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Strategic Foresight: Getting Ahead in Hospitality Talent Tech

Property Technology

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Thinking about technology in hospitality, I often reflect on how it used to feel like something separate, an add-on. Today it is woven into everything we do, especially in something as crucial as managing our talent. And with artificial intelligence, particularly generative AI tools, grabbing headlines, we are entering a new era in how we think about and handle our people strategies.

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Bringing new technology into hospitality talent management has not always been a walk in the park. Our industry's structure, including all those different owners, brands, and management models, can slow widespread adoption. But the need to invest is becoming undeniable. We need to operate smarter, engage our teams better, and prepare for a future workforce that looks different from today.

Right now, AI is already quietly making a difference. I see it improving the hiring precision, making the initial sifts through applications faster and more effective. It is helping personalize how we bring new team members on board and tailor training programs to individual needs. Think about how AI can analyze data to suggest the best internal career paths or predict who might be a flight risk so we can proactively engage them. Technology is bringing these real, present-day benefits to our HR teams.

But for me, looking ahead is the fascinating and critical part. Where is this taking us? My colleagues and I recently explored this by building future AI and talent management scenarios out to 2035. We looked at different paths: a future where AI drives peak efficiency, one where perhaps we rely too much on algorithms and lose the human touch, a scenario of slower, more cautious adoption, and, importantly, a future where humans and AI work together in harmony.

What struck me most from these explorations, particularly when talking with industry experts, is the absolute consensus on the irreplaceable nature of human interaction in hospitality. Nobody I spoke with felt AI could or should completely take over the human aspects of HR. The empathy, nuanced understanding, and personal connection truly define how we manage and nurture talent in our sector. So, while AI for efficiency is here to stay, I believe the most desirable and viable future is where AI *augments* human capabilities, handling repetitive tasks and providing data-driven insights so our HR teams can focus on the strategic, empathetic work that matters most.

Looking "Beyond" the immediate horizon, I think Generative AI offers a fascinating potential for strategic foresight. We even used it in our research to generate possible future scenarios for talent management. And yes, it is fast, can conjure diverse ideas, and might even suggest roles we had not thought of, like "AI ethics officers" or "employee experience designers."

But here is the challenge: while AI can generate possibilities at speed, it does not have the deep contextual understanding, the lived experience of our industry, or the ethical judgment humans possess. The scenarios generated by AI often felt more polarized, either overly utopian or dystopian, compared to the more nuanced, complex futures envisioned by human experts telling us that while GenAI can be a powerful *assistant* in foresight, it does not replace the need for human critical thinking and strategic vision.

This brings me to what I believe we must focus on now to prepare for what's next. We need to invest not just in technology but in our people. That means cultivating AI literacy across our organizations, helping everyone understand what AI is, how it works, and its limitations. I feel strongly that strategic foresight needs to become a core skill, teaching our teams how to think in terms of scenarios and anticipate future challenges. Ethical awareness around AI use is non-negotiable; we must ensure our AI adoption is fair and transparent and respect employee privacy and well-being. These skills are crucial, and I think our hospitality education programs need to embed them immediately.

My advice for industry leaders is this: see AI, including GenAI, as a tool to empower your people and refine your talent strategies, not just a way to cut costs. Develop clear guidelines for human-AI collaboration. Prioritize continuous learning focused on both tech fluency and essential human skills. And always, always remember that the strength of hospitality lies in its human connections; technology should enhance those connections, not diminish them. By embracing this balanced approach, I believe we can navigate the future successfully and ensure that our greatest asset, our talent, thrives in the AI age.

During the preparation of this work, the author used GPT-4o to enhance language, clarity and brevity. After using these tools, the author reviewed and edited the content as needed and takes full responsibility for the publication's content.



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