



HINDSIGHT IS 20/20; 2030 REQUIRES FORESIGHT:
*A SCENARIO-LED METHOD FOR BUILDING
HOSPITALITY TEAMS FOR THE FUTURES AHEAD*

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The rapid spread of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has left many hospitality professionals uncertain about which of their skills will still be needed in the coming years. Commercial leaders face the same uncertainty when deciding whom to hire and which skills to develop. A common response is to forecast future skills by extrapolating from what has worked in the past, and to recruit or train accordingly. However, the skills expected of hotel commercial roles appear to have changed substantially twice in the past twenty years, and with AI likely to accelerate that change, any single forecast carries a considerable risk of being outdated. This paper proposes that team leaders rely less on hindsight and instead develop foresight by building several plausible futures and considering what skills their team may need in each. Drawing on a workshop with commercial leaders at the 2026 HSMAI Commercial Strategy Conference in Singapore, we present a scenario-led method in which teams map the forces shaping the industry, sort them by impact and uncertainty, build four contrasting worlds for 2030 and write a job posting for each. In the workshop, the method produced job titles that do not yet exist and revealed a gap between the world participants considered most plausible and the one they would most like to work in. It also indicated that some capabilities, notably handling difficult guest situations and recovering from service failures, may be needed in every world. We suggest that such recurring capabilities offer a sound basis for the hiring and development decisions made today, and that they are better assessed through demonstrated ability than through formal qualifications. The paper closes with a practical guide for running the method with your team.

INTRODUCTION

The rise of general-purpose large language models (LLMs), such as ChatGPT, Claude or Gemini, has prompted a re-evaluation of what is expected of those already in the job market and a reframing of what will be required of those hoping to enter it. Everyday tasks are increasingly being redesigned around what these tools enable, yet not everyone understands what this implies or has the ability to use the tools to their full capability. Companies are asking employees how AI could automate their workflows, and employees are looking for ways to remain indispensable. Leaders are working out how to lead teams in which people and AI work side by side, while graduates acquire as many AI-related skills as they can to stand out from other candidates. Many are uncertain what their job description will look like in a year or two, although most assume that AI will form part of it.

Commercial leaders in hospitality carry this uncertainty on behalf of their teams. They must decide today whom to recruit and how to develop their existing staff, although the consequences of those decisions will only become clear years from now. Employer surveys offer some guidance, and the World Economic Forum's Future of Jobs Report 2025, for example, found that employers expect 39% of workers' core skills to change by 2030. We understand the appeal of such forecasts and do not dismiss them. However, they describe broad movements across economies and industries and say little about which skills a particular hotel's commercial team will need or when it will need them.

This paper therefore argues that foresight offers a sounder basis for building a team than either a single forecast or the experience of what has worked before. Team leaders can instead develop several plausible futures and consider what each would demand of their team. Capabilities that recur across these futures can inform decisions now, while those that belong to only one can be monitored until the direction of the industry becomes clearer. The argument draws on extant literature and on a workshop we ran at the 2026 HSMAI Commercial Strategy Conference in Singapore. The sections that follow explain why skills forecasting tends to fall short, describe the workshop as a method, report what it surfaced and close with a practical guide for running the same exercise with your own team.

WHY SKILLS FORECASTING FALLS SHORT

THE CHANGING ROLE

The skills expected of hospitality professionals have always depended on their context and have therefore never been permanent. Language skills alone once gave candidates a clear advantage during periods of rapid growth in international travel, and the standardisation pursued by expanding hotel brands later made the ability to operate property management systems a basic and transferable requirement. The hotel Sales and Marketing Manager shows how far such change can go within a single job title. In 2005, the role was largely relationship-led. A successful manager knew clients by name and kept a calendar full of meetings that translated into sales, and the contact list served as the main indicator of success. A simple spreadsheet summary at the end of each month was usually all the reporting required. By 2015, relationships still mattered, but digital skills had become far more important. A typical day might begin with online travel agency (OTA) listings before moving on to social media, property management system reports, STR benchmarking data and a constant flow of emails. By 2025, the role had added a further layer of analysis, with decisions increasingly driven by data from tools such as Power BI, Cvent, customer relationship management (CRM) systems and Google Ads. Each stage removed little from what came before but added new requirements as the technology changed. It seems unlikely that a manager hiring for the role in 2005 could have anticipated what it would require in 2025. Basing hiring decisions on past experience is often sensible, since the past has at least happened and tends to repeat itself. However, when a role changes this much within twenty years, what worked before becomes an unreliable guide to what will be needed next.

INHERITED TEAMS

For a team leader, the question extends beyond the skills of individual roles to the composition of the team as a whole. A capable team can rarely be built through hiring alone. A leader planning for 2030 inherits an existing team and seldom has the luxury of starting from scratch. That team is likely to be led by an experienced manager who began working in one of the earlier eras described above. Some senior members who perform well today may not remain competitive by 2030 without further development, and their experience may shape their judgement in ways that no longer apply. Some members will leave and new ones will join, often younger and less experienced colleagues who may bring more current skills but are unfamiliar with how the role was performed in the past. The skills a team needs by 2030 will therefore come largely from two sources, the development of current members and the recruitment of new ones. Both take time, since training and upskilling programmes need to be designed and completed and recruitment cycles can take months. In both cases, the decision has to be made well in advance of an outcome that remains uncertain.

THE PACE OF AI

The pace of AI development compounds this problem, as some of the tasks that commercial teams perform today may soon be unnecessary or no longer require a specialist to carry them out. Prompt engineering offers a recent example of how quickly the value of a skill can change. When LLMs first became widely available, the ability to write effective prompts was heavily promoted as an essential skill, and prompt engineers were among the most sought-after hires of 2023. Two years later, The Wall Street Journal reported that the role had become largely obsolete, as models became better at interpreting ordinary instructions and companies trained staff across many roles to use AI tools themselves. Prompting remains useful, but its value as a specialism declined far faster than many expected. A training programme built around the most prominent skill of the moment may therefore be outdated by the time it has been completed.

FORESIGHT AND THE FUTURES CONE

Nobody can reliably predict how the industry will evolve, and this paper does not attempt to. Instead, we suggest that team leaders base their decisions on foresight, the practice of exploring several plausible futures in order to be prepared for whichever one emerges. Prediction has an obvious appeal, since an accurate forecast would allow a leader to commit to a single fixed plan and use resources efficiently. However, such a plan commits the team to one possible future in a context that may evolve in unexpected ways. Foresight accepts that the future cannot be known in advance and aims to build the flexibility and resilience needed to act appropriately as circumstances change. A widely used tool for exploring this uncertainty is the futures cone. An early version appeared in 1990, when Charles W. Taylor of the US Army War College described a 'cone of plausibility', and the model has since been developed by several futurists, notably Joseph Voros. The cone widens outwards from the present, so that futures considered probable sit near its centre and those that seem less likely in today's context sit at its outer edge. Two of Voros's points are relevant here. First, preferable futures, which describe what we would like to happen, are judged separately from how likely a future is, so the future people consider most likely need not be the one they would choose. Second, these judgements are made in the present and can change, so an idea that seems unlikely, or even preposterous, today may later become the expected course of events, as seen in Figure 1 below.

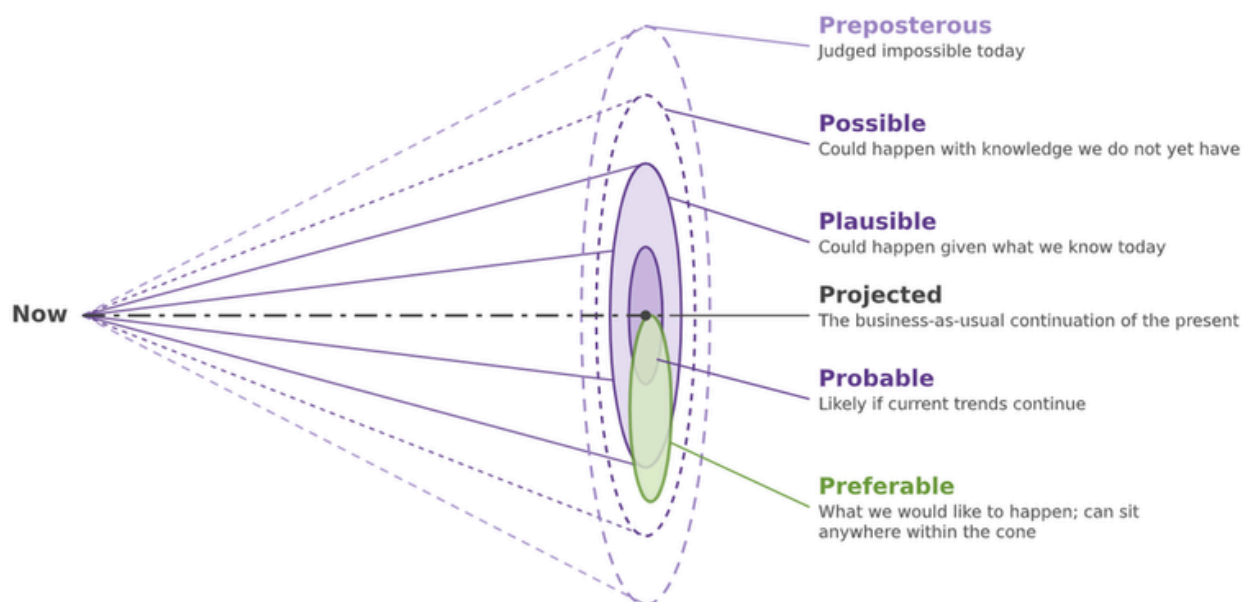


Figure 1: The futures cone, adapted from Voros (2017). Futures become less likely towards the outer edge of the cone, while preferable futures can fall anywhere within it.

THE WORKSHOP AS A METHOD

SETTING AND PARTICIPANTS

The method described in this paper was developed for the 'Build Your 2030 Team' workshop we ran at the HSMAI Commercial Strategy Conference in Singapore on 15 May 2026. After a short introduction to foresight and the futures cone, commercial leaders from hotels across the region worked in groups through a fixed sequence of exercises, recording their work on flip charts that were later displayed around the room. The session was designed to give participants a process they could repeat with their own teams and to encourage them to begin thinking about the future of those teams, and it was not intended to generate research data. The outputs reported in this paper should therefore be read as examples of the kind of thinking the method can prompt, and no contribution is attributed to any individual or organisation.

MAPPING THE FORCES

The first exercise asked each group to identify forces that could shape the hospitality industry by 2030, defined as trends and developments visible today whose future course could affect the industry, whether their effect is already evident or still a matter of speculation. To structure the discussion, we suggested six areas, covering technology, the workforce, guest behaviour, the economy, regulation and climate. Participants were encouraged to include forces that seemed predictable alongside ones that might appear far-fetched. Humanoid robots changing bed sheets and cleaning bathrooms by 2030, for example, may seem improbable at this stage, whereas a robotic arm preparing an omelette at the breakfast buffet seems far more plausible.

IMPACT AND UNCERTAINTY

Each group then placed its forces on a matrix, with the level of impact on the y-axis and the level of uncertainty on the x-axis, as seen in Figure 2 below. This step adapts a ranking exercise long established in scenario planning, a practice developed at Shell in the 1970s and later popularised by Peter Schwartz and the Global Business Network. A force with high impact and low uncertainty is a predetermined trend, which a team should plan for because it is likely to shape every future the team faces. A force with low impact and low uncertainty is background noise, worth acknowledging but requiring little attention. Forces of low impact but high uncertainty belong on a watch list or are a wild card, to be monitored in case their impact grows. Forces of high impact and high uncertainty are critical uncertainties, with the greatest potential to change the industry. Because their direction is unclear, many organisations may hesitate to prepare for them. A team that does prepare may therefore gain an advantage over its competitors, although the same uncertainty means its preparation will not always pay off. In scenario planning, critical uncertainties also provide the axes on which the scenarios are built.

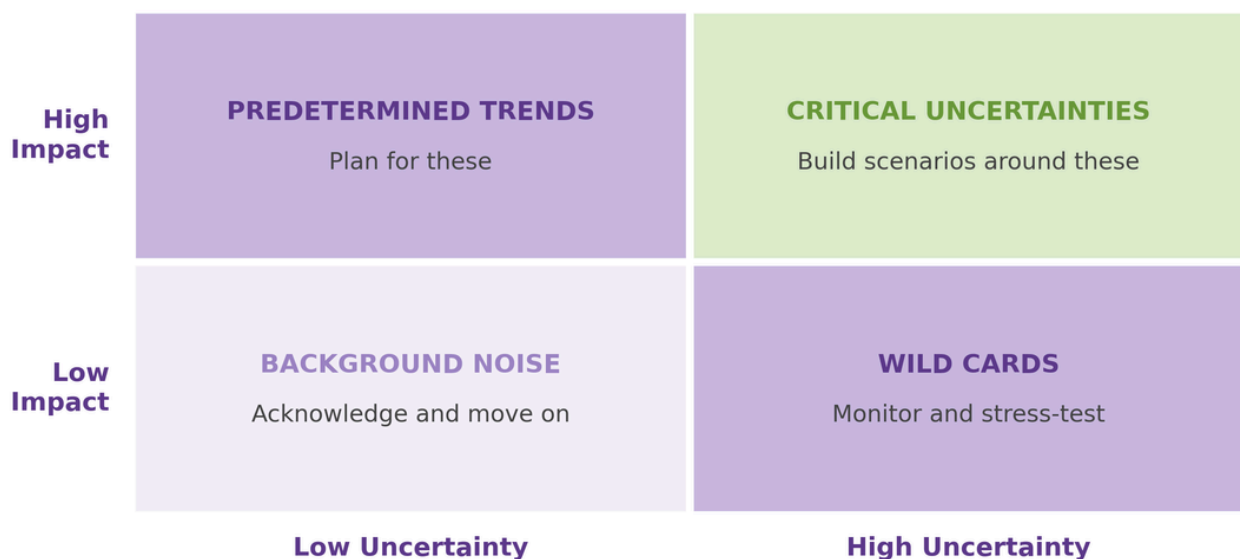


Figure 2: The impact and uncertainty matrix, adapted from scenario planning practice. Forces are sorted by impact and uncertainty, and critical uncertainties form the axes of the scenarios.

FOUR WORLDS FOR 2030

The next exercise focused on the critical uncertainties. All groups agreed to work with the same two, guest expectations and the degree of AI integration in hotel operations, which became the axes of a shared scenario matrix. Guest expectations ranged from standardised efficiency to mass personalisation, and AI integration from low to high, producing four worlds for 2030, as seen in Figure 3 below. In the Artisan Hotel, personalisation is achieved with little AI, through staff whose craft and judgement shape a bespoke experience for each guest. The Lean Classic combines low AI integration with standardised service delivered consistently and at low cost by well-trained people, and resembles much of the industry today.

In the Automated Stay, robots and automation deliver a standardised experience with minimal human contact, which may leave the stay feeling transactional. The AI Concierge world tailors every guest's experience, but it relies on extensive AI integration rather than on people to do so.

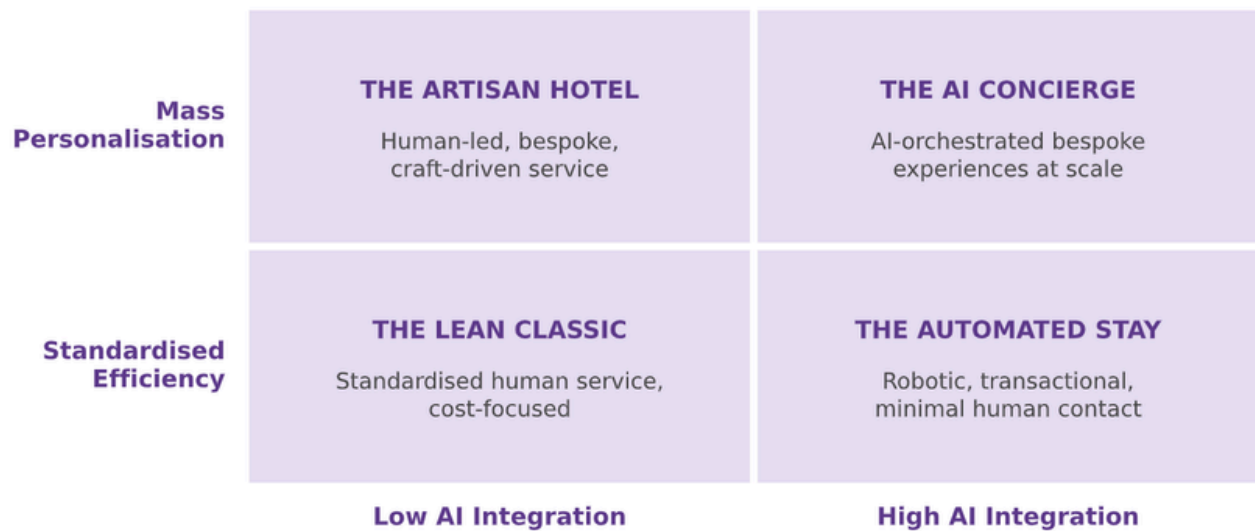


Figure 3: The four worlds for 2030, built on the two critical uncertainties chosen by all groups.

THE 2030 JOB POSTING

Each group then chose one world and wrote a job posting for a role within it, keeping the conditions of that world in mind throughout. The posting began with a job title, which did not need to exist today, followed by five must-have skills, the technology the candidate would be expected to use in 2030 and the mindset traits the role would require, meaning the softer qualities that matter as much with colleagues as with guests. Finally, each group designed the package that would attract a suitable candidate, from where the role would be advertised and how to apply to the benefits and pay on offer.

THE GALLERY WALK

In the final exercise, participants walked around the room to read the other groups' postings, a format commonly known as a gallery walk. Each participant then voted for the world that seemed most plausible by 2030, the world they would most like to work in and the world that concerned them most.



WHAT THE WORKSHOP SUGGESTS

FORCES SHAPING 2030

The forces the groups identified extended well beyond technology and where it may lead. One group anticipated a market divided between hotels that deliver service through AI and robots and hotels that deliver it through people, with human-led operations catering mainly to leisure and high-end guests and AI-led operations targeting frequent business travellers. Another group saw technology as a way of extending the working lives of experienced staff, supporting the human element instead of replacing it. An older employee who can no longer meet the physical demands of a service role could rely on assistive technology for the heaviest tasks, while continuing to contribute the guest orientation that took years to develop. Less optimistic expectations also emerged. Several participants anticipated job losses in finance, revenue management and reservations, where AI agents could carry out many routine tasks under the oversight of far fewer human supervisors. These included functions within the commercial teams that many participants lead. Others were concerned that fewer young people appear willing to build careers in hospitality, which could leave hotels little choice but to use technology to supplement their workforce. These forces suggest that participants saw the availability of people as a source of uncertainty alongside the technology itself.



NEW ROLES

The job postings prompted lively discussion, as participants asked other groups to explain roles that several described as new to them. The roles also ranged well beyond the commercial function. The worlds at the automated end of the matrix were deliberately extreme, and the roles written for them should be read as explorations of that extreme rather than as forecasts. For these worlds, groups suggested that the housekeeping manager could become a fleet manager, responsible for robots that clean bathrooms, change bed sheets, vacuum floors and refill minibars. Maintenance teams could keep these robots charged and serviced alongside the air-conditioning units and televisions they already look after. One group imagined drones replacing bellboys in greeting guests and guiding them to their rooms. The remaining guest-facing staff could then become problem-solving managers, with conflict resolution, reading a guest's mood and risk management among their core skills.

RECURRING CAPABILITIES

Although the worlds were designed to contrast, the postings shared a notable feature. In the automated worlds, people were left with the situations machines could not resolve, which placed conflict resolution and service recovery at the centre of the job. In the Artisan Hotel, people formed the core of the product, and the ability to handle demanding guests and service failures became scarce enough to command a premium. The reasons differed, but in both cases the ability to read a guest and recover from a service failure was among the most valued requirements. We would expect the same in any world where AI personalises the stay, since such a hotel will still meet guests whose needs or complaints fall outside what its systems anticipate. The ability would be just as central to the Lean Classic, which resembles much of today's industry. In the terms of the impact and uncertainty matrix, this capability behaves like a predetermined trend, likely to matter in all four worlds. Other requirements seem to belong to a single world. A fleet manager for housekeeping robots, for instance, would only be needed where such robots are widely used. We offer this as a reading of a small number of postings from a single session rather than as a firm conclusion.

PLAUSIBLE AND PREFERABLE WORLDS

Participants voted the AI Concierge the most plausible world by 2030 and the Artisan Hotel the most desirable world to work in, while the Automated Stay was voted the most concerning. In the language of the futures cone, the world participants expected was not the one they preferred. If the industry moves towards the AI Concierge world, hotels may find it harder to attract and retain people whose idea of rewarding work resembles the Artisan Hotel, and leaders may need to consider what would make work in a highly automated operation appealing. The vote also indicates where the concern lay. Both the Automated Stay and the AI Concierge rely heavily on AI, yet participants singled out only the Automated Stay as concerning. One possible reading is that they were less troubled by AI itself than by a standardised, transactional experience with little human contact. The vote reflects the views of one group of participants on one day, and we present it as a prompt for discussion rather than as evidence of wider industry opinion.

WHAT THIS MEANS

Taken together, the outputs suggest a way of acting on an uncertain future. The 2030 job postings are unlikely to prove accurate in their details, and they were not intended to. Their value lies in the comparison between them. Capabilities that recur across worlds can be acted on now with relatively little risk, in recruitment as well as in the development of current staff. World-specific requirements can wait on the watch list, together with the signals that would indicate their world is emerging, so that training or recruitment can begin if those signals strengthen. Recurring capabilities such as service recovery are also difficult to verify through qualifications, which remain a reasonable guide where the skills they certify are stable but say little about how a candidate handles a guest whose stay has gone wrong. We therefore suggest recruiting for them through competency-based hiring, which assesses demonstrated ability through methods such as situational interviews or role-played service scenarios. The method of assessment matters here, as [research on skills-based hiring in the United States](#) indicates that removing degree requirements from job postings has changed who is actually hired in only a small share of cases.



RUNNING THE METHOD YOURSELF

Uncertainty about future skills will likely persist, and skills forecasts will remain a useful reference. However, we suggest treating them as one input into a broader exercise that considers several futures at once. The workshop gave participants time to think about the future of their teams, which day-to-day operations rarely allow, and any team willing to set aside a couple of hours can do the same. The exercise may be most useful when it includes the people whose roles are being imagined.

THE FORESIGHT SESSION: SIX STEPS

Below we set out a six-step framework for running the method with your team. The first five steps follow the workshop, and the sixth uses the resulting postings to set hiring and development priorities. Feel free to adjust the timings and materials to fit your context.

- 1. Map the Forces (20 minutes):** Using the six areas described above, ask the team to list the forces that could affect your operation by 2030. Keep the far-fetched forces on the list alongside the predictable ones, as they can prompt useful discussion later, and record each force on a separate sticky note so that it can be moved in the next step.
- 2. Sort by Impact and Uncertainty (20 minutes):** Place each force in one of the four quadrants of the impact and uncertainty matrix. Where team members disagree about a placement, ask them to explain their reasoning, since disagreement can itself be a sign of uncertainty. Note the predetermined trends, as your plans should account for them in any future, and start a watch list with the low-impact, high-uncertainty forces.
- 3. Build Four Worlds (20 minutes):** Choose the two critical uncertainties that matter most to your operation and define the extremes of each. Our groups worked with guest expectations and AI integration, but uncertainties specific to your property or market may produce more useful worlds. Name each of the four resulting worlds and briefly describe what a guest's stay and a staff member's shift would look like in each.
- 4. Write the 2030 Job Posting (30 minutes):** Assign one world to each group or pair and ask them to write a posting for a role in your team as it would exist in that world, using the components described above. Remind each group to stay within the conditions of its world, as the value of the exercise depends on the contrast between the postings.
- 5. Walk and Vote (15 minutes):** Display the postings, give everyone time to read them and hold the vote described above. Where the most plausible and the most desirable worlds differ, discuss what the gap could mean for recruitment and retention in your team.
- 6. Separate the Recurring from the Specific (20 minutes):** Compare the postings and mark the skills and traits that appear in more than one world. Treat these as priorities for developing current team members and for competency-based assessment in your next recruitment round. Add the requirements that appear in only one world to the watch list, with the signals that would show that world taking shape.

Finally, we suggest repeating the session each year, or sooner if a force on the watch list begins to gain momentum, and revising the worlds and postings as the signals change. New technologies and changing guest expectations will continue to reshape hospitality work, but in the end you just need to make the best judgement based on how the market is evolving and while..

Hindsight is 20/20, 2030 Requires Foresight.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

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Dr. Michael A. Kruesi is an Associate Professor in the Hospitality and Tourism Management Programme at the Singapore Institute of Technology (SIT). He began his career in hospitality and tourism in 2002, working in hotels in New Zealand, Switzerland and Peru, before completing his PhD at Auckland University of Technology (AUT) in 2015. His academic career has since taken him from AUT to the National Kaohsiung University of Hospitality and Tourism in Taiwan, and now to SIT, where he has been a faculty member for seven years.

Dr. Kruesi's research and teaching are best summarised by the three pillars of sustainability: environmental protection, economic viability and social wellbeing. Specifically, his research focuses on non-equity governance structures and technology augmentation in hospitality, on organisational behaviour and leadership practices that promote positive employee outcomes, and on the measurement and benchmarking of the environmental impacts of hotels, attractions and events, together with the revenue optimisation and economic incentives of sustainability-based strategies more broadly.



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Kiattipoom Kiatkawsin, Ph.D. is an Associate Professor and head of the hospitality and tourism division at Singapore Institute of Technology (SIT). Dr. Kiatkawsin's hospitality career started in a fine-dining restaurant in Germany before transitioning to event management in Switzerland. After getting a taste of teaching in Switzerland, he moved to Seoul, South Korea to pursue his Ph.D. at Sejong University. His academic career subsequently started in Korea before taking up the current role at SIT.

Dr. Kiatkawsin's expertise is in consumer behaviour, specifically customer experiential design, luxury consumption and technology-induced service delivery design. He has also been involved in various tourism development consultancy projects with organizations such as the UN Tourism, UN Development Programme, and the Korea Tourism Organization. He regularly contributes to the scientific community and has over 30 publications in SSCI-indexed hospitality and tourism journals. Dr. Kiatkawsin represents Singapore on the board of the Asia Pacific Tourism Association.

