in delivering these outcomes (Smith et al., 2020). Misiran et al. (2022) employed structural equation modelling to reveal that service quality and menu variety are the two most influential factors driving student satisfaction, reinforcing the importance of job effectiveness in kitchen and front-of-house operations (Misiran et al., 2022). Therefore, the present research is informed not only by theoretical principles of workforce design but also by empirical insights that link operational clarity to improved service outcomes in campus dining.

According to Firjatullah & Kusuma (2024), long queues during lunch hours at food courts waste customers' valuable time when they're already hungry. This not only reduces comfort but also shortens mealtimes, adds stress, affects productivity, and can even cut food court revenue as some customers choose to eat elsewhere. Given the centrality of human capital to institutional service outcomes, this study provides timely insight into how job design and workforce planning can be optimized within campus-based foodservice settings.

While existing research has focused largely on customer satisfaction metrics, this paper shifts the analytical lens to operational causes rooted in HRM structures. By adopting an autoethnographic case study approach, the research captures first-hand observations from the perspective of frequent service users - offering grounded reflections on role effectiveness, coordination gaps, and staffing inadequacies. This experiential perspective contributes a deeper understanding of how frontline inefficiencies emerge and how they might be addressed through more responsive job structuring and dynamic manpower planning. The following literature review will examine key conceptual models and prior research on job design, workforce planning, and performance alignment, providing a framework to contextualize the current study's analysis of role effectiveness and manpower gaps in a high-demand campus foodservice environment.

Literature Review

Human Capital Management in Campus Cafeteria Industry

Human capital management (HCM) in the context of campus cafeteria operations is a multidimensional construct that integrates staffing, capability development, and

performance management to meet the unique demands of institutional foodservice. Defined broadly, HCM refers to strategic approaches for acquiring, training, managing, and retaining the workforce to enhance organizational performance (Dessler, 2020). Within foodservice settings, particularly in university cafeterias, human capital plays a central role in determining service quality, operational consistency, and customer satisfaction. As noted in the *Handbook of Human Resource Management* (Werner et al., 2007), human capital systems must be tailored to the service environment, taking into account the high-paced nature of cafeteria operations, fluctuating peak-hour demands, and the frontline roles of food preparers and servers in shaping customer experience.

The campus cafeteria industry presents specific HCM challenges such as high turnover rates, role ambiguity, and the need for continuous adaptation to student expectations. Smith et al. (2020) emphasize that quality of service, value for money, and food and beverage options significantly influence students' satisfaction and dining frequency, making the competencies and attitudes of staff critical assets in service delivery. Similarly, Cha and Seo (2019) identify menu variety, cleanliness, and pricing as satisfaction drivers, all of which are executed through human resource functions such as hiring, training, and scheduling. Furthermore, Misiran et al. (2022) highlight that service quality remains the most influential determinant of student satisfaction in campus cafeterias, reinforcing the need for well-trained, responsive, and adequately staffed service teams. Therefore, effective HCM in campus dining contexts must involve systematic staff planning, continuous skill enhancement, and proactive performance monitoring to maintain alignment between student expectations and operational capabilities.

Job Design, Workforce Planning, and Performance Alignment in Campus Cafeteria

Early research by Hackman and Lawler (1971) included two social dimensions in job design namely dealing with others and friendship opportunities, but these were later removed when Hackman and Oldham (1975, 1976) developed their Job Characteristics Model, which focused primarily on individual tasks. Although the Hackman and Oldham model generated a tremendous burst of research, the social aspects of job design did not reappear until Salancik and Pfeffer's (1978) social information processing critique. Furthermore, empirical evidence demonstrates that "social characteristics explain significant amounts of variance in turnover intentions, organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and subjective performance" (Humphrey, Nahrgang, & Morgeson, 2007). In the context of campus cafeteria management, this suggests that employee performance is influenced not only by individual job design (e.g., cooking, serving, handling cash) but also by the quality of social interactions and networks among cafeteria employees, which ultimately affect service quality and customer satisfaction.

In 1976, Hackman and Oldham introduced the term "job characteristics" as a way to design or redesign jobs (work design) with the goal of ensuring that the redesigned (enriched) job is truly beneficial for both the worker and the organization. In other words, not all jobs are automatically beneficial simply by being modified or enriched. Two factors that influence this are job characteristics and organizational characteristics. According to

Hackman and Oldham (1976), job characteristics are a system or situational factor that can influence employee psychology, behavior, and motivation. This job characteristics model was also developed by Hackman and Oldham (1976) to address the limitations of Herzberg's job enrichment theory. Job characteristics theory proposes five main dimensions: skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback. These five dimensions influence work outcomes related to motivation, job satisfaction, absenteeism, and employee turnover. The job characteristics theory is used in this study to determine the critical elements of job designs that improve an employee's performance. In accordance with the proposals that this study wishes to convey regarding responsive job design, job re-design from classical job design theory to a service-oriented environment with fluctuating demand also takes into account the five important elements of job characteristics.

Marchington and Parker's work (1990) contributed significantly to job design theory by introducing the concept of employee involvement. According to Marchington and Parker (1990), employee involvement includes activities designed by management to increase workers' commitment to the organisation. This approach focuses on management's efforts to strengthen that commitment by providing employees with greater access to information and opportunities to participate in decision-making. In the context of this study, employee involvement is also relevant to campus cafeteria management. For example, providing employees with opportunities to express their opinions whether in the form of input or the latest information about the cafeteria to upper management can foster greater commitment. Involving campus cafeteria employees in decision-making and ensuring that they have easy access to all necessary information is expected to improve overall employee performance.

Job design and workforce planning are critical components of human capital strategy, particularly in campus cafeteria environments where service efficiency is time-sensitive and labor-intensive. Job design refers to the process of organizing tasks, duties, and responsibilities into a unit of work to achieve specific objectives (Dessler, 2020). A well-structured job design not only clarifies role expectations but also enhances employee motivation, reduces redundancy, and supports performance alignment. In foodservice settings, this may involve delineating roles such as cooks, cashiers, and service personnel based on workflow needs and customer volume. Werner et al. (2007) further elaborate that workforce planning complements job design by forecasting staffing needs, identifying skill gaps, and developing strategies to align personnel deployment with organizational goals.

In campus foodservice contexts, aligning job design with performance expectations is particularly important due to operational complexity during peak hours. According to Lifang and Ali (2024), performance alignment is most effective when job responsibilities are clearly defined and matched with competency-based training and evaluation systems. Without such alignment, tasks may overlap, bottlenecks may emerge, and service quality may decline. Empirical studies support this connection: Cha and Seo (2019) found that

satisfaction with cleanliness, price, and food quality depends on the proper execution of specific staff functions. Similarly, Smith et al. (2020) confirmed that students' satisfaction increases when service delivery is consistent, responsive, and aligned with dining expectations. These findings suggest that operational success in campus cafeterias requires not only adequate staffing but also role clarity, effective scheduling, and performance systems that reinforce service excellence. Consequently, this study focuses on evaluating how current job structures and workforce planning strategies can be optimized to improve role effectiveness and service quality within a campus cafeteria setting.

Methodology

This study adopts an autoethnographic case study approach to explore how job design and workforce planning influence service delivery in a university-based cafeteria setting. Autoethnography is a qualitative method that combines personal narrative, systematic observation, and contextual reflection to generate insights from the perspective of an involved yet non-managerial participant (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011; Chang, 2008). This approach is especially appropriate when researchers are situated within the research context - not as operators, but as experientially embedded observers - able to access nuances of organizational behavior through repeated, situated interactions.

The research was conducted by two student-researchers who, over a two-week period, visited and dined at the cafeteria during weekday peak hours (11:00 to 13:00) - the time identified as having the highest customer traffic. As returning customers, they engaged in naturalistic observation of the service environment, focusing on job roles, task execution, staff coordination, queue management, and overall workflow performance. Observations were documented through fieldnotes and reflexive journals, written immediately after each visit, capturing situational insights and emergent patterns across multiple service encounters.

Rather than interviewing staff directly, the researchers relied on in situ observation and interpretive reflection to analyze the effectiveness of manpower allocation and role distribution from the customer point of view. Observational data were thematically analyzed to identify recurrent operational patterns, such as service delays, staff task overlaps, visible bottlenecks, and communication breakdowns. These were then interpreted from the perspective of existing HRM concepts such as job design clarity, workload balance, and frontline coordination.

This methodology prioritizes contextual immersion and experiential insight over statistical generalization. The embedded perspective - though not as employees, but as frequent users of the service - provides a grounded understanding of how organizational factors manifest in everyday customer experience. By linking these observations to HRM frameworks, the study offers both conceptual refinement (through the lens of responsive job design) and practical relevance for institutional service improvement.

Findings and Discussion

The observational data and staff interviews revealed that the current job structure in the cafeteria consists of clearly assigned yet unevenly distributed roles, notably among the Chef de Partie, Cashier, and Waitress positions. Each role holds defined responsibilities - Chefs manage food preparation, Waitresses handle serving and table clearance, and the Cashier manages transactions. However, during peak hours, particularly between 11:00 and 13:00, the workload among these roles becomes imbalanced, with kitchen staff experiencing bottlenecks in meal preparation and service staff unable to maintain timely table turnover. The Cashier role, while less physically demanding, often becomes a point of queue congestion due to limited transaction throughput. These patterns suggest that although job roles are defined, the current allocation of manpower does not sufficiently match operational demand, leading to observable delays in food availability, longer customer wait times, and a decline in overall service efficiency.

Further analysis of staffing adequacy indicates that the kitchen unit, particularly the Chef de Partie, is critically understaffed relative to demand. Observations documented recurring delays in meal preparation, especially for high-demand items during peak periods. This was corroborated by interview responses noting the need for at least two additional chefs to ensure timely food output and reduce backlog. The existing manpower structure places excessive pressure on one chef to simultaneously handle cooking, plating, and quality control. In contrast, front-of-house roles such as the Waitress are also stretched thin, with one server managing multiple functions including table clearance, order pickup, and customer communication. These findings highlight a misalignment between manpower allocation and task complexity, suggesting that both quantitative (number of staff) and qualitative (role-specific competency) gaps hinder operational efficiency.

In addition to manpower shortages, the data also revealed limitations in task sequencing and workflow coordination. For instance, the lack of a standardized preparation system in the kitchen contributes to inconsistent food readiness times, while the absence of a queue management mechanism at the cashier counter leads to customer congestion. Moreover, observational notes indicated that communication between kitchen and service staff was primarily informal and reactive, often resulting in duplicated efforts or missed orders during busy hours. Staff interviews also pointed out the absence of written job instructions or shift-specific task breakdowns, which further complicates coordination, especially for new or temporary personnel. These inefficiencies suggest that beyond staffing levels, procedural clarity and inter-role communication are critical weaknesses within the current operational model.

Table 1: Summary of Observed Job Roles, Issues, and Operational Implications

Job Role	Main Responsibilities	Key Observed Issues	Operational Implications
Chef de Partie	Cooking, plating, quality control	Understaffed; long prep time; multitasking overload	Delayed food readiness; bottleneck in kitchen operations
Waitress	Serving, table clearing, order coordination	Overloaded; unclear task prioritization; wide role coverage	Slow table turnover; reduced customer interaction quality
Cashier	Handling payments, managing transaction queue	Single point of service; queue congestion	Long customer waiting times; inefficiency in payment flow
Cross-role workflow	Coordination between kitchen and service staff	Lacks formal system; reactive communication; inconsistent updates	Workflow misalignment; duplicated or missed orders
Documentation	Job instructions, task breakdown	No written guidelines or shift planning	Role ambiguity; inconsistent performance across shifts

Overall, the findings indicate that while basic role definitions exist within the cafeteria's operational structure, significant gaps remain in staffing adequacy, workflow coordination, and procedural clarity. These inefficiencies contribute directly to delays in service delivery and diminished customer experience during peak periods. To better understand the implications of these findings, it is essential to examine them through relevant theoretical and empirical lenses, which will be addressed in the following discussion.

Discussion

The operational challenges identified in the findings - ranging from understaffing to unclear task sequencing - can be analytically situated within the framework of job design and performance alignment. As outlined by Dessler (2020), effective job design must clearly specify task responsibilities, allow for appropriate division of labor, and enable measurable outcomes. In the observed cafeteria setting, while roles such as Chef de Partie and Waitress were nominally defined, the absence of standardized task flows and performance expectations undermined execution. Moreover, Werner et al. (2007) emphasize that job design must be responsive to workload variability and peak service demands, which the current staffing model fails to accommodate. This misalignment suggests a breakdown not only in the static structuring of roles, but also in the dynamic aspect of job redesign - i.e., the periodic adjustment of task structures based on

operational data and service patterns. These theoretical insights help to explain why operational efficiency remains low despite the presence of a fixed role structure.

Empirical literature on campus foodservice operations reinforces the importance of role clarity and workforce alignment in delivering high-quality service. Smith et al. (2020) found that service quality, food variety, and operational flow significantly influence student satisfaction and dining frequency. These service outcomes, however, are heavily contingent on the effectiveness of internal role execution - particularly during peak hours. Likewise, Misiran et al. (2022) demonstrated through structural equation modeling that service quality and menu diversity are the strongest predictors of cafeteria satisfaction, with service quality being most sensitive to staff performance and interaction. This suggests that operational efficiency is not only a logistical concern but also a perceptual one, directly shaping the end-user's experience. The current study adds to this body of knowledge by offering a ground-level view of how ineffective job distribution and manpower planning manifest in specific service delays. In doing so, it extends the empirical discourse by linking observable inefficiencies to gaps in human capital structures, thus advancing a micro-operational perspective that complements prior satisfaction-focused research.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the refinement of job design and workforce planning models by emphasizing the interplay between structural role clarity and real-time task execution in high-demand service environments. Existing frameworks, such as those presented by Dessler (2020) and Werner et al. (2007), provide foundational principles for organizing work and aligning performance. However, they often assume a level of operational stability that may not be held in dynamic, customer-facing contexts like campus cafeterias. The present findings highlight how static role assignments, without adaptive planning for peak-load variation, result in systemic inefficiencies despite the presence of formal job descriptions. By demonstrating the need for a more iterative, observation-driven approach to role calibration, this study invites a theoretical expansion toward what may be termed *responsive job design* - a model where job boundaries are continually shaped by service rhythms, observed workflow friction, and real-time feedback. This conceptual refinement can inform future research seeking to adapt classical job design theory to service-oriented environments with fluctuating demand.

Practically, the findings of this study offer actionable insights for campus cafeteria managers seeking to improve service delivery through human capital optimization. First, the identification of understaffed critical roles - particularly in the kitchen - suggests the immediate need for targeted recruitment or task reallocation to alleviate operational bottlenecks. Second, the absence of written task protocols and standardized inter-role communication mechanisms highlights a gap that can be addressed through simple procedural tools such as shift-specific checklists, job cards, or communication boards. Moreover, the study emphasizes the importance of integrating performance management with job analysis - ensuring that task assignments are not only clear but also linked to measurable service outcomes such as queue times and customer satisfaction. In doing

so, it provides a practical framework for cafeteria administrators to move beyond reactive staffing and toward a more data-informed, proactive model of workforce planning. These contributions are particularly relevant in institutional foodservice settings, where budgetary constraints and high service expectations often collide, making human capital strategy a key determinant of success.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study sets out to explore how job design and workforce planning contribute to service inefficiencies in a campus cafeteria environment. Using an autoethnographic case study approach, the research drew on experiential observations made by student-researchers embedded as regular customers over a two-week period. Through direct engagement with repeated service encounters, the study identified recurring operational gaps such as task overload in key roles, misaligned manpower deployment, and the absence of procedural clarity during peak hours.

These findings offer practical insight into how HRM-related factors - particularly role distribution and workflow coordination - can shape customer-facing outcomes in institutional foodservice settings. Rather than relying on managerial reports or customer surveys, the autoethnographic approach enabled a ground-level analysis of service breakdowns as they were experienced in real time. The study's contribution lies in framing these micro-level observations within broader HRM theory, particularly the need for responsive job design that adapts to demand variability and supports operational consistency. While limited in generalizability, the study offers actionable implications for cafeteria administrators and HR practitioners seeking to improve service performance through human capital interventions.

This study contributes to the human capital management literature by offering a grounded, observational perspective on how job design and workforce planning manifest in everyday service delivery. By applying an autoethnographic case study approach, the research demonstrates the value of experiential inquiry in identifying operational inefficiencies that may be overlooked in formal HR audits or survey-based studies. The concept of *responsive job design*, as observed in real-time service breakdowns, provides a starting point for theorizing how micro-level task dynamics interact with structural staffing decisions. Future research may build on this approach by incorporating cross-case comparisons or blending autoethnographic data with operational metrics to further validate and refine HRM theories in service contexts.

For institutional foodservice managers and HR practitioners, the findings suggest several actionable interventions. First, task assignments and shift scheduling should be periodically reassessed based on service flow data and peak-hour pressures, rather than static assumptions. Second, clearer articulation of role boundaries and responsibilities - such as through job cards or shift-based task lists - may reduce overlap and miscommunication across kitchen and service teams. Third, even modest adjustments in manpower allocation (e.g., reassigning an extra worker during lunch rush) can

significantly alleviate workflow congestion. Lastly, adopting customer-informed observation methods, such as feedback from trained observers or internal service audits, can offer fresh perspectives on performance challenges that might be normalized within the staff environment. These recommendations support a more dynamic and data-aware approach to HRM in campus-based service operations.

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