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01
Introduction

Innovation in service design does not always require radical transformation; incremental improvements can yield significant impact. This project thus explores a structured yet adaptable design approach.

1.1 Synopsis

The hospitality industry, one of the oldest and most inherently people-centric sectors, has historically been grounded in the principles of human connection and service; from inns to taverns and even monasteries providing safe havens for pilgrims. This focus further evolved with the industrial era, as luxury hotels and modern service establishments emerged, coding hospitality as a professional and customer- centric endeavour.

Despite these deeply ingrained humanistic ideals, the contemporary hospitality industry faces systemic workforce challenges that threaten its foundational principles. Rapid globalisation, operational standardisation, and increased cost pressures have contributed to high employee turnover, disengagement, and a growing disconnect between the workforce and organisational goals. This paradox highlights the pressing need to reconcile the industry's historical emphasis on people with the demands of a dynamic and rapidly evolving workforce.

This project seeks to address these challenges through the lens of service design innovation, crafting a scalable, adaptable framework that aligns individual aspirations with corporate objectives.

Leveraging Ritz- Carlton, as a case study- a globally renowned hotel brand and an industry benchmark for excellence in service and employee engagement- the project aims to employ a comprehensive methodology. It begins with analysing the workforce challenges to uncover systemic issues impacting employee satisfaction and retention. Through detailed mapping of the employee journey, the project identifies critical touch-points and pain points that influence the workforce experience. Based on these insights, a people-centric engagement framework is to be developed, emphasising intrinsic motivators such as purpose and recognition, alongside extrinsic incentives like rewards and career growth opportunities.

The hospitality industry is a cornerstone of the global economy, playing a vital role in fostering cultural exchange, economic growth, and social cohesion. As one of the largest and fastest growing sectors, it contributes significantly to global GDP (Gross Domestic Product), generating approximately 10% of the world's economic output and supporting over 330 million jobs worldwide, according to the World Travel and Tourism Council.
Beyond its economic impact, the industry is a driver of infrastructure development, investment, and innovation, particularly in emerging markets where tourism acts as a catalyst for broader economic expansion.

Hospitality also holds profound cultural and social significance. It facilitates global tourism, enabling people to explore diverse cultures, histories, and traditions, fostering understanding and collaboration. Thus, it proves indispensable for the interconnected global landscape. This project's outcomes are relevant in shaping the future of the hospitality industry. The initiative contributes to a more empowered, engaged, and resilient workforce ensuring long term success and relevance in a competitive and evolving landscape.

Furthermore, the project acknowledges and leverages the modern transformation of service design, which has shifted from transactional problem solving to holistic, human centred innovation. This evolution mirrors society's broader shift- embracing inclusivity, sustainability, and adaptability in response to the changing workforce and customer demographics of today.

Lastly, it is important to mention that this project is significant in its own right as it focuses on enhancing the employee experience, addressing valuable concerns. However, the strategic importance extends beyond its impact on the workforce. Improving employee experience has a direct and measurable impact on service quality. Studies have shown that companies with highly engaged employees see higher profitability and an increase in customer satisfaction. In contrast, disengaged employees are responsible for lower productivity and higher turnover costs. Thus, this project strives to keep employees motivated, to deliver superior guest experiences.

It aims to demonstrate that investing in employees is not just an operational strategy but the foundation for achieving the excellence that defines the hospitality industry.

"IF YOU CREATE AN ENVIRONMENT WHERE PEOPLE WANT TO COME TO WORK, THEY WILL DO THEIR JOB WELL AND SERVE THE CUSTOMER BEAUTIFULLY."

~ HORST SCHULZE, CO- FOUNDER OF THE RITZ CARLTON

1.2 Design Process

The design process for this project seamlessly integrates the Double Diamond Framework with the Four Question Model introduced in the book Design Thinking for the Greater Good; providing a complementary structure to guide exploration and refinement. The Double Diamond, with its emphasis on divergence and convergence, is overlayed coherently to structure the process with distinct phases of discovery, definition, development and delivery. While, The Four Question Framework- What is?, What if?, What wows?, and What works?- drives the core inquiry, ensuring the process remains human centered, outcome oriented, and strategically aligned.

The process bgins with the "What is?" stage, where the focus is on understanding the current realities and establishing context. This corresponds to the "Discover" phase of the Double Diamond, emphasizing empathy and deep research. Qualitative methods such as interviews, surveys, and ethnographic studies, uncover crucial pain points. Quantitative data analysis further validate these findings ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the systemic issues. Cross referencing and triangulation of data play a vital role here, ensuring that insights from diverse sources are corroborated for a complete picture.

The "Define" phase is also a part of this, and helps shift emphasis to narrowing the focus and reframing challenges into actionable problem statements. Tools like affinity clustering and journey mapping help identify critical touch-points, ensuring that the scope remains both precise and impactful.

Next, the "What if?" stage transitions from the "Define" into the early "Develop" phase of the Double Diamond. Here, the focus shifts to reimagining possibilities and generating innovative ideas. This stage prioritises divergence, encouraging a wide range of potential ideas that align with the stakeholder needs.

The "What wows?" stage runs deep through the "Develop" phase by refining the ideas into actionable prototypes. At this stage, concepts are evaluated based on criteria; eg. desirability, feasibility and viability. Feedback is integrated to ensure solutions resonate and are practical for real world application.

Finally, the "What works?" stage corresponds to the "Deliver" phase where solutions are rigorously tested, validated, and scaled. Prototypes are piloted in controlled environments, with measurable metrics.

By utilising this integrated approach, the process ensures both creative exploration and practical implementation of design.

The combination allows the project to address systemic challenges while ensuring continuous cross referencing and data triangulation that nurtures innovation.

Discover   Define   Develop   Deliver

Diverging   Converging   Diverging   Converging

What is ?   What if ?   What wows ?   What works ?
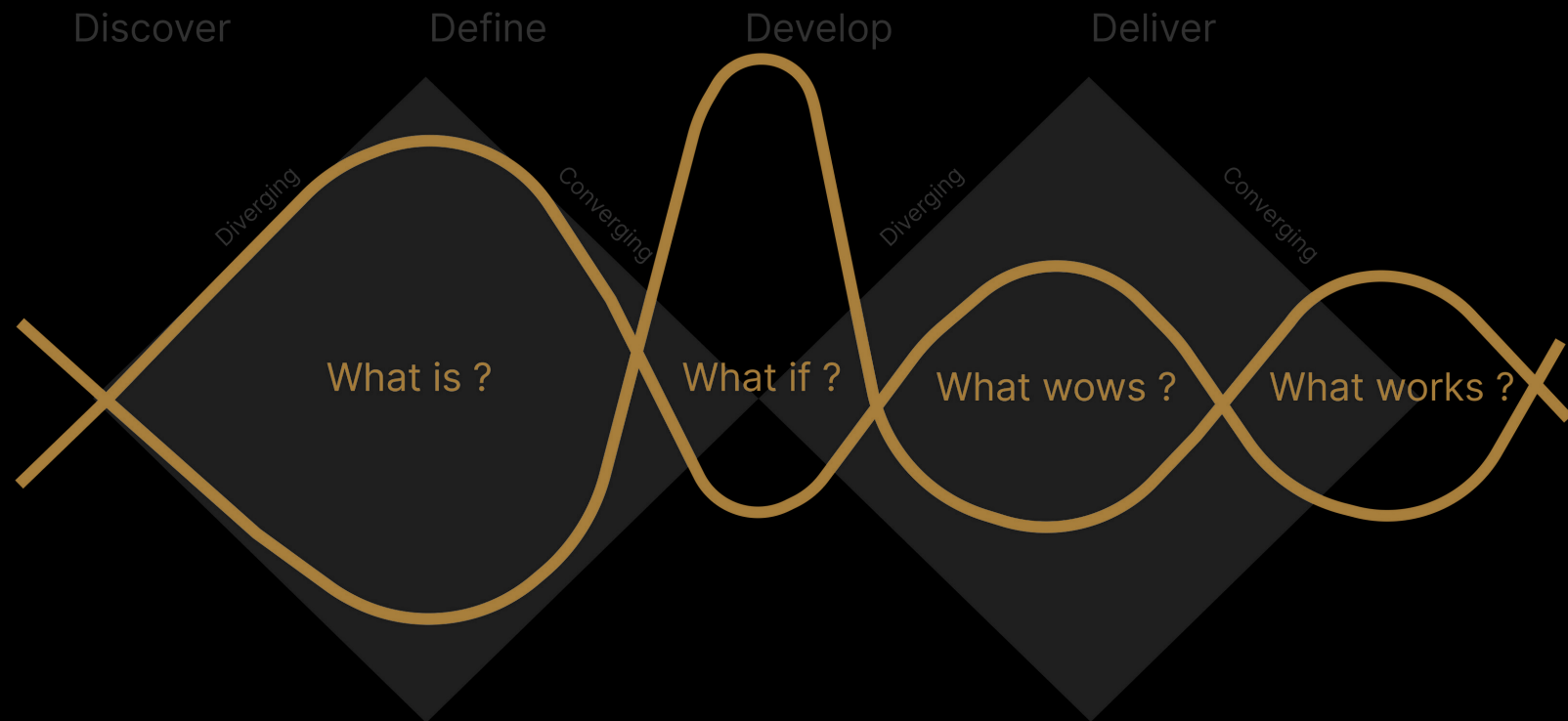
Fig 1.0 : The Four Question Framework from the book- Design Thinking for the greater Good (Leidtka et al., 2018, p. 39)- overlayed with the Double Diamond Design Process (Design Council, 2005) utilised for the following project.

1.3 Project Timeline

A well- structured project timeline is the cornerstone of successful project management, providing clarity, focus, and a clear path to achieving objectives. Timelines help break down complex projects into manageable phases, ensuring that each step is approached systematically and with purpose. This level of organisation is especially critical in fields like design, where creativity thrives within the structure of iterative processes. As Tim Brown, CEO of IDEO and a proponent of design thinking, also noted, "Design thinking is about accelerating progress by learning quickly from iterative cycles."

Effective timelines require not just a high-level breakdown of phases (reference in fig. 1.1) but also the segregation of daily tasks (reference in fig. 1.2) to maintain momentum and focus. This ensure continuous learning as well as adaptation.

In addition to this, the famous architect and designer Charles Eames also remarked, "Design depends largely on constraints." Timelines and task segmentation are the constraints that guide the creative process, enabling designers to focus their energy on problem-solving while staying within the bounds of time and resources. In service design, they also balance exploratory and convergent thinking and prevent "analysis paralysis" as many say. The structured cadence of deliverables ensures that ideation, prototyping, and testing occur within manageable cycles, allowing to adapt based on new discoveries.

For this academic endeavour, the clear progression ensures that the complexity of workforce challenges in the hospitality industry can be addressed while remaining agile and outcome- driven through the process.
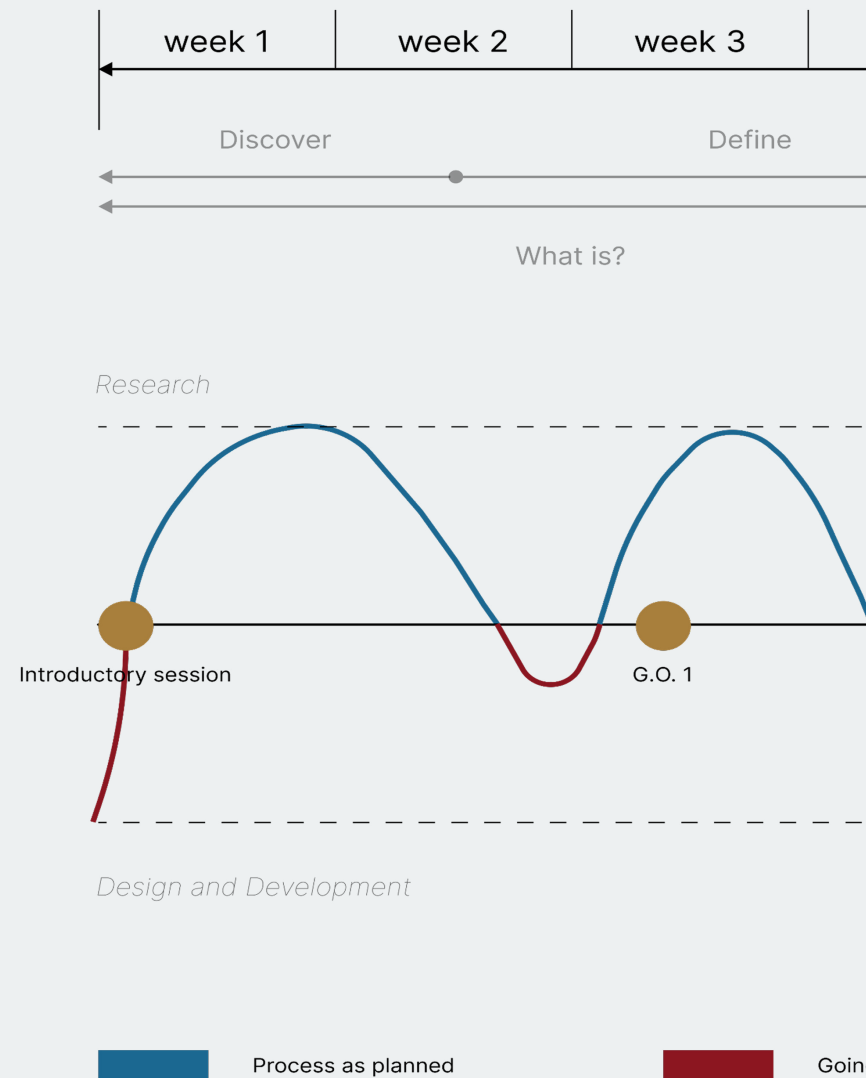
Fig 1.1: Project Timeline with Process Overview

week 4	week 5	week 6	week 7	week 8	week 9	week 10

...ine   Develop   Deliver

What if?   What wows?   What works?

Mid-term   Interim Crit   Final Grading
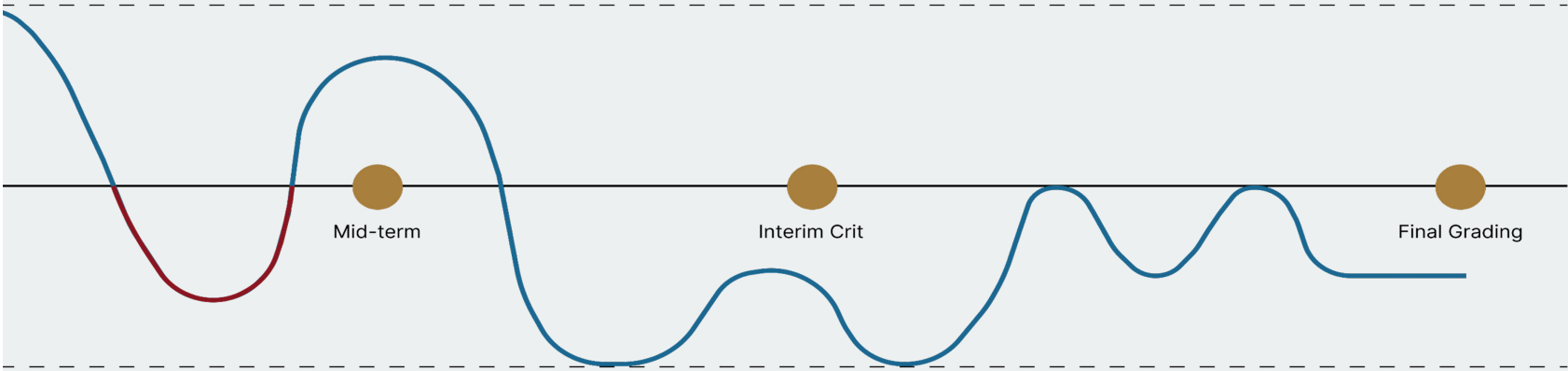
Going off course   Major checkpoints

Task / Week	week 1							week 2							week 3							week 4							week 5						
	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S
	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Define research objectives	█	█								█	█	█																							
Desk Research		█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█																									
Identify stakeholders		█	█	█																															
User Interviews								█	█	█	█				█	█	█	█		█	█	█													
Ecosystem Mapping						█	█	█	█	█			█	█																					
Customer journey mapping																		█	█	█	█														
Empathy mapping																					█	█	█	█											
Industry Analysis			█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█																							
Survey analysis										█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█										
Pain point identification											█	█			█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█													
Synthesising insights																				█	█	█	█	█	█										
Opportunity statement								█	█	█	█																								
Affinitize and clustering			█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█											
Create user Personas										█	█	█			█	█	█	█		█	█	█													
Define problem statement																									█	█									
Identify opportunities																						█	█	█											
HMW questions																						█	█	█											
Prioritise focus areas																																		█	█
Define success metrics																													█	█	█			█	█
Conduct ideation																															█	█	█	█	█
Co- creation workshops																																	█	█	█
Storyboarding																															█	█	█	█	█
Service blueprinting																█	█	█	█	█		█	█	█											
Validating findings								█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█											█

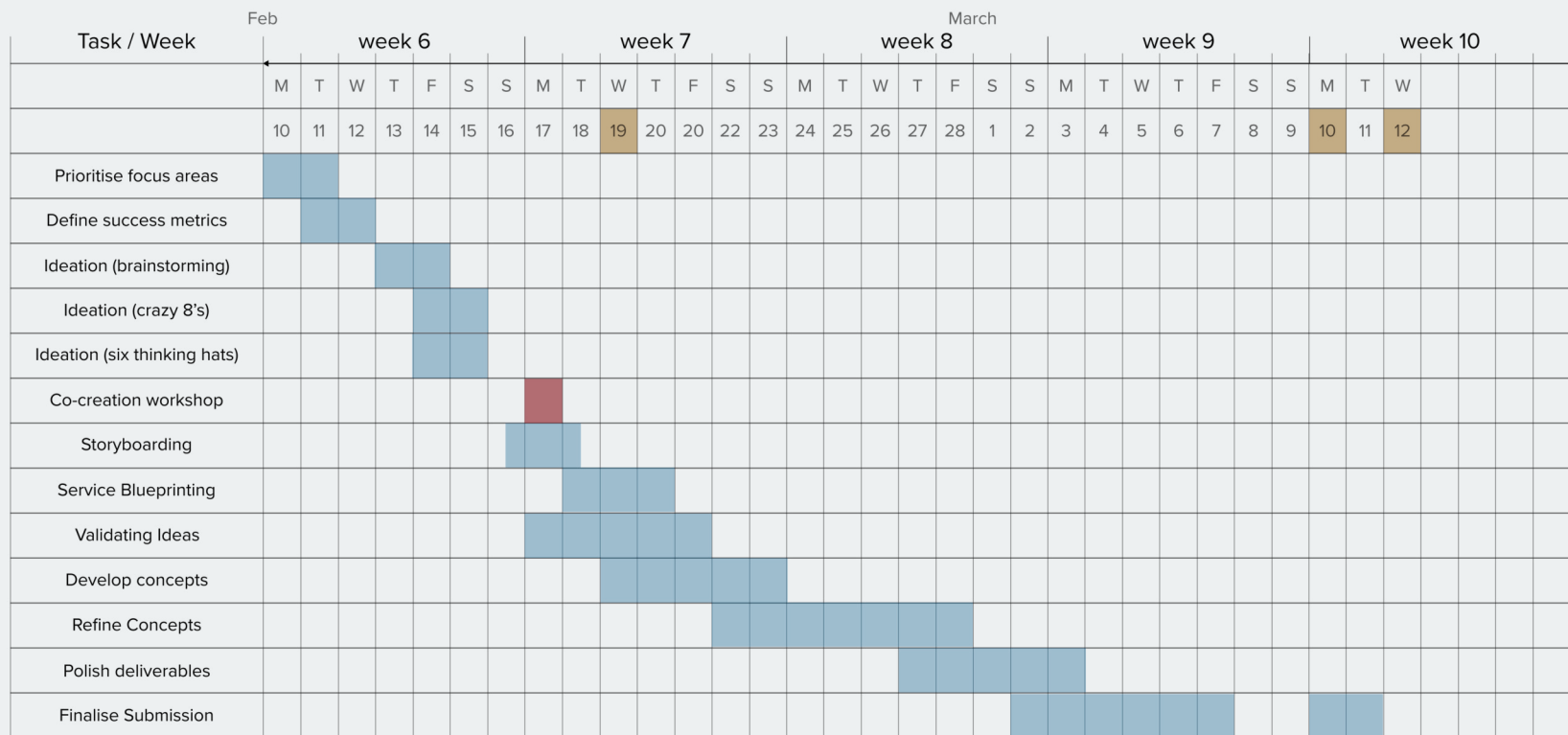| Task / Week	week 6							week 7							week 8							week 9							week 10		
	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W
	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	20	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Prioritise focus areas	▓	▓																													
Define success metrics		▓	▓																												
Ideation (brainstorming)				▓	▓																										
Ideation (crazy 8's)					▓	▓																									
Ideation (six thinking hats)					▓	▓																									
Co-creation workshop								▒																							
Storyboarding								▓	▓																						
Service Blueprinting									▓	▓	▓																				
Validating Ideas									▓	▓	▓	▓																			
Develop concepts										▓	▓	▓	▓	▓																	
Refine Concepts														▓	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓												
Polish deliverables																			▓	▓	▓	▓									
Finalise Submission																						▓	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓		▓	▓	

Fig 1.2: Project Timeline with daily planned process stages (Left to Right: January 6 - March 12, 2025)

02
Scoping the Landscape

To democratise design and innovation, organisations need to create a context in which things done differently make sense and feel safe. Which is why, first we need to establish and understand the current scenario.

2.1 Laying the Opportunity

The hospitality industry, despite being fundamentally human centric, faces systemic workforce challenges; leading to issues such as disengaged employees and increased operational costs due to high turnover rates.

The project aims to transform the employee experience through service design innovation, creating a forward thinking, adaptable framework that aligns individual aspirations with organisational objectives.

This would target achieving a reduction in turnover rates, significantly cutting recruitment and training costs. This would in turn enhance employee empowerment, engagement, and confidence, enabling consistent service quality across all levels.

The project aims to focus on analysing workforce challenges using Ritz Carlton as a case study because of its established practices in the industry. The solution would include exploring intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, mapping out the employee journey and developing a people centric framework for engagement. The blueprint would be scalable across the broader hospitality sector.

An opportunity statement is a structured articulation of a challenge or problem space, guiding research and innovation by framing potential areas for transformation. In service design, opportunity statements are essential because they move beyond merely defining problems; they create a lens through which to explore new possibilities.
Unlike traditional problem statements that focus on deficiencies, opportunity statements are forward thinking, framing challenges as potential areas for value creation. By doing so, it helps ensure that solution is human centred, strategically viable, and adaptable over time.

A strong opportunity statement thus includes;
- A clear definition of the issue, the current state, with an emphasis on systemic challenges.
- The desired impact and its alignment with broader organisational and user goals.
- The impact the project has, both qualitative and quantitative, to help set a threshold for measuring success.
- The scope of the project, setting boundaries for research and design efforts ensuring meaningful and sound solutions.

Unpacking the Opportunity Statement (on the left)

Current State
The hospitality industry presents a fundamental paradox; despite being inherently human-centric, it continues to struggle with systemic workforce challenges that lead to employee disengagement and high turnover rates. On one hand, hospitality thrives on personal connection, emotional intelligence, and service excellence—qualities that depend on a motivated and fulfilled workforce. On the other hand, industry norms—such as long hours, unpredictable schedules, and often rigid hierarchical structures—frequently undermine the very conditions necessary for employee satisfaction. **This dialectic between the industry's dependence on human connection and its difficulty in sustaining an engaged workforce forms the core of the challenge.**

Desired State
The hospitality industry prioritizes short-term efficiency over long-term employee well-being, creating a cycle of high turnover, increased recruitment costs, and limited investment in workforce development. This not only strains finances but also leads to inconsistent service quality, affecting customer satisfaction and brand reputation. This project aims to break this cycle by developing a forward-thinking framework that aligns employee aspirations with organizational goals, transforming the employee experience into a competitive advantage.

Value
Quantitative value ensures financial viability through cost reductions and efficiency gains such as reduced turnover rates, lower recruitment and training costs, and improved operational efficiency, while qualitative value enhances employee satisfaction, engagement, and service quality. Together, they create a desirable and feasible workforce strategy that benefits both employees and the organization.

Scope
This project uses Ritz-Carlton as a case study. Using it helps extract practical, evidence-based insights for best practices for enhancing employee engagement in hospitality. By mapping the employee journey and exploring key motivators, it aims to develop a scalable, service design-driven framework.

2.2 Research Methodology

Establishing a clear and structured research methodology is essential for ensuring the rigour, credibility, and applicability of findings in service design. By systematically laying down the methodology, methods, modes of inquiry, modes of analysis, and scope, this research ensures that every stage of the process is both comprehensive and aligned with the project's objectives.
A well-defined methodology provides a logical roadmap, guiding the study through its exploratory, generative, evaluative, and applied phases. This approach ensures that insights are not anecdotal or surface-level but rather deeply researched, evidence-based, and actionable for the broader hospitality sector.

The methods used—ranging from surveys and semi-structured interviews to journey mapping and prototyping—allow for a blend of qualitative and quantitative insights, capturing both measurable trends and human experiences. The modes of inquiry involve both primary and secondary research, ensuring a triangulated approach where multiple data sources validate and refine insights.
This triangulation of data—from employee feedback, industry reports, and case study analyses—enhances the reliability and objectivity of the findings while minimising bias or singular perspectives. Additionally, defining the scope of the research is crucial in framing the boundaries of inquiry, ensuring that the study remains focused on workforce challenges and engagement strategies rather than becoming overly broad or diluted.

By integrating a triangulated research model, this project ensures that findings are both valid and applicable across the hospitality industry. Triangulation strengthens data credibility by cross-verifying insights from different stakeholders and data sources.

Ensuring Rigour in Secondary Research

Secondary research provides the foundational knowledge, industry benchmarks, and theoretical frameworks necessary to support primary findings. However, the quality of secondary research depends on the credibility of sources and the depth of source analysis to ensure accuracy, objectivity, and relevance.

For secondary research in this project, source credibility is evaluated based on three key factors: author and publication date, purpose and objectivity, and comparability of source data. The credibility of a source is heavily influenced by the expertise of the author and the recency of the publication (not over 5-8 years old is a standard practice), as workforce trends and employee engagement strategies evolve over time. Peer-reviewed journal articles authored by recognized scholars or institutions, such as those published in Cornell Hospitality Quarterly, the Journal of Service Research or the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC), carry high credibility. Industry reports from Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), Ecole Hoteliere de Lausanne (EHL), Deloitte, McKinsey, PwC, and the International Labour Organization provide real-time insights into workforce trends and best practices in HR management.

The purpose and objectivity of a source are equally important, as research-backed publications tend to be more neutral and evidence-driven, while corporate whitepapers or media articles may have inherent biases. Objectivity is assessed through the presence of peer review, methodological transparency, and neutrality in analysis.

Lastly, comparability of source data ensures that research findings are

not based on isolated cases. Multiple reports from reputable sources should align in their insights on employee engagement and retention strategies, eliminating bias and reinforcing conclusions through cross-verification. The findings should be able to be benchmarked against other sources and be corroborated.

In addition to credibility, source analysis is crucial in determining the role each type of secondary research plays in informing the study. Academic papers provide evidence-based insights and theoretical models on employee motivation, workforce engagement, and service design methodologies, offering a strong conceptual foundation for the research. Industry reports highlight global workforce trends, HR best practices, and future projections, allowing the study to align with larger labor market shifts. Case studies present real-world applications of employee experience models, particularly in leading hospitality brands such as Ritz-Carlton, Marriott, and Four Seasons, making them highly valuable for understanding unique industry practices. Media articles provide insights into emerging workforce trends, though they could be more immediate and news driven. Lastly, consulting reports offer scalable workforce solutions, helping to bridge the gap between theoretical research and practical implementation.

By integrating a diverse mix of academic, industry, case study, media, and consulting sources, the research ensures both depth and relevance, making its findings applicable to the real-world challenges faced by hospitality businesses.

Ensuring Rigour in Primary Research

Primary research, on the other hand, is critical for capturing real-world employee experiences, motivations, and challenges. The effectiveness of primary research hinges on a well-defined stakeholder selection process, ensuring that diverse voices across organizational roles, business types, and geographic locations are represented.

Stakeholders include frontline employees who provide firsthand experience of daily workforce challenges, middle managers who offer insights into HR policies and leadership engagement, and senior executives or HR professionals who provide strategic viewpoints on long-term workforce transformation. By including perspectives from across hierarchical levels, the research captures a 360-degree view of workforce challenges and engagement strategies. Beyond job roles, stakeholder selection also considers diversity in business types, ensuring that insights are not skewed toward a single type of hospitality operation, making findings more applicable across the industry.
The target composition of participants is designed to reflect the broader hospitality workforce, with 60% of respondents being frontline employees, 30% comprising management and HR professionals, and 10% representing external industry experts.

Primary research is carried out through surveys and semi-structured interviews, which allow for both quantitative and qualitative data collection. Surveys capture measurable workforce insights, providing a data-driven understanding of workforce trends. Semi-structured interviews, on the other hand, offer qualitative depth, enabling employees to express personal challenges, career aspirations, and thoughts on engagement strategies.

Phase	What is?	
Methodology	Exploratory Research	C
Methods	Secondary: Literature reviews, industry reports, academic papers, publications, news and media reports Primary: Informal discussions, semi-structured interviews, focus groups	cre sior
Modes of inquiry	Contextual exploration of employee experiences and systemic practices; qualitative and quantitative	abc s a
Modes of analysis	Comparative analysis for secondary data (benchmarking) Thematic analysis for qualitative data (interviews, focus groups)	the ritis or
Scope	Employee lifecycle within Ritz Carlton USA and the broader hospitality sector	lab
Triangulation	Compare findings from qualitative interviews with quantitative secondary data to synthesize key themes	

Fig 2.0: The table (on the right) outlines the research methodology carried out for this project in regards to the design process steps.

	What if?	What wows?	What works?
	Generative Research (Primary)	Evaluative Research (Mix-methods)	Experimental and Applied Research (Primary and Quantitative)
rep	Co-creation workshop, ideation and brainstorming session, journey mapping workshop	Focus groups to gather qualitative feedback on prototypes. Surveys to collect quantitative data on concept desirability.	Usability testing (qualitative/ quantitative) Surveys to measure metrics (quantitative)
ar	Collaborative and speculative exploration to generate ideas and hypothesise potential solutions	Iterative testing and feedback	Outcome-driven validation of solutions
, fo	Synthesise ideas into themes/ clusters Prioritisation based on feasibility, impact, and alignment with organisational goals.	Qualitative feedback coding to identify strengths and areas for improvement Statistical analysis for preference and desirability scores	Quantitative metrics against baseline Interviews for qualitative feedback.
he	Scalable solutions for Ritz Carlton	Narrow down to high-potential solutions for Ritz Carlton USA (Validate desirability, feasibility, and viability)	Test the scalability and effectiveness of refined solutions across the hospitality industry
	Use feedback from multiple stakeholders (e.g., employees, managers) to refine concepts Preliminary themes help refine the opportunity statement to the problem statement and trigger co-creation sessions/ brainstorming	Triangulate qualitative data on prototypes from focus groups, with quantitative survey data measuring desirability and preference	Analyse testing results using quantitative metrics and qualitative feedback (eg. interviews) Test findings can validate themes from earlier stages, ensuring cohesion (cross reference against baselines to measure improvement)

What is? - Exploratory Research

The first phase focuses on understanding the current workforce landscape, identifying systemic challenges, and uncovering opportunities for transformation in employee experience.
The secondary research in this phase involves a comprehensive literature review of studies on employee engagement, workforce retention, and motivation theories in hospitality. Industry reports from analyzed to track workforce trends, including retention rates, job satisfaction levels, and turnover costs. Additionally, an in-depth case study analysis of Ritz-Carlton provides a benchmark for best practices in employee engagement and service excellence. Other successful hospitality organizations are also examined to compare workforce strategies and identify industry-wide gaps.

Simultaneously, primary research is conducted using surveys and semi-structured interviews. The surveys capture quantitative workforce insights while, he semi-structured interviews provide qualitative depth, revealing underlying emotional and systemic issues that affect workforce retention.

By triangulating findings from secondary sources, surveys, and interviews, this phase ensures a well-rounded understanding of workforce challenges, forming the foundation for the next stage.

What if? - Generative Research

Following the exploratory phase, the focus shifts toward developing innovative and human-centered solutions for employee engagement. This phase leverages service design methodologies to reimagine workforce strategies, ensuring they align with both employee aspirations and organizational objectives.

The secondary research at this stage involves analyzing service design frameworks, employee motivation theories, and behavioral psychology insights. Studies on intrinsic and extrinsic motivation are explored to understand what drives long-term commitment beyond financial incentives. Additionally, workforce engagement models from industries outside of hospitality—such as tech firms known for employee experience innovations—are examined for transferrable insights.

Primary research continues with follow-up surveys and semi-structured interviews, allowing employees and managers to provide feedback on potential workforce solutions. A key component of this phase is employee journey mapping, where the full employee lifecycle—from recruitment to career progression—is visualized, identifying moments where engagement strategies can be best applied.

Using co-design workshops and brainstorming sessions, stakeholders collaboratively develop new employee experience models, including potential training structures, recognition systems, and career growth frameworks. The ideas generated in this phase are refined into early-stage concepts that can be tested later.

What wows? - Evaluative Research

At this stage, the most promising solutions undergo initial testing and validation to ensure they are both practical and impactful. The goal is to assess the effectiveness, feasibility, and scalability of proposed workforce engagement strategies before full-scale implementation.

The secondary research in this phase includes an re-evaluation of current HR policies, workforce training models, and retention strategies in hospitality. Industry benchmarks and performance metrics from similar workforce transformations are examined to compare the effectiveness of new strategies.

Primary research at this stage includes employee and management feedback surveys, where participants evaluate proposed engagement programs based on their perceived impact and feasibility. Additionally if time permits, semi-structured interviews can be conducted with HR professionals and senior management, ensuring alignment between proposed solutions and organizational goals.

To refine the strategies, low-fidelity prototyping is employed, allowing employees to test new engagement frameworks in controlled settings. Role-playing scenarios and pilot engagement initiatives provide real-world feedback, leading to iterative improvements in strategy design.

What works? - Experimental and Applied

The final phase involves preparation for a scaled implementation and long-term impact assessment. Development and refinements should ensure that the framework is adaptable to different organisational structures and cultures.

The secondary research in this phase examines best practices in change management, ensuring that workforce transformation is implemented smoothly without disrupting operational efficiency. Past industry case studies on employee experience initiatives provide insights into scaling challenges and adoption strategies.

Primary research for the future, includes pre- and post-implementation surveys measuring employee engagement, job satisfaction, and retention rates before and after applying the new workforce strategies. Additionally, interviews with relevant stakeholders such as HR teams and employees would capture qualitative feedback on the real-world effectiveness of the new frameworks.

2.3 Setting the Context

In Service Design, understanding the system is not just the first step, it is the foundation for transformative solutions and laying the groundwork for change.

Setting the context is a fundamental step in service design, ensuring a holistic understanding of interconnected factors that shape experiences and behaviours within a system. As Stickdorn et al. highlight, service design goes beyond isolated touch-points to address systemic challenges. (Stickdorn et al., 2018, p. 53) In tackling workforce issues in the hospitality industry, context setting offers stakeholder alignment, clarifies scope and goals, and supports insights generation. Tools like journey maps and service blueprints help visualise current state and identify improvements.
A well established context prevents misdiagnosing issues and enables strategic, impactful solutions, laying the foundation for innovation and sustainable workforce strategies in hospitality.

The hospitality industry, a cornerstone of global economic activity, has evolved significantly over the centuries, shaped by societal, technological and cultural changes. Its historical development provides vital context for understanding the industry's current state and emerging trends,

The hospitality sector contributes over $4.7 trillion to the global economy and employs approximately 334 million people, representing 10.3% of the global workforce

(World Travel & Tourism Council, 2023)

Ancient Civilisations

Communal shelters in Mesopotamia, Greece, Rome; hospitality rooted in social and moral obligations

Middle Ages

Religious institutions, especially monasteries, provide hospitality to pilgrims; emphasis on spiritual care

Renaissance & Industrial Revolution

Urbanisation leads to purpose build hotels; Savoy Hotel established in 1889 introduces luxury amenities

20th Century

Globalisation, chain hotels, online booking; 1.5 billion international arrivals (2019), $1.7 trillion in tourism receipts

21st Century (currently)

Hospitality industry valued at $4.7 trillion; 334 million employed globally; rise of AirBnB with 150 million users
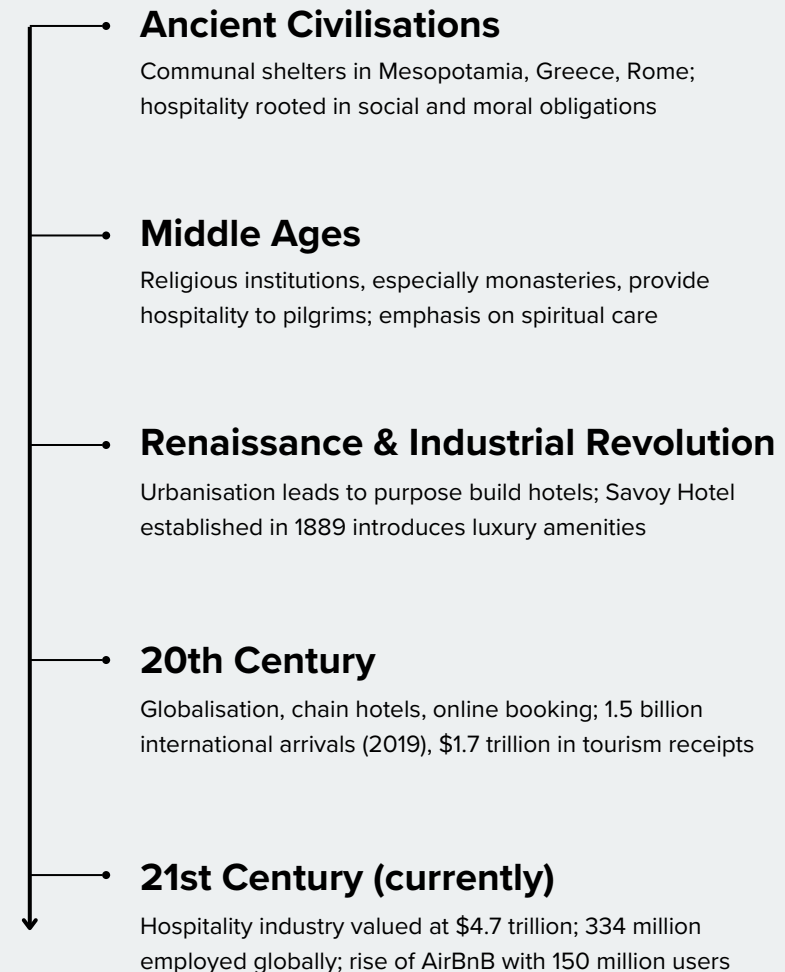
Fig. 2.1: Timeline of the hospitality industry as an overview

This journey began with simple acts of altruism in ancient civilizations (as shown in fig. 2.1 on the left) and has transformed into a sophisticated, multi- dimensional industry that caters to diverse consumer needs.

The origins of hospitality are rooted in the social and moral obligations of ancient societies. In Mesopotamia, Greece, and Rome, communal shelters offered travellers food and rest, embodying the ethos of service and care. During the Middle Ages, religious institutions such as monasteries became pivotal in offering hospitality, particularly to pilgrims. This period saw hospitality align more closely with spiritual principles, emphasising solicitude and respect as core values. As detailed by the Library of Congress Guide on Hospitality, these early practices set stage for the later commercialisation of the industry, embedding a human centric approach that persists to this day.

The Renaissance and the Industrial Revolution marked a major transition in hospitality, as increasing urbanisation and technological advances spurred the demand for organised accommodation and services. Purpose-built hotels began to emerge in urban centres, catering to the growing needs of business and leisure travellers. The Savoy Hotel in London, established in 1889, became a symbol of evolution, introducing luxury amenities such as en-suite bathrooms and electrical lighting (Hospitality Insights, École hôtelière de Lausanne). The innovations of this era reflect the industry's shift toward professionalism and the development of global standards.

In the 20th century, however, globalisation, mass tourism, and technology catalysed further changes in the hospitality sector. The emergence of chain hotels, advancements in transportation, and the rise of online booking platforms transformed hospitality into a highly scalable and accessible industry.

For example, international tourism arrivals reached 1.5 billion in 2019, contributing $1.7 trillion in global tourism receipts before the COVID-19 pandemic

(United Nations World Tourism Organization 2020)

The period also saw the diversification of services to include budget accommodations, luxury resorts, and alternative models such as vacation rentals, driven by platforms like AirBnB, which now serves over 150 million users worldwide. (Statista, 2023)

Today, the hospitality industry is composed of several interrelated components, each contributing to its dynamic landscape. From accommodation to sustainable initiative, each segment plays a critical role in meeting the diverse needs of consumers and advancing the industry's growth and innovation.
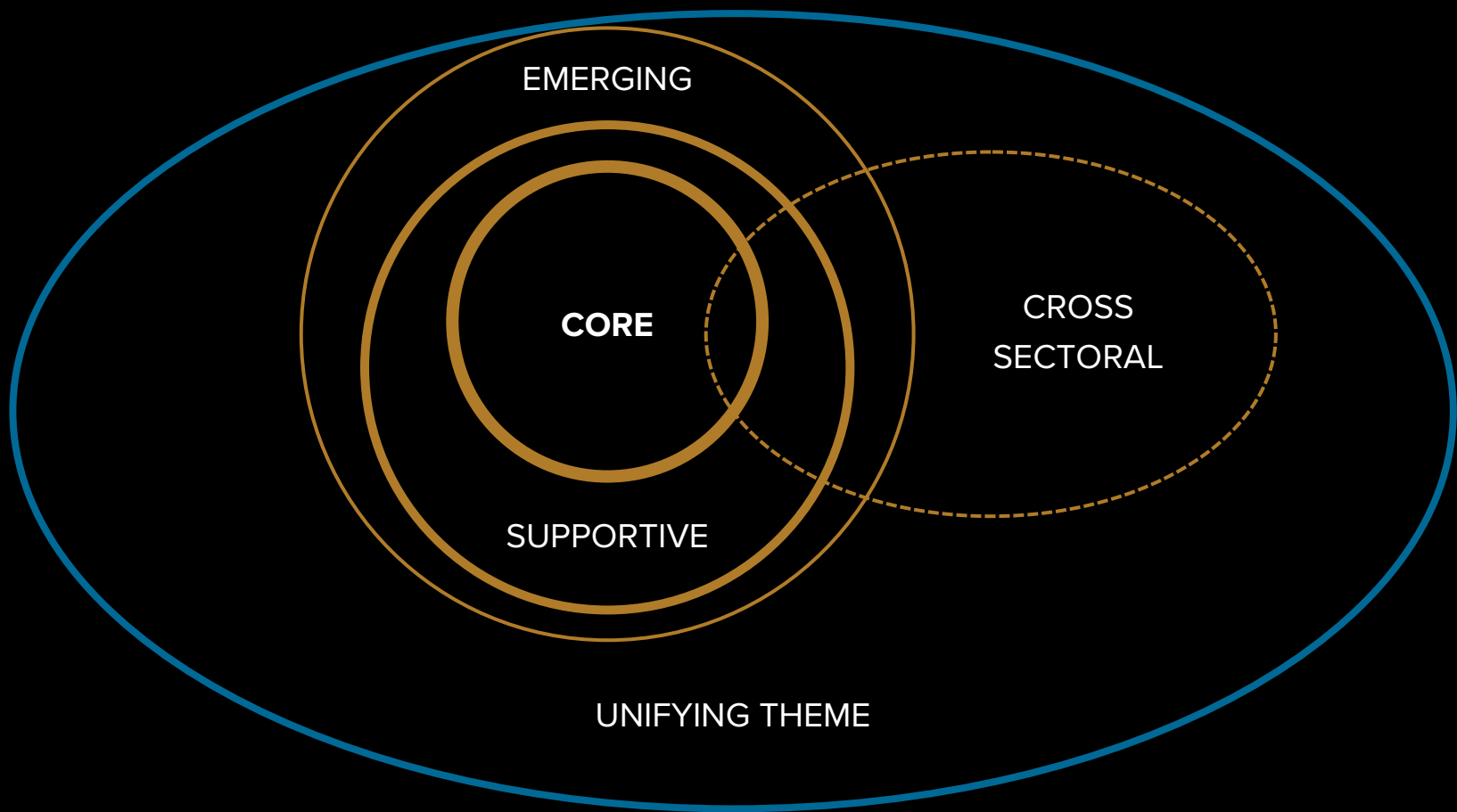
Fig 2.2: Framework to visualise the hospitality industry and its key components in a systemic and organised manner.

The framework given above represents the multi-dimensional structure of the hospitality industry, where different sectors interact dynamically.

At its core, accommodation and food & beverage (F&B) form the foundation. Surrounding this, travel & tourism and entertainment & recreation support industry growth, while health & wellness and technology & digital services represent emerging trends.The MICE (meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions) cuts across all layers, influencing various components; yet a separate sector in itself. Encapsulating the entirety is sustainability, subtly grazing the emerging section as it's still in its nascent stages; serving as a unifying theme.

This model highlights the industry's evolving nature, emphasising on systemic innovation, cross sector collaboration, and long term sustainability as key drivers for future growth and transformation.

Fig: 2.2 (shown on the left)

CORE

SUPPORTING
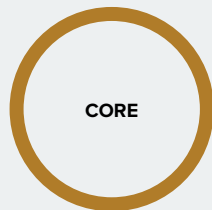
Accommodation forms the backbone of the sector, offering a spectrum of lodging options from budget motels to luxury hotels, vacation rentals, and boutique resorts. This segment addresses the fundamental need for rest and comfort, directly influencing customer satisfaction and the quality of travel experiences. The global hotel market is projected to reach $1.21 trillion by 2028, growing at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 9.1% (Fortune Business Insights, 2022). This segment not only generates significant revenue but also serves as a vital enabler of global mobility, providing safe and accessible lodging for travellers across socio-economic strata.

The **food and beverage (F&B)** sector, which generates over $3.6 trillion annually is the largest and the most revenue generating component of this industry; encompassing restaurants, bars, cafes, catering services, and other food establishments. Beyond satisfying the basic need for nourishment, the F&B segment enhances travel experiences by promoting cultural exchange through diverse cuisines and culinary traditions. It is an indispensable part of social interaction and entertainment, with fast casual dining and fine dining establishments catering to varying consumer preferences of convenience and quality. Economically, it also supports millions of jobs globally.

Travel and Tourism, which encompasses transportation services such as airlines, cruiselines, and car rentals, as well as travel agencies and booking platforms, is the connective tissue of the hospitality industry-driving demand across other segments including accommodation and Food & Beverage services. This segment facilitates exploration and accessibility, linking travellers to destinations and experiences. Pre-pandemic, international tourism arrivals reached 1.5 billion annually; looking ahead to 2025, preliminary estimates suggest that international arrivals will grow by 3% to 5% compared to 2024. (United Nations World Tourism Organisation)

Entertainment and recreation form a key component of the industry, offering unique and memorable activities such as theme parks, casinos, cultural attractions, and adventure tourism.
These experiences not only enhance the value of travel but also serve as significant economic drivers, with the global theme park generating $47.6 billion in 2021. For individuals, this segment provides opportunities for relaxation, excitement, and cultural immersion, improving overall quality of life. (WTTC)

EMERGING

CROSS SECTORAL
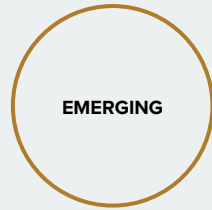
Health and Wellness tourism, an emerging segment, focuses on promoting physical and mentall well-being through offerings such as spas, fitness centers, yoga retreats, and medical tourism services. Hilton's 2023 travel report indicates that 50% of travellers are seeking experiences that address physical or mental wellness during trips. (Kim Schewitz, Business Insider, 2024). According to the Global Wellness Institute, the wellness tourism market was valued at $814.6 billion in 2022 and is projected to expand at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 12.42% from 2023 to 2030. (Roger Sands, Forbes, 2023) This segment has gained traction as consumers increasingly prioritise stress relief and self-care.

The role of **technology and digital services** has become indispensable in the hospitality industry, revolutionising service delivery and customer engagement. Online booking platforms, virtual concierge systems, and mobile applications have made travel planning more accessible and convenient. Emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, blockchain and the Internet of Things (IoT) are transforming operations and enabling businesses to offer seamless, personalised experiences. For consumers, these advancements enhance satisfaction, while for businesses, they drive efficiency and innovation. The 2024 Lodging Technology study indicates that 60% of hotel IT decision-makers are focusing on digital transformation initiatives. This reflects a strong commitment to leveraging technology to enhance guest services and streamline operations. (Hospitality Technology, Ensemble IQ, 2024)
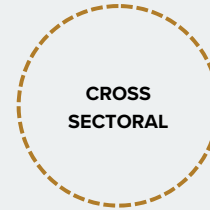
The **Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions (MICE)** sector represents the intersection of hospitality and business.
Hosting professional events such as corporate meetings, trade exhibitions, and industry conferences, the MICE sector supports knowledge exchange and networking. (World Bank, 2024)
According to a systemic literature review published in the International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences, the MICE industry was valued at approximately $805 billion in 2017 and was projected to reach $1,439.3 billion by 2025, reflecting a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 7.6%.

Sustainability and eco-friendly practices have become increasingly relevant as the industry responds to global calls for environmental responsibility. In a notable policy development, more than 50 countries signed a UN declaration in November 2024 to make global tourism more climate-friendly. Initiatives such as renewable energy usage, waste reduction, eco-tourism, and ethical sourcing align with sustainability goals while promoting mindful consumption. According to WTTC, the sector's global greenhouse gas emissions have reduced to 6.5% in 2023 from 8% in 2019. These efforts not only contribute to environmental preservation but also strengthen brand loyalty and appeal to a growing segment of eco-concious consumers; as a 2023 survey found that 76% of travellers intend to pursue more sustainable travel options in the coming years. (World Economic Forum)

The hospitality industry is also multifaceted, with various sectors as we just reviewed, tailored to distinct service types and target markets. Understanding this categorisation is essential for analysing its trends and challenges. (as discussed in the figure 2.3 on the next page)

The segmentation by price point and service level delineates **luxury accommodations from economy options**, catering to diverse guest expectations and financial capacities. For instance, luxury hotels often provide personalised services and premium amenities, while economy hotels focus on essential comforts at budget-friendly rates. This differentiation allows businesses to effectively target specific customer segments, enhancing market reach and profitability. (Simon Crawford-Welch, Market segmentation in the hospitality industry, Sage Journals)

Further segmentation distinguishes between **corporate and leisure** travellers. Business travellers typically prioritise convenience, connectivity, and efficient services to support their work commitments. In contrast, leisure travellers seek unique and immersive experiences that offer relaxation and recreation. Understanding these distinct preferences enables hospitality providers to tailor their offerings accordingly, thereby improving customer satisfaction and loyalty. (Tanuja K. et al., Demographic or psychographic hotel segmentation, 2022)

Geographical segmentation into **urban and rural markets** also plays a crucial role. Urban hospitality establishments often experience high occupancy rates and rapid guest turnover, necessitating streamlined operations and services. Conversely, rural hospitality offerings frequently focus on retreats and eco-tourism, emphasising tranquility and natural surroundings to attract guests seeking respite from urban life. This segmentation allows businesses to align their services with the specific desires of their target demographics. (R. Andrew et al., National Bureau of Economic Research, 2019)

Additionally, the industry encompasses both **traditional and alternative models**. Traditional models include hotel chains and full-service restaurants, which offer standardised services and amenities. Alternative models, such as boutique hotels, food trucks, and spaces designed for digital nomads, provide unique and flexible offerings that cater to niche markets. This diversity within the industry reflects its adaptability to evolving consumer preferences and market trends.

Understanding the industry's evolution and segmentation is critical to address systemic challenges.

The industry's complexity requires a nuanced approach to ground solutions ensuring relevance, scalability, and long term impact.

However, its resilience and adaptability have been proven time and again, from its ancient roots in generosity to its current status as a global economic powerhouse.

Using an Adaptive Value Framework to help categorise the hospitality industry.

This theory draws from the idea of segmenting characters that one needs to thrive. Here, it draws upon sociological and business principles, emphasising the interplay between individual preferences, situational contexts, and systemic industry dynamics.

This is not a rigid linear framework. Instead, these function as flexible elements that a business can blend to craft a unique value proposition to align with market demands and customer expectations enhancing adaptability and innovation capacity.

Fig: 2.3 (shown on the right)

Hospitality Industry

Categorisation

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Experiential Value

Service Delivery Style

- **Alternate** — eg: boutique hotels, food trucks, and spaces designed for digital nomads
- **Traditional** — eg: hotel chains and full-service restaurants

Contextual Value

Geography / Location

- **Urban** — eg: high occupancy rates, necessitating streamlined operations and services
- **Rural** — eg: retreats and eco-tourism, emphasising tranquility and natural surroundings

Functional Value

Purpose of Travel

- **Corporate** — eg: prioritise convenience, connectivity, and efficient services
- **Leisure** — eg: unique and immersive experiences that offer relaxation and recreation

Economic Value

Price / Service Tier

- **Luxury** — eg: personalised services and premium amenities
- **Economy** — eg: essential comforts at budget-friendly rates

The service industry, also known as the tertiary sector, comprises economic activities that provide intangible goods and services rather than physical products (Investopedia, n.d.); distinguishing it from the primary (raw materials) and secondary (manufacturing) sectors.
It includes. diverse sectors such as finance, healthcare, education, retail and hospitality, all of which emphasise expertise, customer experience and service delivery. (Britannica, n.d.)

The service sector has grown to become the dominant contributor to GDP in many developed economies, reflecting a shift toward a service global economy. (New American Economy, n.d.) We have already established the substantial and extensive contribution of the industry to the global economy and employment in the above section thus far.
In addition, the hospitality sector also contributes significantly to tax revenues, which governments can reinvest into infrastructure, public services, and community development, further strengthening its role in the fiscal health of countries.

In 2024, the sector's global economic contribution is projected to reach about $11.1 trillion, accounting for one in every ten dollars generated worldwide.

(World Travel and Tourism Council 2024)

On a broader scale, tourism related tax receipts can constitute up to 10% of total tax revenues in some developed countries.

(The PayPayers- Netherlands, 2024)

However, despite its undeniable economic impact, the industry's workforce often faces precarious working conditions, including low wages, job insecurity, and high turnover rates (Baum et al., 2022) Employees in hospitality play a pivotal role in service delivery, directly influencing customer satisfaction and business performance. (Dimitrios & Buhalis, 2023)
Moreover, the industry's growing reliance on technological advancements and sustainability-driven models requires a skilled workforce that is continuously trained and well-supported (Gursoy, Chi, & Chi, 2023). The rise of AI and automation in hospitality does not replace the need for human interaction but rather elevates the role of employees to provide more specialised and empathetic service.

In this rapidly evolving landscape, a sustainable hospitality industry is one that not only prioritises guests but also ensures that those delivering the experience are valued, protected, and empowered.

Hence, setting the stage for further discussion on its market standing, trends and current shortcomings.
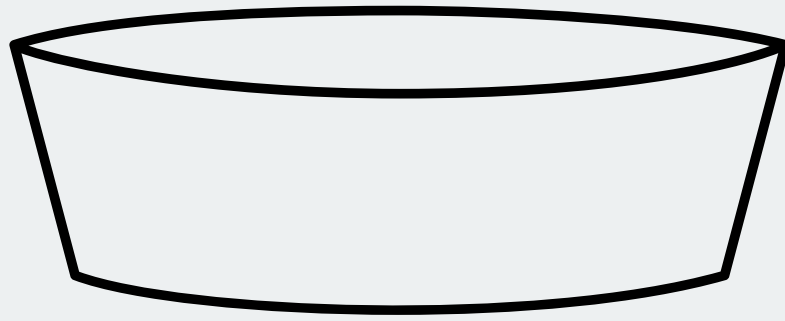
Market dynamics of the hospitality industry in the United Staes
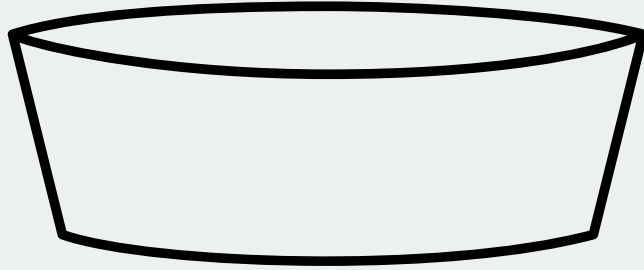
The Core: Accommodation sector in the United States
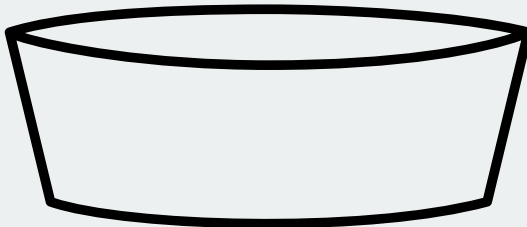
Ritz Carlton- A case study

Fig 2.4: The given diagram illustrates the funnelling process that is carried out while conducting research in the discovery phase (what is?)

Market Dynamics of the hospitality industry in the United States

The market dynamics of the U.S. hospitality industry are shaped by a combination of economic, technological, labor, regulatory, and competitive factors that influence growth and operational strategies.

The industry is going to be driven by increasing domestic and international tourism, evolving consumer preferences, and digital transformation in the future. However, inflation, economic cycles, and changing travel behaviors impact demand, influencing the performance of luxury hotels, budget accommodations, and alternative lodging options like Airbnb and VRBO.

Advancements in smart hotel technology, AI-driven customer experiences, automation, and contactless payments are revolutionizing operations, enhancing guest personalization, and improving efficiency. Sustainability and Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) initiatives are becoming critical, with major hotel chains investing in eco-friendly infrastructure, renewable energy, and carbon-neutral strategies.

Meanwhile, government regulations on health, safety, taxation, and short-term rental policies continue to shape the competitive landscape. As the industry moves forward, AI integration, hybrid hospitality models, and wellness tourism are emerging as key trends, reinforcing the need for businesses to adapt to an evolving, experience-driven market while ensuring workforce well-being and sustainable growth.

The Total Addressable Market (TAM) represents the overall revenue opportunity available within a specific market if a product or service achieves 100% market share. The Total Addressable Market (TAM) for the U.S. hospitality industry is extensive, reflecting its significant contribution to the economy.

In 2024, the industry was valued at approximately $15.31 billion, with projections to reach $23.68 billion by 2031, growing at a CAGR of 5.6%.

The employment landscape in the U.S. hospitality sector is equally significant. As of December 2023, the leisure and hospitality sector employed approximately 16.82 million people, making it one of the largest employment segments in the country.

The average hourly wage for hospitality workers stood at $22.44 as of December 2024, and in 2022 alone, the hotel industry paid over $104 billion in wages, salaries, and compensation. The wages in the industry have even increased by an average of 29% between 2019 and 2024, outpacing the 20% average wage growth in other high-earning categories across U.S. states. However, despite some positive employment figures, challenges persist in these roles.

Regulations
- Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) – Ensures employee safety.
- American Hotel & Lodging Association (AHLA) – Provides and maintains industry standards.
- Local Housing and Zoning Laws – Regulate Airbnb and rental properties.

Regulations
- Food and Drug Administration (FDA) – Ensures food safety.
- Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau (TTB) – Regulates alcohol sales.
- U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) – Oversees meat and agricultural product safety.

Regulations
- Gambling Laws – Managed at the state level (e.g., Nevada Gaming Commission).
- Federal Communications Commission (FCC) – Regulates broadcasting in entertainment.
- Copyright & Intellectual Property Laws – Protect movie theatres, music, and performance rights.

Regulations
- U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) – Regulates airlines, cruise ships, and road transport.
- Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) – Ensures airline safety.
- Transportation Security Administration (TSA) – Oversees airport security.

Hospitality Industry

Accommodation

Food & Beverage

Entertainment & Recreation

Travel & Tourism

Financial Services

Technology and Digital Services

Marketing and Advertising

Supporting Industries

Fig 2.5.0 : Hospitality System Map - Overview

Accommodation

Types of Lodging
- Hotels
- Motels
- Resorts
- Hostels
- Vacation Rentals
- Bed & Breakfasts
- Service Apartments

Types of Stay
- Short- term stay
- Extended stay
- Luxury stay
- Budget stay
- Recreational
- Business
- Leisure

Management

Departments
- Food & Beverage
- Room Division
- Finance
- Asset Management
- Human Resources
- Sales
- Marketing

Operational Structure
- Independant
- Franchise
- Cooperate owned
- Government run

Quality control
- Star rating
- Customer reviews
- Certifications
- Internal audits
- External audits

Fig 2.5.1 : Accommodation subsystem - Overview

Food & Beverage

Types of Offerings
- Full Service restaurants
- Fast Food and Quick Service
- Cafe and coffee shops
- Bars and Nightclubs
- Catering Services and Banquets
- Hotel F&B Operations

Management

Departments
- Front of House- Waitstaff & Bartenders
- Back of House- Kitchen Staff; Chefs and Cooks, F&B Managers, Cleaning & Sanitation Crew
- Procurement & Inventory
- Marketing and Sales
- Finance & Administration
- Quality Control

Quality control
- Food Safety & Hygiene
- Customer Service Standards
- Supply Chain Audits
- Health Inspections & Compliance
- Staff Training & SOPs
- Guest Feedback & Reviews

Fig 2.5.2 : Food & Beverage subsystem - Overview

Travel & Tourism

Key People
- Transportation and logistics
- Tourism management and hospitality
- Government and regulatory officials
- Customer support/ Service providers

Infrastructure
- Transportation
- Accommodation & hospitality
- Tourism specific activities
- Safety and emergency
- Digital and technology

Travel

Types
- Leisure
- Business
- Adventure
- Medical
- Religious

Modes
- Air
- Rail
- Road
- Cruise and Waterways

Users
- Solo Travellers
- Couples/ Families
- Cooperate
- Seniors
- Groups

Policies & Regulations
- Visa & Immigration laws
- Safety
- Environmental policies
- Air travel

Tourism

Types
- Cultural
- Eco-tourism
- Heritage
- Luxury
- Backpacking/ budget
- Other

Management
- Destination
- Tour planning & Itinerary
- Hospitality coordination
- Marketing & Promotion
- Miscellaneous

Staff
- Tour operators
- Guides & local experts
- Travel agents
- Event planners
- Customer support teams

Quality Control
- Sustainability
- Customer experience
- Tour safety
- Cultural sensitivity

Fig 2.5.3 : Travel & Tourism subsystem - Overview

Entertainment & Recreation

Entertainment- enjoyment
(amusement, performances, and leisure activities)

Types

- Live performances
- Cinema & Film
- Nightlife and clubs
- Gaming and casinos
- Theme parks and attractions

Management

- Event planning
- Venue operations
- Marketing and promotions
- Financial Management
- Security and Safety

eg: coordinators, performers/ artists, technical crew, customer service teams, security personnel, f&b service teams, tour guides, instructors

Quality Control

- Environmental impact
- Health & Safety compliance
- Equipment & Facility Standards
- Service standards
- Visitor reviews and feedback

Recreation- renewing/ revitalising
(wellness, fitness, and outdoor experiences)

Types

- Outdoor activities
- Sports and fitness
- Wellness and spa
- vAdventure tourism
- Cultural and heritage sites

Management

- Facility maintenance
- Program coordination
- Membership services
- Marketing Services
- Safety and risk management

Fig 2.5.4 : Entertainment & Recreation subsystem - Overview

Supporting Industries

- **Financial Services**
  - Payment Processing
  - Banking and loans
  - Insurance Services

- **Technology and IT Infrastructure**
  - Online travel agencies
  - Mobile applications
  - Cloud based management systems
  - Point of Sale (POS) systems
  - Smart Hospitality and IoT solutions
  - Cybersecurity and Data protection

- **Marketing and Advertising**
  - Social media marketing
  - Digital marketing
  - SEO and Online Advertising
  - Traditional Media management
  - Loyalty Programs and strategy
  - Public Relations

Fig 2.5.5 : Supporting Industries for Hospitality - Overview

Fig 2.6: (Above figure) Causal looping refers to a system dynamics concept where elements in a system influence one another through feedback loops. These loops create reinforcing (positive) or balancing (negative) effects, impacting system behavior over time. Causal loops are commonly represented using Causal Loop Diagrams (CLDs) to visualize how variables interact and influence outcomes.

It is relevant to depict in this scenario as it shows the different interdependencies of the industry with respect to the larger ecosystem at play. It helps understand the complex cause and effect relationships and can be further implemented to specific instances to predict unintended consequences to management decisions or even improve and optimise experiences and performances.

The Core: Accommodation sector in the United States

Given the sector's reliance on tourism, business travel, and consumer spending, the Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Legal, and Environmental factors play a crucial role in providing a comprehensive assessment of external factors influencing the accommodation sector.

The accommodation sector is significantly influenced by government policies, international relations, and regulatory frameworks. Federal and state governments impose taxes, zoning laws, and safety regulations that impact hotel operations. The administration's focus on infrastructure and workforce development has led to investments in urban renewal projects, indirectly benefiting hotels and short-term rentals by increasing accessibility and tourism appeal. However, immigration laws and visa restrictions affect international travel, which is a key driver of hotel revenue.
Hotel associations often lobby against short-term rentals, pushing for stricter licensing requirements and taxation on these properties to level the playing field. Additionally, government intervention in pandemic recovery measures, such as grants, stimulus packages, and employment support for hospitality workers, has played a crucial role in stabilizing the industry.

The accommodation sector is highly sensitive to economic cycles, inflation, and consumer spending power. In 2024, the industry was valued at $231.1 billion, with projections to reach $567.38 billion by 2030, demonstrating steady growth. However, inflation and rising costs of goods and services have pushed hotels to adjust pricing strategies. The average daily rate (ADR) for hotels has increased, particularly in urban centers like New York, Miami, and Los Angeles, where hotel stays now often exceed $200 per night. Additionally, fluctuations in disposable income and corporate budgets impact travel too.

Changing consumer preferences, demographics, and lifestyle trends significantly impact the accommodation sector. Additionally, diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives are becoming a core focus in the hospitality workforce. Hotels and hospitality brands are making efforts to improve employee satisfaction, mental well-being, and work-life balance due to the industry's historically high turnover rates and physically demanding conditions. The workforce shortage has prompted businesses to increase wages, offer better benefits, and implement flexible work arrangements.

Technology is redefining the guest experience and operational efficiencies in the accommodation sector. The adoption of AI-driven customer service, mobile check-ins, contactless payments, and voice-activated room controls has enhanced convenience for travelers. Big data and machine learning allow hotels to analyze customer preferences, personalize offerings, and optimize pricing strategies using dynamic algorithms.

The accommodation sector operates within a complex legal framework, influenced by business regulations, labor laws, taxation policies, and consumer protection standards. Another key legal concern is data privacy and cybersecurity, particularly in hotels that handle large volumes of customer information, payment data, and loyalty program memberships. Compliance with General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and California Consumer Privacy Act (CCPA) is crucial to maintaining consumer trust and preventing security breaches.

Sustainability is becoming a major differentiator in the accommodation sector, with hotels and resorts implementing green building practices, carbon reduction strategies, and waste management programs.

Legend

Fee for a service model (Internal)

Fee for a service model (External)
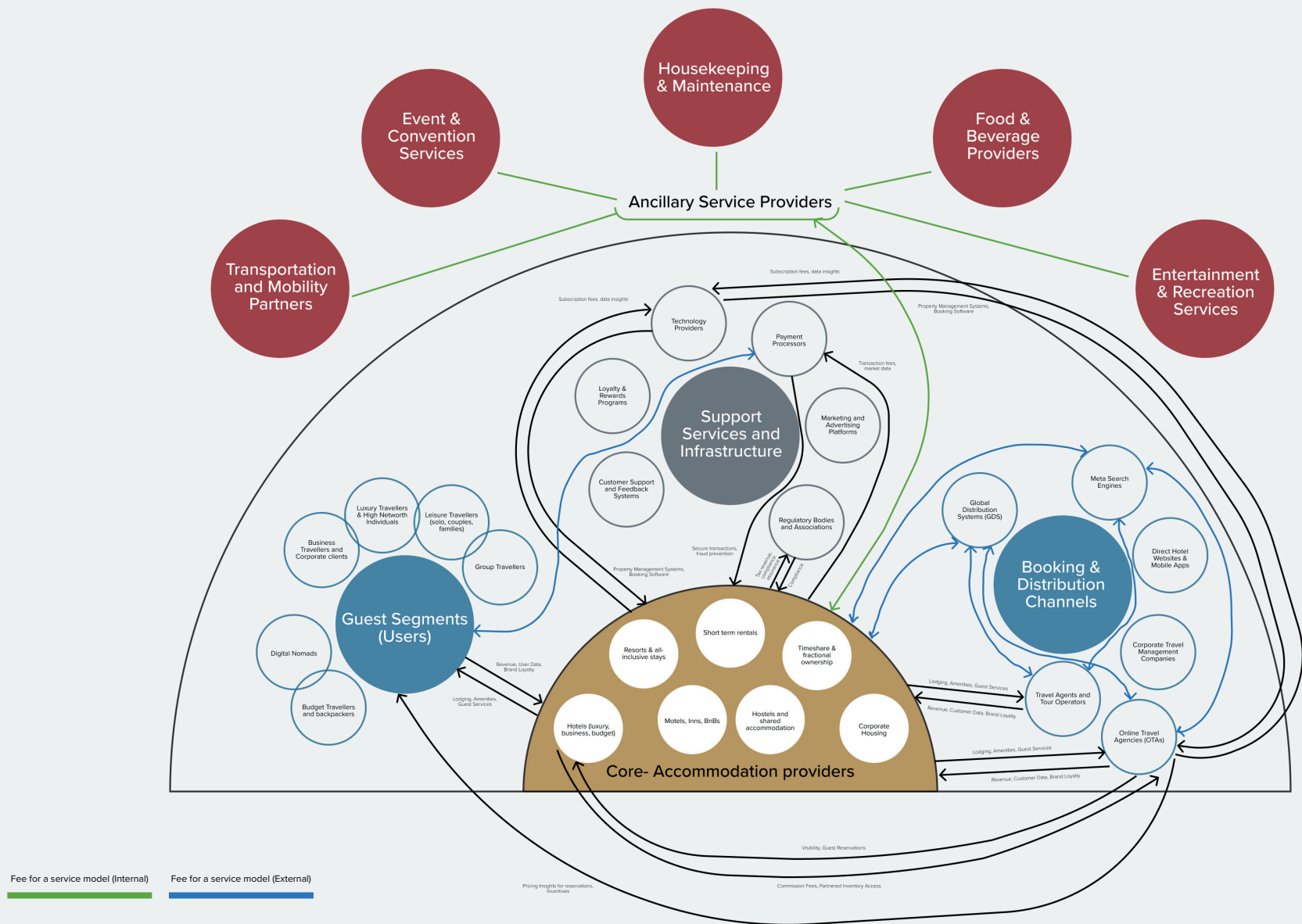
Fig 2.7: Accommodation (Subsystem) Value Network
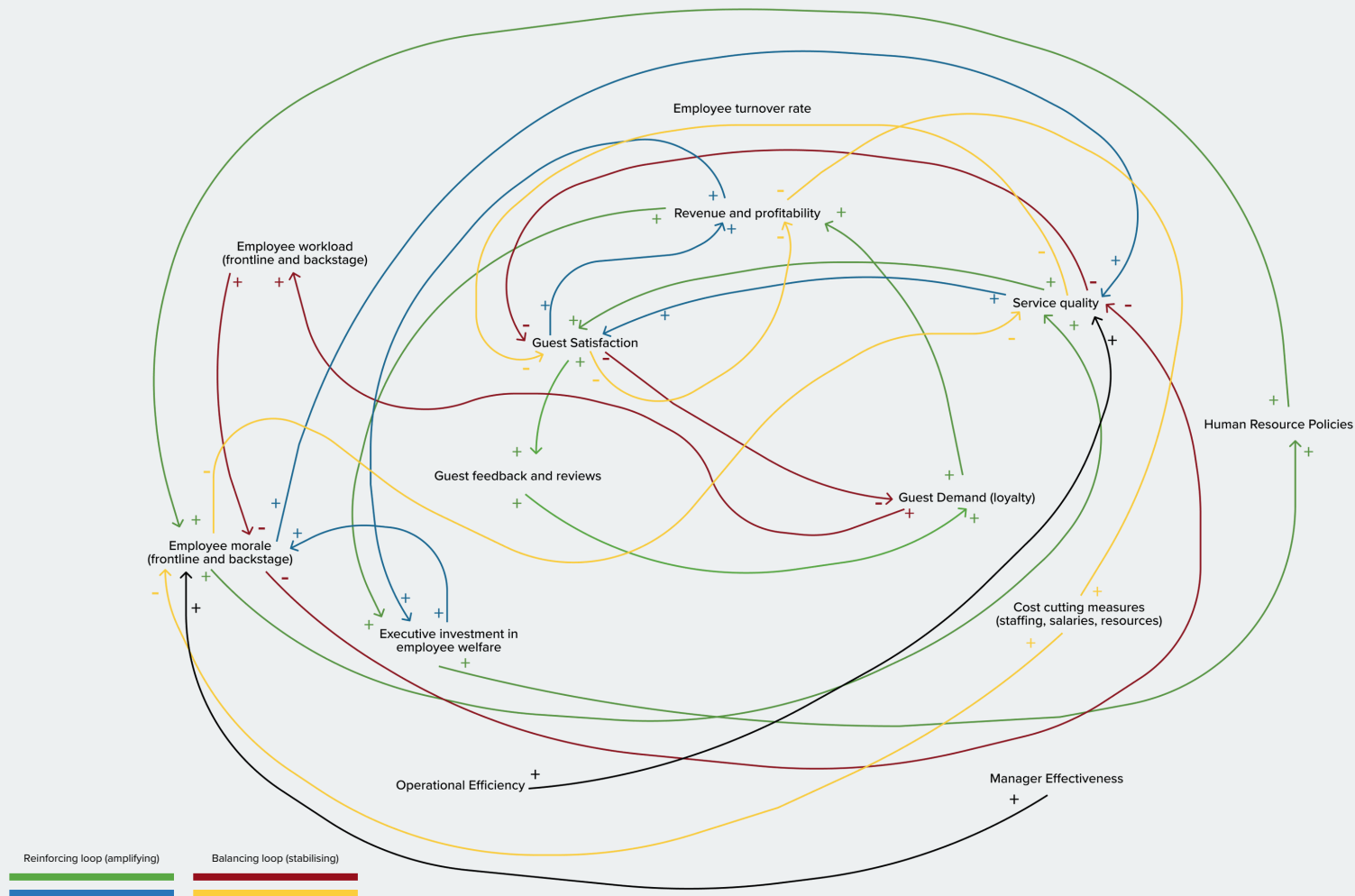
Fig. 2.8: Causal Looping for Hotels as a niche subsector

The above figure underscores the link between employees and guests. The reinforcing loops show how prioritising employee well being not only improves operational efficiency but also generates sustainable revenue growth. Meanwhile, the balancing loops highlight the need to manage employee turnover effectively ensuring consistency in service quality. This approach helps represent the future way forward, emphasising a people first strategy vs the environmental factors studied in fig 2.6 above. These dynamics in strategic planning aim to enable hotels as a sub-sector to gain resilience, attract and retain top talent, build customer loyalty and ultimately secure industry leadership.

Exploration of Fig. 2.8 (on the left)- Fig. 2.8.1 (above):
The causal loop illustrates how employee investment enhances experience, boosts operational efficiency, and improves service quality, leading to higher guest satisfaction and revenue (Reinforcing Loops). Increased revenue allows further employee investment, creating a self-sustaining cycle. At the same time, better employee experience reduces turnover, ensuring a skilled, stable workforce that maintains service quality (Balancing Loop). This model is based on empirical evidence (Hyo-Sun Jung, et al, 2023) (Laškarin Ažić, M., 2017) on the causal relationship between employee experience, guest satisfaction, and financial performance in the hospitality industry, validating the people-first strategy as a sustainable business approach.

Ritz Carlton- A Case Study

The Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company is synonymous with luxury and exceptional service in the hospitality industry. A significant contributor to its esteemed reputation is its unwavering commitment to employee experience. By fostering a culture of empowerment, continuous development, and recognition, The Ritz-Carlton ensures that its employees, referred to as "Ladies and Gentlemen," are equipped and motivated to deliver unparalleled guest experiences.

Central to The Ritz-Carlton's success is its well-defined organizational culture, encapsulated in its "Gold Standards." These standards comprise The Credo, The Motto, The Three Steps of Service, and The Employee Promise. The Motto, "We are Ladies and Gentlemen serving Ladies and Gentlemen," emphasizes mutual respect and professionalism, setting a tone of dignity and self-respect within the organization. This philosophy not only elevates the guest experience but also instills a sense of pride and belonging among employees. (Ritz Carlton Leadership Center)

The Ritz-Carlton's meticulous selection process is foundational to its service excellence. The company prioritizes hiring individuals with innate talents that align with its service values, often involving multiple interviews and assessments to ensure a cultural fit. This rigorous approach results in a turnover rate of approximately 20%, significantly lower than the industry average of 60%. (Stephen B., n.d.)

Upon hiring, new employees undergo a comprehensive onboarding process known as the "Seven Day Countdown." This program immerses them in the company's culture, standards, and expectations, ensuring they are well-prepared to embody The Ritz-Carlton's service ethos from day one. (Harvard Business School Case 601-163)

Empowerment is deeply ingrained in The Ritz-Carlton's operational philosophy. Every employee is authorized to spend up to $2,000 per guest, per day, to resolve any issues or enhance the guest experience without managerial approval. This level of trust enables employees to address guest needs promptly and creatively, fostering a sense of ownership and accountability.

The Ritz-Carlton places a strong emphasis on recognizing and valuing employee contributions. Regular evaluations, such as the Gallup Q12 employee engagement survey, are utilized to assess and enhance staff engagement. Statements like "In the last seven days, I have received recognition or praise for doing good work" help measure the effectiveness of the company's recognition programs and ensure that employees feel valued.

The comprehensive focus on employee experience at The Ritz-Carlton has yielded remarkable results. The company boasts a 97% customer satisfaction rate, a testament to the effectiveness of its employee-centric strategies. Furthermore, engaged employees contribute to higher guest engagement, leading to increased revenue and brand loyalty. (ICMR India. (2014). Employee Training & Development at Ritz-Carlton: Fostering an Exceptional Customer Service Culture)

The Ritz-Carlton's dedication to enhancing employee experience through a well-defined culture, rigorous selection and training processes, empowerment, and recognition has solidified its position as a leader in the hospitality industry. By investing in its employees, the company ensures that they are motivated and equipped to deliver the exceptional service that defines The Ritz-Carlton brand.

Strategic review of Ritz Carlton's service methods

From the previous overview, it is understood that the Ritz Carlton service philosophy. is not merely a set of rules but a structured system of innovation, empowerment and disruption designed to sustain its leadership. To ensure its continued dominance in the hospitality industry, the fundamental service methods- the Credo, Motto, Service Values, Employee Promise, Three Steps of Service, and the Sixth Diamond- are all mapped using Alexander Manu's Innovation matrix.

As shown in figure 2.9, this framework categorises practices into four quadrants- integrator, enabler, disruptor and follower- based on their ability to create, implement, and drive transformational change.

1 The Credo, which states, "We are Ladies and Gentlemen serving Ladies and Gentlemen", acts as the integrator that unifies service excellence across all properties. It embeds the company's core values into every interaction, ensuring that employees view hospitality as more than a job- it becomes an extension of their professional identity.

2 The Motto, reinforces the similar ideology, further supports this integration by serving an intrinsic service mindset. However, unlike conventional customer service standards that are imposed externally, the Ritz Carlton's Motto serves as an internalised guideline , allowing employees to maintain service consistency across touch-points without requiring excessive managerial oversight; forming a foundation for a highly scalable luxury experience.

3 The Three Steps of Service as laid out- warm welcome, anticipation of needs, and a fond farewell- act as a bridge between the integrator and enabler quadrants. On one hand they create a structured, predictable service model that ensures every guest receives the same level of attentiveness. On the other hand, they enable employees to infuse personality and intuition into each step, transforming a transactional interaction into a deeply personalised experience. This dual role enhances guest loyalty, as returning customers come to expect familiarity while also being delighted by thoughtful touches that go beyond routine hospitality.

4 Building upon this foundation, the Service Values transition from merely integrating service principles to enabling employee driven innovation. The Service Values provide employees with clear yet flexible guidelines on how to personalise guest experiences while maintaining a unified brand standard. They emphasise more-so the importance of anticipation, customisation and exceeding expectations, allowing staff to act with autonomy rather than strictly adhering to scripted interactions.

5 The Employee Promise similarly fosters a high-trust work culture where employees are seen not only as service providers but also as creators of unique guest experiences. By placing this in the enabler quadrants , Ritz Carlton ensures that its workforce is agile and empowered to innovate from within, reducing the reliance on top-down management for service differentiation.

6 At the highest level of service innovation lies the Sixth Diamond, which propels Ritz Carlton into the disruptor segment. This framework consists of three key elements- function, emotional engagement, and mystique. The functional aspect integrates seamlessly with the brand's operational excellence, ensuring that service errors are minimised and efficiency is maximised. This reinforces predictability and reliability. However, Emotional engagement and Mystique push the company into the realm of disruption. Emotional engagement enables employees to deeply connect with guests on a personal level, shifting luxury service from transactional to relational. Mystique, on the other hand, represents the most disruptive element of the model. It challenges the predictability of luxury service by introducing moments of unexpected delight.

These aspects of service are what pushes Ritz Carlton from being a mere follower in the luxury space to a disruptor.
The balance maintained between being an integrator and enabler also prevents it from rigidity or chaos. This is how it is actively redefining high-end hospitality in a constantly evolving market.

FOUNDATIONS OF THE BRAND
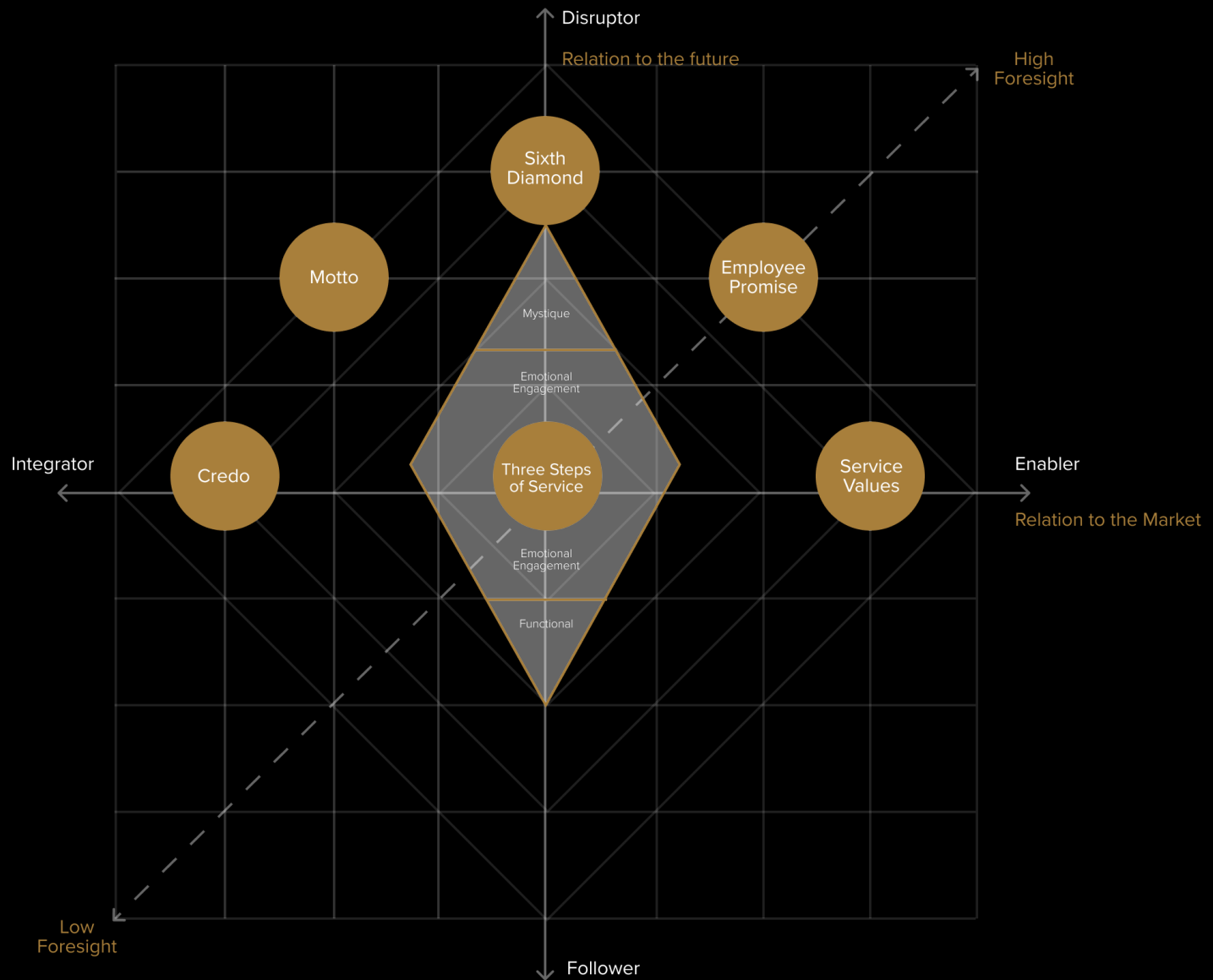
Fig 2.9: Service methods of Ritz Carlton mapped on the Disruption Index (Source: Manu A., 2021, The Philosophy of Disruption, p.11)

Fig. 2A: Plotting Service Excellence across luxury hotels
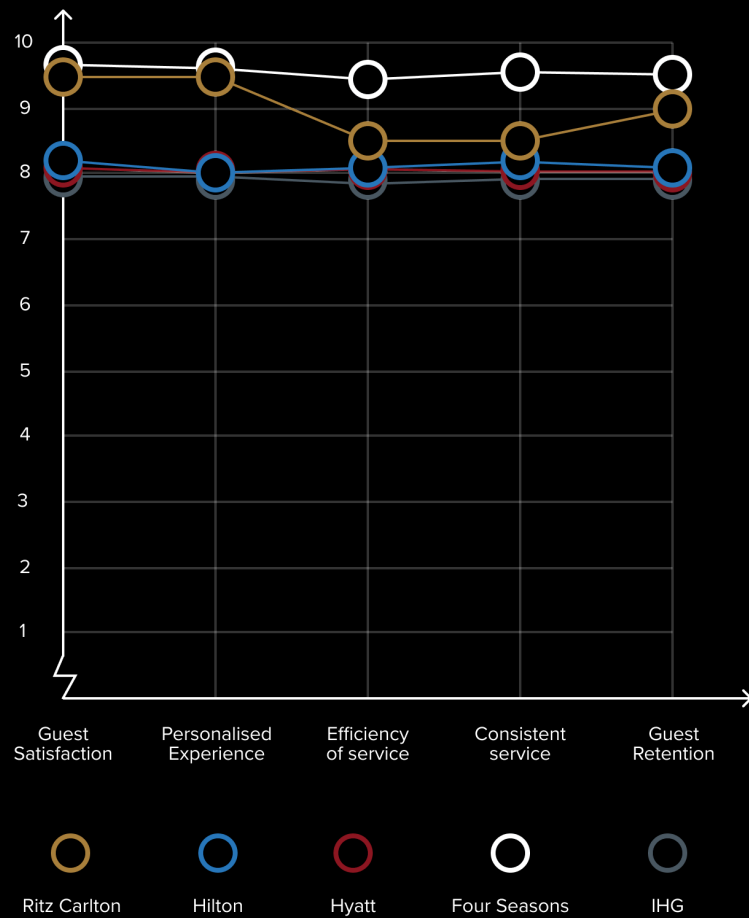
Fig. 2B: Plotting Employee Satisfaction across luxury hotels
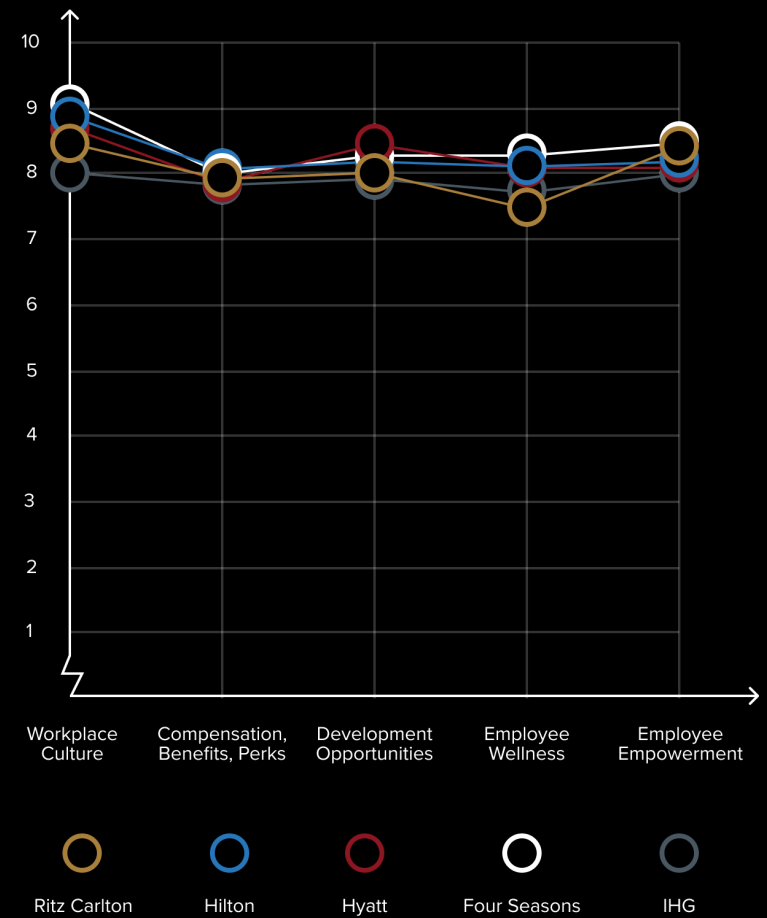
The selection of the Ritz Carlton, Four Seasons, Hilton, Hyatt, and IHG (InterContinental Hotel Group) for this analysis is based on their prominent presence in the United States luxury and premium hotel industry, as well as their influence on global hospitality standards. The Ritz Carlton and Four Seasons are synonymous with luxury hospitality, consistently ranked among the top. They are known for their personalised services, high end accommodations and exceptional consistency. Hilton and Hyatt, while offering premium properties, also maintain strong reputations for a broader market appeal. IHG on the other hand is a significant player in the luxury hospitality space, offering a mix of business and leisure oriented services.

These names were chosen to maintain a balanced representation of the market since they consist of a diverse range of luxury, upscale hotel experiences, catering to different segments of travellers while maintaining high industry recognition.

Figure 2A
The diagram illustrates the detailed breakdown of service excellence across renowned hotel chains, analysing key factors (x-axis) such as guest satisfaction, personalised guest experiences, efficiency of service, guest retention rates, and consistency across locations. The significance of this analysis lies in its ability to highlight how each hotel brand delivers high quality service and meets guest expectations. The data for this evaluation is sourced from the Forbes Travel Guide and readers Digest that conduct professional and anonymous inspections, along with industry reports that assess guest experiences and service consistency.

Figure 2B
This diagram represents an in-depth analysis of employee satisfaction levels with major luxury hotel chains, examining workplace culture, compensation and perks, employee development opportunities, employee wellness, and employee empowerment initiatives. It visually demonstrates how the different hotels prioritise their workforce, reflecting the connection between employee satisfaction and overall service quality. The diagram's significance lies in understanding that a satisfied and engaged workforce is essential for delivering outstanding guest experiences and maintaining operational efficiency. The data here is primarily sourced from Glassdoor, which aggregates employee reviews and workplace ratings, supplemented by industry reports that evaluate human resource practices within the hospitality sector.

The service methods of the Ritz Carlton discussed previously play a pivotal role in guiding its position for both service excellence and employee satisfaction as depicted in the two diagrams.

These principles support exceptional guest experiences by ensuring a highly personalised, anticipatory, and emotionally engaging service model. Similarly from an employee satisfaction perspective, they train employees to deliver services with autonomy and pride building a strong workplace culture.
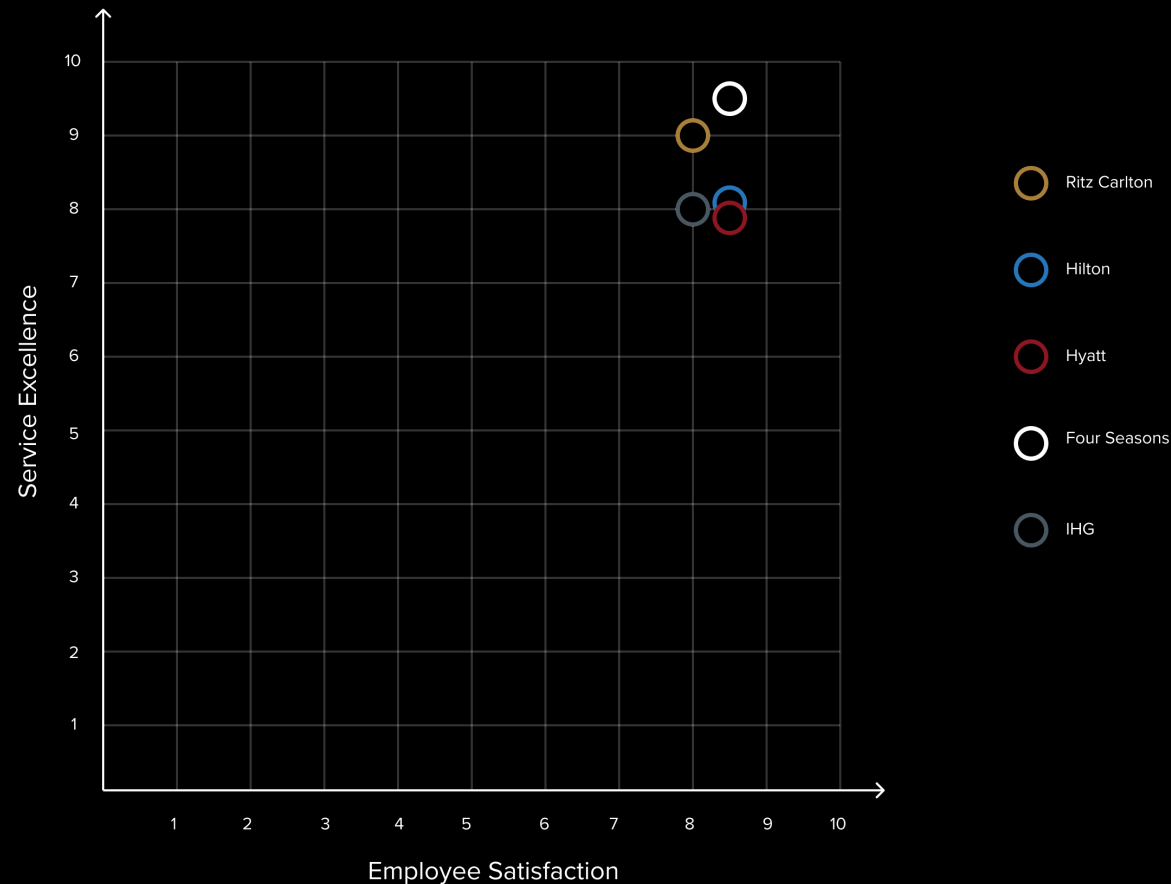
Fig 2C: Employee Satisfaction vs Service Excellence in luxury hotels

The diagram above represents the relationship between employee satisfaction and service excellence across major hotel chains. The positioning is directed through the learnings from the figures 2A and 2B mentioned previously. While Ritz Carlton is known for its exceptional guest experiences, the gap between high service standards and moderate employee satisfaction could lead to increased service inefficiencies, lower guest retention, and reputation risks over time.

Since The Ritz-Carlton's Gold Standard service model relies on personalised and emotionally engaging experiences, disengaged employees might struggle to consistently uphold these expectations. Analysing the industry and benchmarking against its competitors, this matrix (fig. 2C) helps understand how Ritz Carlton can refine its practices to ensure high performing sustainable excellence and continuous innovation in the hospitality industry.

Fig 2D: Organisational Structure- Ritz Carlton

Marriott International

President | Chief Operating Officer (COO)

SVP Operations | SVP Sales & Marketing | SVP Finance | SVP Human Resources | SVP Quality & Innovation

Senior Vice Presidents (SVPs)

Regional Vice Presidents

General Manager (GM)

Director of Sales & Marketing | Resident Manager (Assistant GM) | Chief Engineer | Financial Controller | Security Manager | HR Director | Food & Beverage Director (F&B)

Executive Committee

Sales and Marketing

Sales Managers (Corporate, Leisure, Events)
• Sales Coordinators
• Corporate Account Executives

Marketing Manager
• Digital Marketing & SEO Team
• Social Media & Content Creators

PR & Communications Executive
• Press & Media Liaisons
• Branding Specialists

Front Office Manager

Front Office and Guest Services

Guest Relations Manager
• Guest Relations Officers
• VIP Service Coordinators

Concierge Manager
• Concierge Team
• Bellhops & Doormen

Reservations Manager
• Reservation Agents
• Call Center Executives

Night Manager
• Night Auditors
• Security Coordinators

Executive Housekeeper

Housekeeping and Laundry

Assistant Executive Housekeeper

Housekeeping Supervisors
• Room Attendants (Housekeepers)
• Public Area Cleaners

Laundry Supervisor
• Linen & Inventory Staff
• Uniform Management Staff

• Quality Control Inspectors

Engineering and Maintenance

Engineering Supervisors (Mechanical, Electrical, Plumbing)
• Preventive Maintenance Technicians
• HVAC Technicians

Landscape & Groundskeeping Staff

IT & Systems Technicians

Finance and Accounting

Chief Accountant
• Accounts Payable/Receivable Team

Payroll & Benefits Staff

Purchasing & Procurement Officers

Security and Loss Prevention

Assistant Security Manager
• Security Supervisors
• Loss Prevention Officers
• CCTV & Surveillance Team

Human Resources and Training

Assistant HR Director
• Talent Acquisition Managers
• Employee Relations Managers
• Training & Development Managers
• Payroll & Benefits Coordinators

Human Resources and Training

Executive Chef (Culinary Head)
• Sous Chefs (Hot Kitchen, Cold Kitchen, Pastry)
• Line Cooks

Restaurant Manager (Dining Operations)
• Head Waiters
• Servers & Hosts

Beverage Manager (Bars & Lounges)
• Bartenders & Sommeliers

Banquet & Catering Manager
• Event Coordinators
• Banquet Service Team

Room Service Manager
• Room Service Attendants

Executive Chef
Head Chef
Sous Chef
Chef De Partie
Commi 1
Commi 2
Commi 3
Porters and Dishwashers

Executive Management- Corporate Level | Functional/ Departmental Groups- Property Level | Operational Groups- Department Level

The organisational structure of the Ritz Carlton is a strategically designed framework that creates a well orchestrated system along with its white glove service principles- "Golden Standards" - optimising both guest satisfaction and workforce engagement.

At the foundation of the structure are the front-stage employees, including receptionists, concierges, servers, etc.. These employees are the face of the brand, directly interacting with guests.

Overseeing the front-line staff are the team leads and supervisors, such as front office managers, housekeeping supervisors, and kitchen captains, who ensure smooth daily operations, uphold service standards and provide mentorship. Their role bridges the gap between executive vision and on-the-ground execution, making them essential to the Ritz Carlton reputation for excellence too.

The next tier in the structure consists of mid level managers, including executive housekeepers, food & beverage directors, chief engineers, etc.. These leaders are responsible for aligning operational efficiency with broader business goals while also constantly focusing on fostering a positive employee experience.

At the highest level, there is senior leadership, comprising of General Managers, regional vice presidents, the chief operating officer, etc.. They focus on driving financial performance, maintaining brand consistency across properties, and creating policies that support both employees well being and business growth.

A hierarchal structure, rather than a circular or flat organisational model, remains ideal for Ritz Carlton due to the nature of the hospitality industry.

The well defined chain of command provides clear accountability, ensuring that every employee understands their responsibilities and progression. This structure also ensures consistency in service delivery allowing for predictable, high quality guest experiences across. Additionally, it also supports structured training and mentorship, enabling employees to develop skills within a guided and tiered system.

Fig 2E: Life Cycle of an Employee in the hospitality industry (Ritz Carlton)

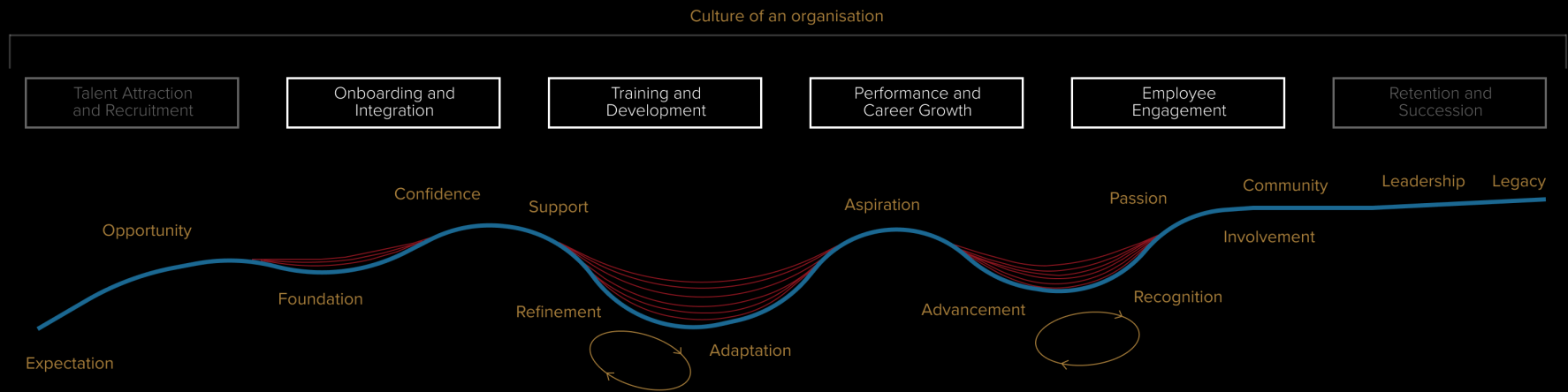|	Talent Attraction and Recruitment	Onboarding and Integration	Training and Development	Performance and Career Growth	Employee Engagement	Retention and Succession
Phase	→	→	→	→	→	→
Steps	Job posting and sourcing; Candidate Screening; Interviewing; Offer and Acceptance	Welcome program-orientation; Initial training; Probation period- first 90 days; Performance evaluation	Ongoing skills training; Cross training; Certifications	Performance appraisals; Promotion and internal mobility; Mentorship and coaching	Workplace culture- internal events; Recognition programs; Employee wellbeing; Team building	Compensation and benefits; Employee surveys and feedback; Talent review; Leadership pipeline
Stakeholders	HR recruitment team; Hiring Managers; Department Heads	HR Onboarding Team; Department Trainers; Respective managers	Training and development team; Department Leaders; Learning and Development managers	HR Business partners; Department Managers; Leadership Coaches	Director of HR; HR team; Corporate communications team	HR Leadership team; Department Heads; Executive leadership
Touch points	Career website; Referral programs; Email; Social media; Job fairs; Interviews	Orientation materials; HR check-ins; Email; Training workshops; Feedback sessions	Training portals; classroom sessions; Feedback surveys; one-on one coaching; Soft boards- pinned flyers	Performance reviews; Feedback tools; Coaching sessions	Employee recognition platform; Engagement surveys; Social gatherings- offsite; Team building	Employee satisfaction surveys; Leadership training sessions; Succession planning meetings
Front Stage	Job postings; Candidate interactions; Interviews	Welcome events; Mentorship meetings; Training sessions	Employee workshops; Interactive learning sessions; Alternatives (competitions, etc.)	Performance meetings; Employee feedback sessions	Award/ recognition ceremonies; Wellness programs	Career development discussions; Leadership training
Back Stage	Background checks; Internal approvals; Compliance verification	IT provisioning; Uniform distribution; HR paperwork	Development of training content; Scheduling sessions; Curating other opportunities	HR analytics; Employee assessments	Event planning; Employee satisfaction surveys	Compensation analysis; workforce planning; Compliance verification
Support Processes	Talent acquisition platforms; Applicant tracking systems	Learning Management systems; Mentor assignments	Learning Management systems; e-learning modules	Performance management systems; mentoring tools	HR analytics tools; recognition platform	HR talent analytics; Mentorship programs
Value Creation	Employer branding effectiveness; Candidate experience quality; Hiring manager satisfaction	New hire engagement; Productivity ramp-up speed; Cultural alignment	Skill enhancement; Leadership readiness; Employee growth satisfaction	Employee motivation; Role satisfaction; Leadership pipeline development	Employee loyalty; Job satisfaction; Workplace happiness	Future leadership readiness; Retention of high potential employees
Metrics to measure	Time-to-hire; Cost-to-hire; Candidate satisfaction scores; Offer acceptance rate	Time-to-productivity; New hire satisfaction; Retention rates- after 90 days	Training completion rates; Skill assessment scores; Internal promotion rates	Employee promotion rate; Performance review ratings; Retention of top performers	Employee engagement score; Retention rates; Participation in recognition programs	Succession planning effectiveness; Leadership readiness index; Voluntary turnover rate- employees

Fig 2F: Journey of an employee currently in the hospitality industry (Ritz Carlton)

Figure 2E
The employee lifecycle journey at Ritz Carlton reflects the current state of how employees progress through key phases, from recruitment to succession and retention being an outcome. However, this journey is not just about talent management or viewing employees as a mere resource- it is about valuing individuals as integral contributors to the brand's service excellence and long term success.

Figure 2F
Employees are not just assets to be managed but people with aspirations, emotions and evolving needs that influence their performance and engagement. By layering the lifecycle (figure 2E) with the emotional journey of employees, the organisation can gain deeper insight into the experience at each stage. Understanding these emotions helps pin point challenge areas, and allows leadership to address gaps proactively.

Hence, the employee lifecycle is not just a structured journey- its is a living representation of a brand's culture. Culture is not something introduced during onboarding, it is the sum of every stage, experience, and emotion that an employee encounters along the way.
Ritz Carlton's true cultural alignment thus will not happen in a single moment but as a result of consistent values, mentorship, and shared experiences that shape an employee's journey.

Furthermore, this dual perspective- operational and emotional- helps identify key enablers and blockers that influence success (as discussed further).

Employee
Engagement

Performance and
Career Growth

Training and
Development

Onboarding and
Integration

Implication/ Impact

Turnover impact

Limited employee
voice- intrapreneurship

Training gaps

Limited career
roadmaps

Continuous learning
platforms

Employee
feedback loops

Merit based
promotions

Technology
adoption rate

Performance based
recognition

Limited personalised
guidance

Leadership
development process

Recognition based
learning

Time constraints

Empowered
decision making

Limited internal
mobility

Incentives

Workload

Gold Standards-
service methods

Daily lineups and
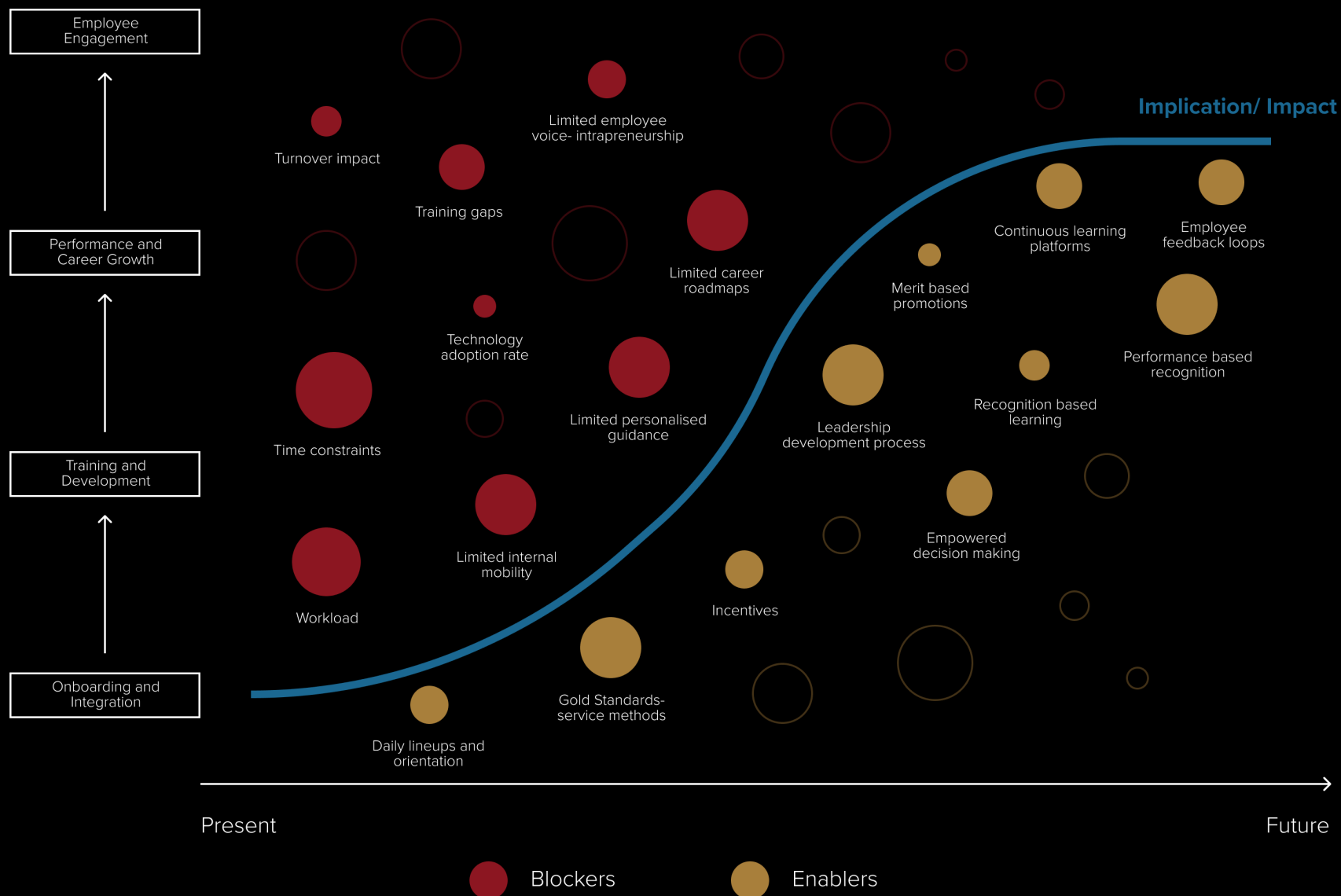orientation

Present

Future

Blockers

Enablers

Fig 2G: Force field analysis diagram for a hospitality employee (Ritz Carlton)

Figure 2G
The force field analysis diagram presented visually maps out the driving forces (enablers) that enhance the employee experience and restraining forces (blockers) that hinder progress across the key stages mentioned along the y-axis. The plotted curve on the graph represents the implications of these enablers and blockers on employees at Ritz Carlton. It indicates that if the current situation persists, the trajectory risks stagnation, leading to declining engagement, skill stagnation and high turnover. To prevent decline and promote rejuvenation strategic changes should be introduced.
The framework proves essential for understanding the tension between the positive and negative influences, allowing to develop targeted interventions that amplify enablers while mitigating blockers; to enhance employee experience and operational efficiency.

Philosophy behind it
Organisational psychology is the scientific study of human behaviour in the workplace, focusing on how individuals, teams, and organisations interact to create a productive and positive environment.

Change management, on the other hand, refers to the structured approach used to transition individuals, teams and organisations from a current state to desired future state. Rooted in Kurt Lewin's (1951) change model, which includes unfreezing, changing, and refreezing, change management strategies help a business adapt to new technologies, processes, or cultural shifts.

Deeply embedded in the philosophies of organisational psychology and change management is upskilling; making it a crucial aspect of workforce development in the hospitality industry, and for Ritz Carlton. In organisational psychology, upskilling aligns with the theories of employee motivation, job satisfaction, and career development, ensuring that individuals remain engaged and productive in their roles. Similarly from a change management perspective, upskilling is essential for adapting to evolving industry standards, technological advancements, and customer expectations. As mentioned, it highlights the importance of continuous learning in organisational transitions— employees must "unfreeze" old habits, "change" by acquiring new skills, and "refreeze" these capabilities into daily practice.

For Ritz-Carlton, where service excellence is a competitive advantage, as previously established (referencing fig. 2C), upskilling would be both a psychological driver of employee engagement and a strategic tool for managing change.

By layering and integrating organisational psychology with change management principles for the stages of upskilling in an employee lifecycle (as shown in fig. 2G)- onboarding and integration, training and development, performance and career growth, and employee engagement- the force field analysis proves to identify factors to balance and ensure that employees remain agile, competent, and resilient in a dynamic environment.

2.4 Identifying Stakeholders

The stakeholder map is significant because it offers a comprehensive view of the individuals and entities shaping the organisation. By clearly mapping these relationships, one can strategically engage with different stakeholders based on their level of influence and importance. Prioritising engagement with key stakeholders helps in resource allocation, improves customer experiences, and strengthens internal processes on a broader level.

More so, a stakeholder map plays a crucial role in service industries by offering insights into the entire ecosystem. It also helps businesses understand who is involved, what their expectations are, and how they interact with one another. This understanding allows hospitality companies to ensure that every role, from frontline employees to investors is aligned towards a common goal of success through exceptional guest experiences. Additionally, its dynamic nature also supports collaboration between departments, enables effective decision making, and helps organisations anticipate and mitigate potential risks.

The stakeholder map in figure 2H provides a structured visualisation of the various internal and external entities influencing a hospitality business (with a focus on Ritz Carlton). It categorises stakeholders into layers based on their level of involvement, ranging from core operational employees to business support teams and strategic management. Beyond the internal structure, the outermost layers include external influencers such as regulatory bodies, industry associations, investors, suppliers, etc.. This depiction helps identify who directly impacts daily operations and who plays a broader role in shaping long term strategies.

Once again, it is also fundamental to organisational psychology and change management for an organisation since it can identify key players who drive change, anticipate resistance, and tailor communication strategies to foster smoother transitions with stakeholder buy-in.

For this project specifically, this layout helps guide research, both primary and secondary. As we see further (figure 2H.1), by refining the focus using an Interest vs. Influence Matrix, the most critical stakeholders for conducting primary research through surveys and interviews can be discerned from external ones considered for expert consultations or secondary research in the form of industry reports.

Primary Influence
They are the key decision makers and the system works on their approval. They are responsible for driving the entire hospitality industry chain.

Secondary Influence
These are the middle men between the hotel facility and its interaction with the environment. They help keep the ecosystem dynamic.

Significant Influence
They manage the daily tasks and smooth functioning of teams.

Tertiary Influence
This section may not be the decision making entity but is extremely important as it is the **backbone of the industry.** They are directly related to ensure high quality services are provided to the user (guests).

Corporate leadership

Vendors and suppliers

Regulatory bodies

Activity providers

Hospitality Industry Associations

Franchise owners and business developers

Brand and experience designers

Local communities

HR & Employee Relations department

Training and development teams

Central Government

Local governance

Backstage employees

Security & Risk Management

Supply Chain Teams

Supervisors and team leaders

Frontline employees

Transportation agencies

Customer data management department

IT and digital transformation teams

Sales and marketing teams

Investors and shareholders

Management and executive leadership

Resource management

Corporate Sustainability and CSR teams

Hospitality training institutions

Infrastructure regulators

NGOs for Ethical Labor & Human Rights
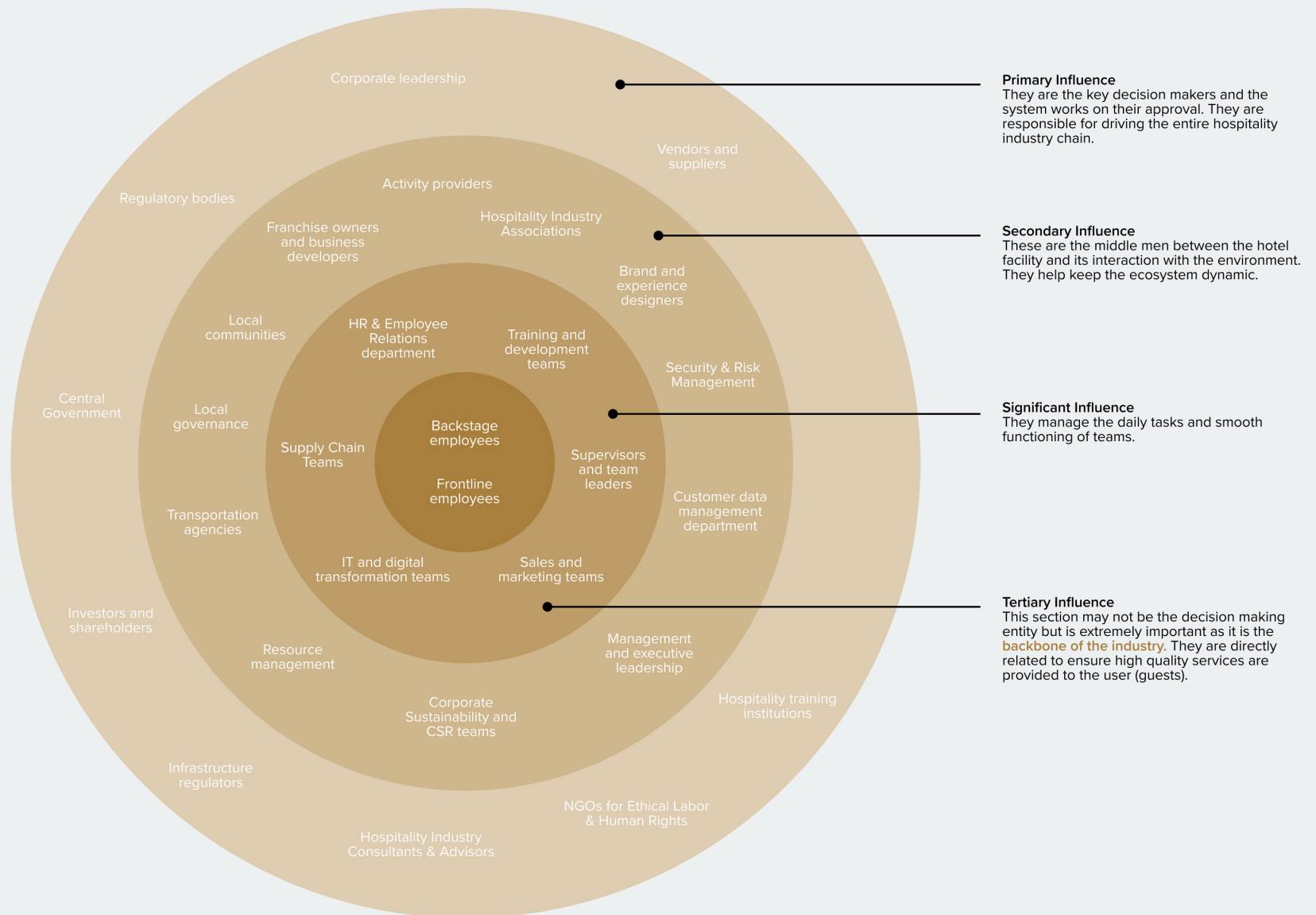
Hospitality Industry Consultants & Advisors

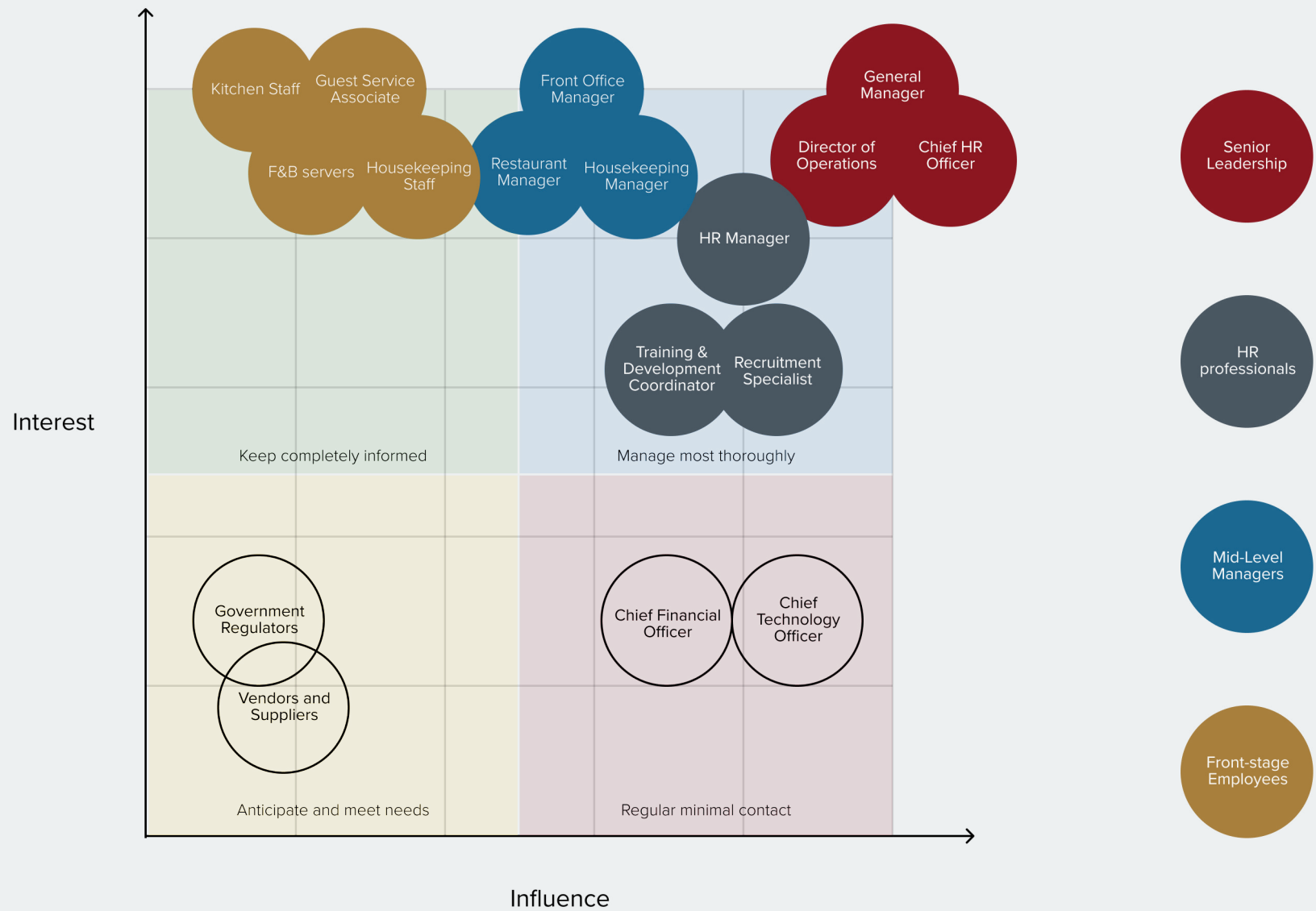Fig 2H: Stakeholder Map for a hotel (attributed by influence and impact)

Fig 2H.1: Stakeholder Interest vs. Influence Matrix

The Interest vs. Influence matrix (fig. 2H.1) for the project provides a framework to identify key stakeholders based on their level of concern for employee wellbeing and their ability to impact decision-making. By categorising stakeholders into four quadrants- manage most thoroughly, keep completely informed, anticipate and meet needs, and regular minimal contact- this matrix ensures that the project efforts are directed towards those who play a critical role in shaping, supporting, or experiencing workplace improvements.

Furthermore, the four categories- senior leadership, mid-level managers, HR professionals, and front-stage employees- are chosen since they represent a good mix. These encapsulate the hierarchal structure within a hospitality organisation and ensure that multiple well calculated levels of employment are considered when assessing employee experience.

Senior Leadership plays a strategic and decision-making role, setting the vision for workplace culture, policies, and operational goals. Their influence over budget allocation, policy implementation, and organisational priorities makes them essential in shaping employee experience initiatives. **HR Professionals** are at the heart of workforce management, responsible for recruitment, training, employee well-being, and compliance with labor regulations. They act as a bridge between leadership's strategic goals and employees' daily realities. Their role in designing employee engagement programs, performance management systems, and workplace policies makes them key players in this project. **Mid-Level Managers** serve as the direct link between senior leadership and frontline employees. They can ensure that policies designed to enhance employee experience are effectively executed on the ground, making them essential contributors in identifying practical challenges and solutions. **Frontline Employees**— including guest service associates, housekeeping staff, F&B servers, and kitchen staff—are the end users of employee experience initiatives. They directly interact with customers and experience the impact of workplace policies firsthand. Their perspectives provide invaluable insights into workplace culture, job satisfaction, and operational challenges. Because they have high interest but low influence, keeping them informed and involved in feedback loops is essential to creating meaningful, employee-centred improvements.

(Keeping in mind accessibility and feasibility constraints)
From a research and project execution standpoint, this matrix guides primary research efforts by clarifying who should be engaged for data collection, feedback, and validation. Frontline employees are central to surveys, focus groups, and direct interviews, providing qualitative insights into daily workplace experiences. HR professionals and senior leadership can be key informants in structured discussions regarding existing policies, workplace culture, and retention strategies. Mid-level managers, who bridge the gap between employees and executives, offer operational perspectives on workforce challenges and possible interventions. Meanwhile, strategic leaders could be consulted to ensure that proposed employee experience initiatives align with business objectives and financial feasibility.

Overall, utilising the matrix prioritises stakeholder engagement to maximise impact, enhance the credibility of the research findings and serve as a guiding reference for communication, decision-making, and successful implementation of workforce initiatives.

03
Decoding Challenges

Service design innovation thrives on decoding the unseen—unraveling user needs, breaking systemic barriers, and reshaping experiences where complexity meets creativity to bridge the gap between theoretical understanding and practical implementation.
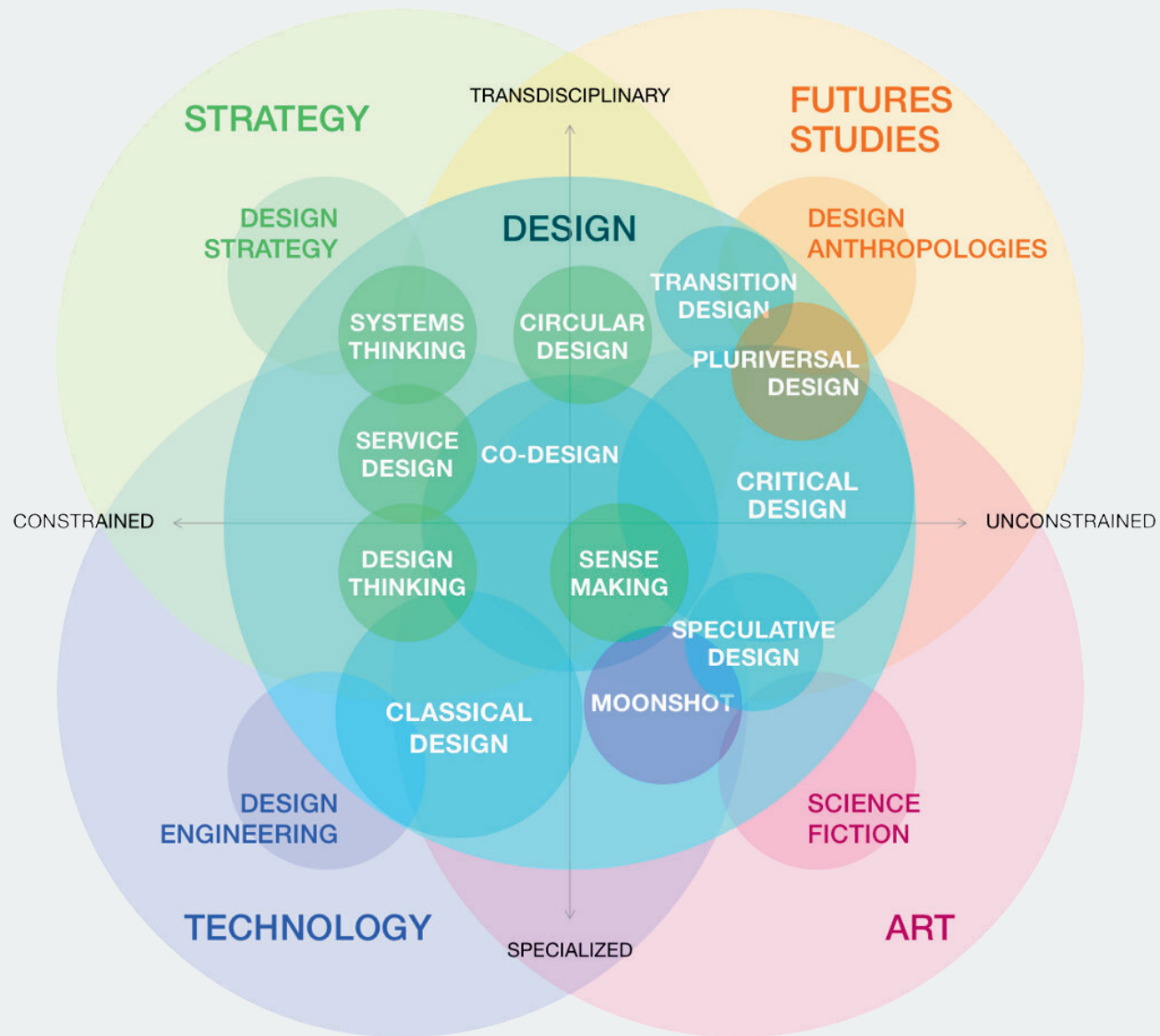
Fig 3: Mapping of current design approaches, created by Masaki Iwabuchi, image credit to Masaki Iwabuchi, 2020.

3.1 Innovation Narratives

Industry Case- Hilton

Hilton Worldwide, a leading global hospitality company, has consistently been recognized for its exceptional workplace culture and innovative practices. With a workforce exceeding 460,000 team members across more than 8,300 properties in 138 countries and territories, Hilton's commitment to employee experience and innovation has been pivotal in maintaining its competitive edge in the hospitality industry. Hilton's approach to employee experience is anchored in four core pillars: Purpose, Growth, Wellness, and Inclusion. These pillars are designed to create a workplace environment where team members can thrive both personally and professionally.

Hilton emphasizes the importance of connecting team members to a larger mission, fostering a sense of belonging and meaning in their roles. The company offers extensive learning and development opportunities through platforms like Hilton University, which provides access to over 25,000 courses, videos, and resources. Programs such as Lead@Hilton and the General Manager (GM) Academy are designed to cultivate leadership skills and provide clear career progression paths.

Hilton's Thrive at Hilton initiative focuses on the well-being of team members, offering benefits like parental leave, adoption assistance, and wellness programs. The company also provides resources such as the Thrive Sabbatical, allowing team members to pursue personal goals or community service projects.

Diversity and inclusion are integral to Hilton's culture, with active Team Member Resource Groups and regional inclusion councils that promote a sense of community and belonging among employees.

Hilton has embraced digital transformation to enhance both employee engagement and guest experiences. Collaborating with Credera, Hilton developed an innovation strategy that included the creation of an in-house innovation lab. This initiative facilitated the transition to an agile organization, enabling rapid development and deployment of new digital tools.

One notable outcome of this collaboration was the development of a native mobile application designed to engage Hilton's global workforce. This app streamlined communication, provided access to training resources, and allowed team members to manage their schedules more effectively, thereby enhancing overall employee satisfaction and productivity. Hilton's commitment to its team members has garnered significant recognition.

The company, Hilton, has been named a Great Place to Work in more than 20 countries and was ranked #1 on the Fortune Best Companies to Work For list in the U.S. in 2024 whereas; Marriott International consisting of Ritz Carlton was ranked #8 on that list.

(Fortune. (2024). Fortune 100 Best Companies to Work For)

To further strengthen its employer brand, Hilton launched the "Every Job Makes the Stay" campaign, highlighting the diverse roles within the company and showcasing the impact each team member has on creating exceptional guest experiences.

Hilton's strategic focus on enhancing employee experience through purposeful initiatives, growth opportunities, wellness programs, and inclusive practices has solidified its reputation as a leading employer in the hospitality industry. By integrating innovative digital solutions, Hilton not only empowers its team members but also ensures the delivery of exceptional service to its guests, maintaining its position at the forefront of the industry.

"When we introduced the mobile application, I saw an immediate shift in the organisation—our team members could swap shifts seamlessly, access training on the go, and feel more in control of their work-life balance. It wasn't just a tech upgrade; it was a game-changer for engagement and retention."

(Christopher H., Regional Operations Manager, USA)

Industry Case- Southwest Airlines

Southwest Airlines, renowned for its low-cost fares and exceptional customer service, attributes much of its success to a strong emphasis on employee experience and a culture of innovation. By fostering an environment where employees feel valued and empowered, Southwest has cultivated a workforce that is both motivated and innovative, leading to enhanced operational efficiency and customer satisfaction.

Southwest Airlines places a high priority on creating a positive and inclusive workplace culture. The company encourages employees to bring their unique perspectives and skills to their roles, promoting a culture of caring and mutual respect. This approach ensures that employees are treated with the same concern and respect that they are expected to share with customers.

To recognize and appreciate employee contributions, Southwest implemented the SWAG (Southwest Airlines Gratitude). This initiative allows employees to acknowledge and thank one another through both tangible rewards and verbal appreciation, fostering a sense of community and belonging within the organization.

Southwest Airlines has been recognized for its innovative approaches to employee engagement. The company has established Innovation Stations at airports, where employees actively engage in identifying challenges and developing solutions to enhance both customer and employee experiences. This initiative empowers employees to contribute to continuous improvement and operational excellence.

In partnership with Qualtrics, Southwest aims to better understand employee experiences to drive planning for an engaged and equipped workforce. This collaboration enables the company to gain insights into employee engagement and well-being, ensuring that employees receive the necessary support and information to succeed in their roles.

The leadership at Southwest Airlines has consistently emphasized the importance of employee satisfaction as a precursor to customer satisfaction. Herb Kelleher, the company's co-founder, famously stated, "Your people come first, and if you treat them right, they'll treat the customers right."
This philosophy underscores the company's commitment to prioritizing employee well-being as a foundation for delivering exceptional customer service.

Southwest Airlines' dedication to enhancing employee experience through recognition programs, innovative engagement initiatives, and a supportive leadership philosophy has been instrumental in its success. By valuing and empowering its employees, the company not only fosters a positive workplace culture but also drives innovation and superior customer service.

66

I have heard about the SWAG program at SouthWest. Implementing a rewards initiative like SWAG program can transform how our teams interact daily. It's not just about rewards; it's about building a community where every employee feels seen and appreciated, leading to a more engaged and motivated workforce.

(Mark, Front Desk Supervisor, California)

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Industry Case- American Express

American Express (Amex) has built a reputation not only as a financial services leader but also as a pioneer in fostering an exceptional employee experience. The company's unwavering commitment to creating a supportive and empowering work environment has positioned it as one of the best places to work globally. Through innovative upskilling initiatives, holistic well-being programs, and an inclusive work culture, American Express has transformed employee engagement into a strategic advantage.

This case explores the various initiatives that make Amex's employee experience stand out and how its commitment to colleague growth sets a benchmark for organisations worldwide.

Recognising the evolving nature of work and the diverse needs of its workforce, Amex introduced the **Amex Flex program**. This initiative provides employees with the option to work in the office, from home, or in a hybrid model. However, flexibility at Amex is not just about location. It extends to career growth, internal mobility, and work-life balance. The company actively promotes internal career opportunities, encouraging employees to explore different roles within the organization. This ensures that talent is retained and that individuals don't feel stagnant in their careers. 90% of surveyed employees also expressed satisfaction with this initiative (American Express, 2022).

Amex is deeply invested in the continuous development of its workforce. Beyond online learning initiatives and platforms like LinkedIn learning, Amex fosters skill-building through real-world experiences.

The **Project MarketPlace initiative** allows employees to engage in short-term projects in departments outside of their primary roles enabling to develop cross-functional expertise. Another key initiative is the **Global Leadership Academy**, which is designed to nurture high-potential employees and prepare them for leadership roles. This academy offers a ingenious mix of mentorship, leadership training, and

whenever needed. Amex also provides **wellness programs** that include yoga, meditation, and fitness challenges to encourage a healthy lifestyle. **Financial wellness** is another area where Amex stands out. Employees receive guidance on personal finance management, retirement planning, and investment strategies. These resources ensure that employees not only thrive professionally but also maintain financial security and peace of mind. In addition to these wellness programs, Amex fosters a culture of recognition through initiatives such as colleague appreciation programs and leadership recognition awards.

The success of Amex's employee experience initiatives is reflected in its high employee engagement scores and strong retention rates. Employees consistently report feeling valued, supported, and empowered in their roles. As a result, Amex has earned numerous accolades as a top employer, including recognition from Fortune's "100 Best Companies to Work For".

Typical company- 57%	American Express- 94%

94% of employees at Amex say it is a great place to work compared to 57% of employees at a typical U.S.-based company.
(source: Great Place to Work, 2024. American Express)

Learning from Amex's model can guide companies towards long-term success, with the driving idea—when you invest in your employees, you invest in the future of your business.

hands-on learning experiences, ensuring that future leaders are well-equipped to drive the company forward. Recognizing that employee well-being directly impacts performance and engagement, Amex has built a comprehensive well-being ecosystem that supports employees' mental, physical, and emotional health. Employees have access to **24/7 mental health counseling services**, ensuring they can seek support

Industry Case- Adobe

Adobe has long been recognised as a leader in fostering an exceptional employee experience, integrating continuous learning, inclusivity, and innovation into its corporate culture.
Understanding the evolving landscape, Adobe has implemented robust upskilling programs. A cornerstone of these initiatives is Adobe's **Professional Development Fund**, which provides employees with up to $1,000 annually for short-term learning opportunities, such as workshops, webinars, and online certifications (Adobe Case study- Zavvy, n.d.). This allows employees to continuously update their skills in alignment with both personal career growth and the company's strategic objectives. In addition to this fund, **Adobe's Education Reimbursement Program** provides up to $10,000 per year for

employees pursuing higher education or specialized certifications (Adobe Case study- Zavvy, n.d.). This substantial investment demonstrates Adobe's commitment to long-term employee growth, that is both personally rewarding and beneficial to the organization.

To further support leadership development, Adobe has launched the **Adobe Leader Experience (ALE)**—a structured program designed to enhance managerial skills through on-demand coaching, curated learning materials, and quarterly leadership training (Adobe, 2023). This initiative ensures that Adobe's managers are equipped with the necessary tools to lead effectively in an ever-changing business environment. By integrating leadership development into its corporate culture, Adobe fosters a workforce that is not only competent but also capable of driving innovation and collaboration at all levels.

Adobe's commitment to employee engagement extends beyond upskilling; the company actively invests in research and experimentation to refine workplace interactions. One of its most forward-thinking initiatives is **Lab82**, an internal experimentation engine designed to optimise the hybrid work model. Lab82 continuously tests different collaboration structures to improve teamwork (Adobe, 2022).

Additionally, Adobe hosts the **annual Career Fest**, a global initiative aimed at empowering employees to take control of their career growth. The event features inspiring speakers, skill-building workshops, and networking opportunities that encourage employees to map out their professional journeys within the company (Adobe, 2023). By creating platforms where employees can explore new career paths and gain industry insights, Adobe ensures that its workforce remains engaged.

Adobe's dedication to creating an outstanding employee experience has not gone unnoticed. The company was featured in PEOPLE's "100 Companies That Care" list for 2024, a recognition that highlights its commitment to community engagement, employee well-being, and social responsibility (PEOPLE, 2024).

This accolade reflects the tangible impact of Adobe's efforts in building a corporate culture that prioritises both personal and professional growth.

3.2 Key Takeaways

Examining the above cases helps highlight proven approaches to the themes of employee engagement, continuous learning, leadership development, and digital transformation, all of which are essential for understanding how the industry leaders create meaningful work environments with a holistic, purpose driven system enhances service excellence, and drives long term business success at the same time.

Hilton's approach to employee experience is built around Purpose, Growth, Wellness, and Inclusion, creating a culture where employees feel valued and empowered.

- **Purpose-Aligned Learning: Training programs connect employees to a broader mission, reinforcing their role in delivering exceptional service.**
- **Digital-First Education: Hilton university's online platform makes learning accessible, manageable, personalised, and on-demand.**
- **Wellness-Integrated Growth: Employee well-being initiatives, such as mental health support and career breaks, enhance engagement and retention.**
- **Leadership Development Tracks: Structured programs like GM Academy help employees visualize career growth, fostering long-term commitment.**
- **Agile Innovation Labs: Creating spaces where employees can experiment and innovate enhances learning and operational efficiency.**

Southwest's success is rooted in its employee-first philosophy, emphasizing a culture of recognition, continuous improvement, and empowerment.

- **Recognition-Driven Learning: Southwest's SWAG (Gratitude Program) fosters engagement through peer recognition, gamification and social learning.**
- **Frontline Innovation Labs: Innovation Stations empower employees to identify operational challenges and co-create solutions.**
- **Real-Time Employee Insights: Partnering with Qualtrics, collecting data on engagement helps refine training programs to meet evolving needs.**
- **Experiential Learning for Emotional Connection: Role-playing, storytelling, and interactive learning strengthen the emotional connection between employees and their work.**

Amex focuses on flexible work models, cross-functional learning, leadership development, and holistic well-being, creating an environment where employees can thrive.

- **Hybrid & Adaptive Learning Models: AmexFlex allows multi modal learning to fit different work styles.**
- **Cross-Departmental Project-Based Learning: Short-term rotational projects help employees gain new skills and experience different aspects of business.**
- **Structured Leadership Growth: Programs like the Global Leadership Academy create a clear path for career progression.**
- **Employee Well-Being Integration: Mental health resources, financial wellness education, and work-life balance support improve overall job satisfaction.**
- **Continuous Feedback & Recognition: Creating a culture of appreciation through milestone recognition programs drives long-term engagement.**

Adobe fosters a culture of lifelong learning and leadership development, offering employees financial support for upskilling and experimentation opportunities.

- **Investment in Continuous Learning: Financial support for upskilling and higher education encourages employees to take charge of their growth.**
- **Leadership Development as a Core Pillar: Programs like Adobe Leader Experience (ALE) ensure employees are prepared for management roles.**
- **Experimentation-Driven Learning Models: Adobe's Lab82 fosters real-world experimentation, ensuring learning is dynamic and adaptive.**
- **Career Navigation & Development Platforms: Initiatives like Career Fest empower employees to explore and design their own career paths.**
- **Community Engagement in Learning: Incorporating social responsibility and through service based learning enhances a sense of purpose and motivation.**

3.3 Voices of the Workforce

Survey Overview

The survey, conducted with a sample size of over 50 hospitality employees (response rate of approximately 50%), aimed to uncover systemic workforce challenges affecting engagement, retention, and overall job satisfaction.

The questions were strategically designed to investigate key areas such as onboarding effectiveness, career growth clarity, workload balance, and employee motivation. These aspects were chosen based on industry pain points, particularly high turnover rates, employee disengagement, and operational inefficiencies. By incorporating Likert-scale, yes/no, and open-ended questions, the survey ensured a well-rounded approach to understanding both quantitative trends and qualitative employee sentiments.

The survey respondents represented a diverse cross-section of hospitality employees, ensuring a balanced dataset that accurately reflects the industry's workforce dynamics. The sample included frontline staff (such as receptionists, housekeeping, and food & beverage employees), mid-level managers, and senior management personnel, providing a comprehensive perspective on workplace challenges across different levels of responsibility.

The distribution of responses showed that a majority of participants (approximately 60%) were frontline employees, followed by mid-level management (around 25%), and a smaller percentage of senior managers (about 15%). This breakdown is justified, as frontline employees form the backbone of hospitality operations and experience the highest turnover rates, making their insights crucial for understanding workforce challenges. The demographic and experiential diversity of respondents adds validity to the findings, as different roles bring distinct perspectives on onboarding, career growth, and work-life balance.

The high percentage of frontline employees reporting poor onboarding experiences and unclear career paths is particularly telling, as they are often the ones most affected by lack of structured training and long-term development opportunities. Additionally, the significant number of employees across all levels who reported considering leaving their jobs (approximately 50%) reinforces the urgency of addressing retention challenges.

While managers had slightly higher clarity on career growth, their responses still indicated concerns about engagement and professional development opportunities.

Given the size of the sample and its distribution, the data is largely justified as representative of real-world trends in hospitality. While a larger sample could provide even deeper granularity, the consistency of responses across key questions suggests that the issues identified—such as poor onboarding, lack of career clarity, burnout, and disengagement—are not isolated but rather systemic across the industry. The survey successfully captures the perspectives of employees at various career stages, making its findings both reliable and actionable for shaping workforce strategies.

Designing the Employee Experience in the Hospitality Industry

I, Hitasha Mehta, am a graduate student from Savannah College of Art and Design, and am conducting a study on the employee experience within the hospitality industry for my Service design capstone project.

I would like to ask for your responses to the questions below to gain a deeper understanding of workplace experiences, challenges, and opportunities of the services from your perspective.

This survey will take less than ten minutes. Rest assured that any information you provide will only be used internally for research purposes. Your responses will be anonymised before they are processed, and none will be shared with third parties.

Please reach out to hmehta20@student.scad.edu should you have any questions or concerns.

I sincerely appreciate your help.

* Indicates required question

Question 1. *

Which sector of the hospitality industry do you currently work in?

○ Accommodation (eg: Hotels, Resorts)

○ Food & Beverage

○ Travel & Tourism

○ Entertainment & Recreation

○ Other: _____

Question 2. *

What is your current job title/role?

○ Frontline Staff (e.g., server, receptionist, housekeeping)

○ Supervisor/Team Lead

○ Mid-Level Management

○ Executive/Senior Management

Question 3. *

How long have you worked in the hospitality industry?

○ Less than 1 year

○ 1–3 years

○ 4–7 years

○ 8–10 years

○ More than 10 years

Question 4. *

What type of employment do you usually have?

○ Full-time

○ Part-time

○ Seasonal

○ Contract

Question 5.

What is the size of the company you work for?

○ Less than 10 employees

○ 10–50 employees

○ 51–200 employees

○ 201–500 employees

○ More than 500 employees

Question 6. *

How well do you think your onboarding process prepared you for your role?

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all	○	○	○	○	○	Very well

Question 7.   *

Did you receive structured training in your first three months to help you perform your job effectively?

○ Yes

○ No

Question 8.   *

Did you have a clear understanding of your career growth path within the company in the first three years?

○ Yes

○ No

Question 9.   *

 In the past six months, have you considered leaving your job?

○ Yes

○ No

Question 10.   *

To what extent do you feel physically or emotionally exhausted due to your work schedule?

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all	○	○	○	○	○	Very Much

Question 11.   *

How often do you feel engaged and motivated at work?

○ Always

○ Often

○ Sometimes

○ Rarely

○ Never

Question 12.   *

Does your company provide opportunities for professional development and upskilling?

○ Yes, regularly

○ Occassionally

○ No

Question 13.   *

How would you rate the effectiveness of communication between management and employees regarding career growth and workplace concerns?

	1	2	3	4	5	
Very ineffective	○	○	○	○	○	Very effective

Question 14.　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　*

What would you say is the biggest challenge that affects employee engagement in the hospitality sector?

Your answer

Question 15.　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　*

If you had the superpower to improve anything about the employee retention and satisfaction, what would it be?

Your answer

Would you be open to a brief conversation (20–30 minutes) to share more about　*
your experience working in the hospitality industry? Your insights would greatly help me understand the employee experience and identify opportunities for improvement.

If you would be interested, please share your name and preferred contact information (phone number/email), and I will reach out to schedule a time that works for you :)

Your answer

Your feedback is valuable.
Rest assured that your contact information will not be shared with any third party. Thank you once again for your time.

If you have any additional thoughts or insights, please feel free to share them here:

Your answer

Screener Guide

Including a screening section in the survey was essential to ensure that the data collected aligns with the objectives of the project and provides meaningful insights into the employee experience for hospitality.

- By filtering respondents at the beginning, the survey can target individuals working specifically in relevant sectors, particularly **accommodation and food & beverage**, which are most aligned with Ritz-Carlton's focus. It also helps achieve a balanced sample distribution by ensuring **diversity in job roles**, from frontline staff to senior management. This variety is crucial for understanding different perspectives on workplace experiences and challenges.

- Furthermore, since the study aims to focus on the inclusion of employees in the critical career stages, where retention and satisfaction strategies have the most impact; **individuals with 1-3 years and 4-7 years of experience** are most significant.

- Ensuring that the majority of respondents are **full-time employees** is also a priority, as their experiences differ significantly from those of seasonal or contract workers.

- Another key objective for the project is to be able to design scalable solutions that can be applied across different business structures. This is why screening to ensure insights from employees **working in companies of various sizes**- a diverse representation of small, medium, and large organisations- are included is important.

Screener Questions

Section 1: Employee Background and Role

Question 1. Which sector of the hospitality industry do you currently work in?
- [Accommodation (eg: Hotels, Resorts)/ Food & Beverage/ Travel & Tourism/ Entertainment & Recreation/ Other]

Question 2. What is your current job title/role?
- [Frontline Staff (e.g., server, receptionist, housekeeping)/ Supervisor or Team Lead/ Mid-Level Management/ Executive or Senior Management]

Question 3. How long have you worked in the hospitality industry?
- [Less than 1 year/ 1–3 years/ 4–7 years/ 8–10 years/ More than 10 years]

Question 4. What type of employment do you usually have?
- [Full-time/ Part-time/ Seasonal/ Contract]

Question 5. What is the size of the company you work for?
- [Less than 10 employees/ 10–50 employees/ 51–200 employees/ 201–500 employees/ More than 500 employees]

Survey Questions

Section 2: Onboarding & Career Growth

Question 6. How well do you think your onboarding process prepared you for your role?
- (Likert Scale: 1- Not at all, 5- Very well)

Question 7. Did you receive structured training in your first three months to help you perform your job effectively?
- (Yes/ No)

Question 8. Did you have a clear understanding of your career growth path within the company in the first three years?
- (Yes/No)

Section 3: Job Satisfaction and Workload

Question 9. In the past six months, have you ever considered leaving your job?
- (Yes/ No)

Question 10. To what extent do you feel physically or emotionally exhausted due to your work schedule?
- (Likert Scale: 1- Not at all, 5- Very much)

Question 11. How often do you feel engaged and motivated at work?
- (Always, Often/ Sometimes/ Rarely/ Never)

Section 4: Workplace Culture & Employee Experience

Question 12. Does your company provide opportunities for professional development and upskilling?
- (Yes, regularly/ Occasionally/ No)

Question 13. How would you rate the effectiveness of communication between management and employees regarding career growth and workplace concerns?
- (Likert Scale: 1- Very ineffective, 5- Very effective)

Question 14. What would you say is the biggest challenge that affects employee engagement in the hospitality sector?
- (Open-ended response)

Question 15. If you had the superpower to improve anything about the employee retention and satisfaction, what would it be?
- (Open-ended response)

Unpacking Survey Results

The survey results highlight significant challenges within the hospitality workforce, particularly in onboarding, career growth clarity, job satisfaction, workload, and communication.

The onboarding experience received a poor rating, with about 50% rating their preparedness as 3/5 or lower on the Likert scale. This suggests that employees feel underprepared for their roles even after the initial training, which can lead to slow adaptation, inefficiency, and early-stage disengagement. Cross-referencing this with structured training data reveals that over 30% of respondents confirmed not receiving structured training in their first three months, indicating that the issue is not just perception but a real gap in learning support.

Career growth clarity is another pressing issue, with only a little over 60% of employees stating they had a clear understanding of their career path within the first three years. This lack of visibility into career progression often leads to disengagement, reduced motivation, and ultimately, higher turnover rates. Furthermore, when comparing this with communication effectiveness data, where approximately 70% of employees rated management's communication regarding career growth as ineffective (2 or 3 out of 5 on the Likert scale), it becomes clear that inadequate career discussions are a major contributor to retention issues.

Employee turnover intentions further reinforce these concerns. A staggering figure, approximately 50% of respondents admitted to considering leaving their job in the past six months. This aligns closely with findings on motivation and career stagnation. To understand whether this dissatisfaction stems from stagnation, overwork, or a lack of development opportunities, responses were cross-referenced with engagement and professional development data. 75% of employees reported not having or only occasionally having access to professional development opportunities, and only 30% stated that they "always" felt engaged at work.

Another key concern identified in the survey was workload and burnout, with over 80% of employees reporting that they feel physically or emotionally exhausted due to their work schedule. This aligns with findings in other hospitality workforce studies, where long shifts and high operational demands contribute significantly to fatigue.

Furthermore, a dialectical approach suggests that while exhaustion negatively impacts employees, strong engagement and motivation can sometimes mitigate its effects.
However, when exhaustion is coupled with low motivation—evident in the disengagement rate—the organization risks facing a severe decline in service quality and retention.

Finally, organisational communication and engagement emerge as a fundamental area requiring improvement. More than 50% of employees cited poor communication as a major challenge in their workplace, particularly regarding career growth and feedback mechanisms. When employees feel unheard or lack structured feedback loops, their sense of belonging and commitment diminishes.

1- Not at all   5- Very well
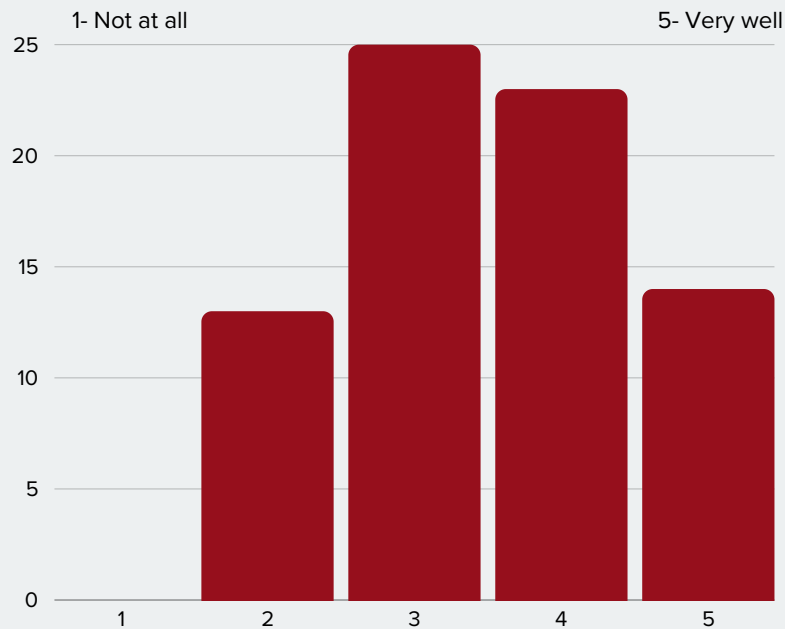
(Fig: 3.1.0) Question 6. How well do you think your onboarding process prepared you for your role?

No   Yes

(Fig: 3.1.1) Question 7. Did you receive structured training in your first three months to help you perform your job effectively?

50 % of respondents rate onboarding at 3/5 or lower
This suggests that most employees feel underprepared for their roles after the initial onboarding process.

A weak onboarding process can lead to slow adaptation, inefficiency, and frustration among new hires.

Triangulation: Comparing this with Q7 (structured training) and Q8 (career growth clarity) can help confirm whether the issue stems from lack of structured guidance.

Approximately 35% of employees reported not receiving structured training in their first three months.
This often results in slow adaptation, increased stress, and inefficiency. Without proper onboarding support, employees struggle to meet performance expectations, leading to frustration and disengagement.

Triangulation: Q10 (workload & exhaustion) is high, Q6 (onboarding effectiveness) is rated low and Q9 (turnover intent) is high; it points to insufficient structured training and support that could have prepared them for operational challenges
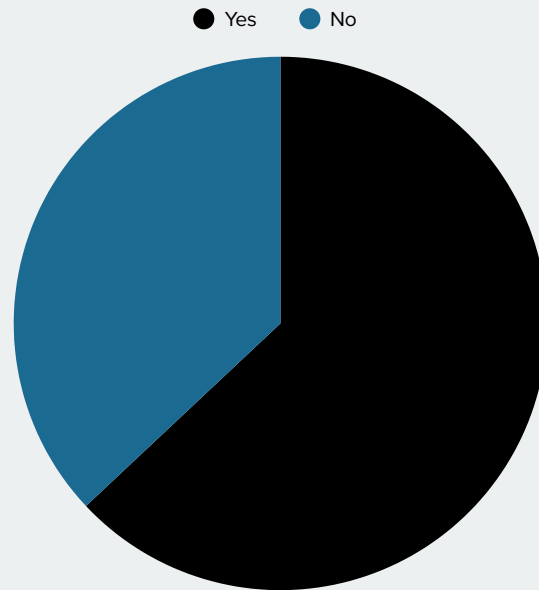
(Fig: 3.1.2) Question 8. Did you have a clear understanding of your career growth path within the company in the first three years?

(Fig: 3.1.3) Question 9. In the past six months, have you ever considered leaving your job?

Only 63% of employees stated they had clarity regarding their career path in their first three years at the organisation, over 35% didn't. A lack of visibility on career progression can lead to disengagement, reducing motivation and increasing turnover rates.

Triangulation: If Q13 (communication effectiveness) is rated low, it strengthens the argument that lack of transparent career discussions contributes to retention challenges.

Close to 50% of employees considered leaving in the last six months. This highlights a major concern in retention strategies.

Triangulation: Cross-referencing this with Q11 (motivation levels) and Q12 (professional development opportunities) can indicate whether disengagement stems from stagnation, overwork, or lack of growth.

1- Not at all   5- Very much
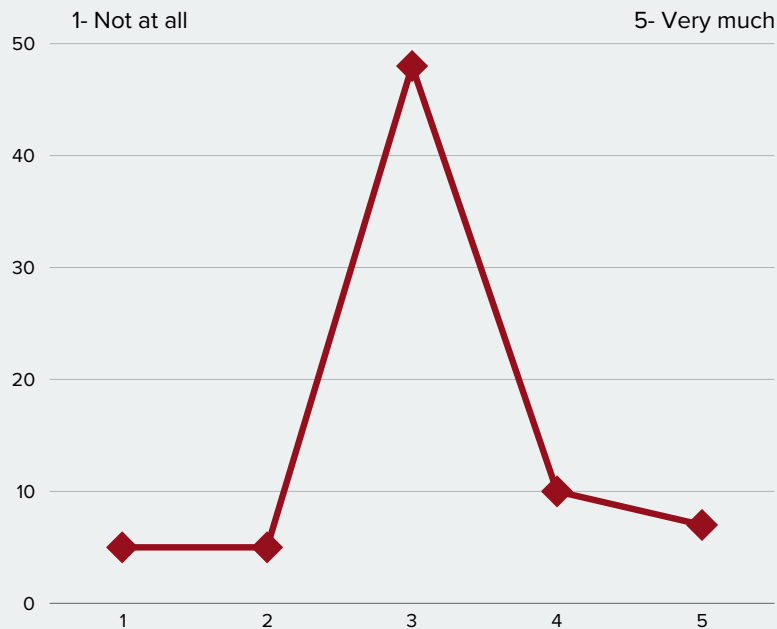
(Fig: 3.1.4) Question 10. To what extent do you feel physically or emotionally exhausted due to your work schedule?

Often

Sometimes

Always

(Fig: 3.1.5) Question 11. How often do you feel engaged and motivated at your work?

Close to 80% of employees feel physically or emotionally exhausted. Excessive work schedules, long shifts, and demanding roles contribute to burnout, lowering service quality and increasing turnover.

Dialectical Approach: Q11 (Employee motivation) and Q13 (effective communication) can either mitigate or exacerbate exhaustion. If employees still feel engaged despite exhaustion, it suggests other positive workplace factors (e.g., recognition, teamwork). If both motivation and engagement are low, an organization may need to rethink scheduling and work-life balance strategies.

30% of employees "always" reported feeling engaged and motivated. However, interestingly enough none stated that they "rarely" or "never" felt engaged. This also suggests that low engagement levels can be because employees struggle to find purpose and satisfaction in their roles, not due to their inherent lack of interest.

Triangulation: Q8 (career path) reinforces the idea that uncertainty about professional progression contributes to disengagement. Further, poor ratings in Q13 (communication effectiveness) and Q9 (high burnout levels) suggests that inadequate incentives diminish motivation.
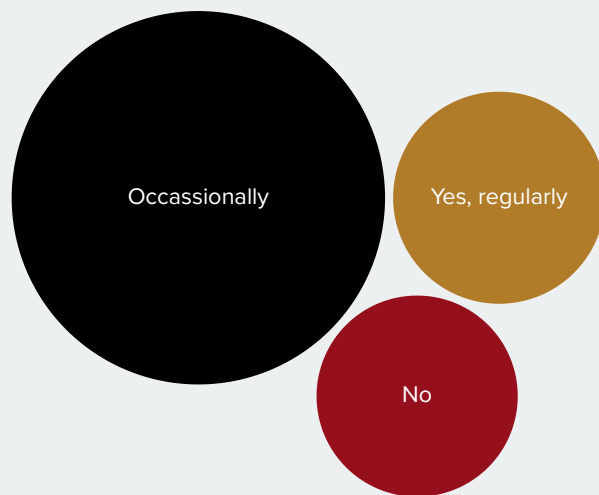
(Fig: 3.1.6) Question 12. Does your company provide opportunities for professional development and upskilling?

(Fig: 3.1.7) Question 13. How would you rate the effectiveness of communication between management and employees regarding career growth and workplace concerns?

This highlight gaps in professional development offerings where only about 20% of the employees say that they are offered opportunities for professional development and upskilling regularly.

Triangulation: Ratings of Q6 and Q7 (onboarding and training) when overlapped with Q8 (career growth clarity), points to limited upskilling being a cause of concern. Similarly a lack of development opportunities may lead to increased turnover intent and job exhaustion as well, as identified from Q9 and Q10 respectively.

Effective communication between management and employees is essential for fostering a supportive and transparent work environment, thus, it is surprising to see 70% of the employees rating the communication a 3/5 or lower. What is even more interesting is the fact that the ones rating it a 4/5 or higher are largely in managerial positions themselves, hinting at biased feedback.

Triangulation: Ineffective communication may also be a contributor to job dissatisfaction (Q9) and increased workload stress (Q10).

Structuring of career pathways

No mentorship

Lack of balance

Long working hours, less appreciation

Communication and coordination

Insufficient skill deveopment

Fewer learning opportunities

Stuck in the same role

Low pay in the industry

Burnout

Confusing training process

Opportunity and Growth

No cross training

No time for training

No follow ups for training

Unclear expectations

Racism

Visa constraints

No structured development plan

Inconsistent

"Old school mentality" of executives

Limited internal mobility

(Fig: 3.1.8) Question 14. What would you say is the biggest challenge that affects employee engagement in the hospitality sector?

Leadership should be trained better

Better leadership development! Managers need to know how to support employees, not just focus on operations.

Flexible work schedules and equal treatment

Better personal life balance

Better work life management

Team building activities at regular intervals

Upskilling and fair compensation for all

More investment in employees—better training, better development, and real opportunities to grow!

Introduce regular coaching sessions instead of just an annual review that doesn't help grow.

Give employees more time for learning and development instead of expecting us to train ourselves after work hours.

Improve training and provide better guidance

Every employee should have access to professional development courses, no matter their role.

Unionise the workplace to improve worker compensation and benefits

Anonymous feedback box

(Fig: 3.1.9) Question 15. If you had the superpower to improve anything about the employee retention and satisfaction, what would it be?

Responses highlight concerns and by analysing these recurring themes in employees' answers, it helps identify key areas for intervention and implement strategies that foster a more motivated workforce.

Cross referencing: Since responses highlight high workload, career stagnation; it stems back to engagement being low (Q11), and turnover intent (Q9) and exhaustion (Q10) being high; while, training gaps and unclear pathways, reinforce onboarding and career development issues. (Q6, Q7, Q8).

This creative, open-ended question invites employees to think beyond existing constraints and propose meaningful changes. The responses provide valuable insights into employee priorities and help tailor strategies to create a more fulfilling and supportive work environment.

Triangulation: Since, employees suggest improving workload, benefits, and career growth with upskilling or internal career mobility, it confirms concerns about unclear career growth paths (Q8), job dissatisfaction (Q9), exhaustion (Q10) and poor professional development (Q12).
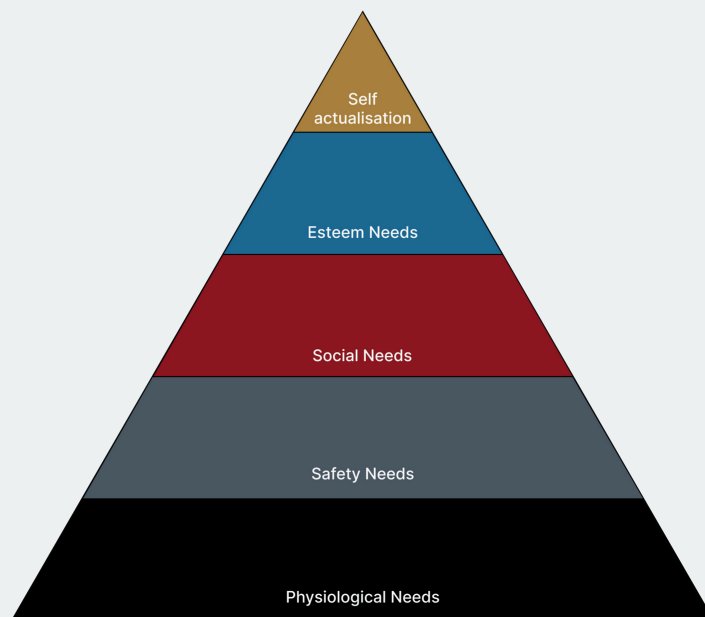
Opportunities for professional growth and meaningful contributions inspire long-term loyalty and higher productivity.

Clear career progression and opportunities to improve, boost motivation and reduce voluntary turnover.

Regular recognition and inclusive team dynamics improve employee morale and engagement.

Transparent communication and well-defined policies foster a sense of security and reduce turnover.

Inconsistent workloads and long hours contribute to employee burnout, affecting satisfaction and retention.

Fig 3.2: Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs representing the relevant motivations for an employee
(Source: Pichère, P., & Cadiat, A.-C. (2015). Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Lemaitre.)

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs provides a valuable psychological framework for structuring the interview guide, serving as a hypothesis for understanding the root causes of employee disengagement and turnover in the hospitality industry. Given that this project aims to enhance workforce engagement, reduce turnover, and align individual aspirations with organizational objectives, Maslow's model becomes highly relevant. By assessing how well the workplace meets employees' fundamental and higher-order needs, looking into the intrinsic as well as extrinsic, the study can identify systemic workforce challenges and design targeted interventions.

At the most basic level, **physiological needs** such as fair pay, adequate rest, and manageable work schedules play a crucial role in employee satisfaction. If these fundamental needs are unmet, employees are likely to feel overworked, underpaid, and physically exhausted, making it difficult to focus on long-term career growth. Questions related to whether employees feel their salary meets industry standards, if their work schedules allow for adequate rest, and whether they receive sufficient breaks during shifts can help gauge the extent to which these basic needs are addressed. If unmet, these issues could explain why a significant portion of employees experience burnout, as seen in the survey results.

Beyond basic survival needs, **safety needs**, including job security, structured training, and a supportive work environment, directly impact an employee's sense of stability. If employees do not feel secure in their roles due to high turnover rates or a lack of clear career progression, their stress levels increase, contributing to disengagement. Additionally, a poor onboarding process or inadequate training can leave employees feeling unprepared, further exacerbating workplace anxiety. Interview questions in this area would explore whether employees feel secure in their jobs, whether they believe their training sufficiently prepared them for their roles, and whether they feel safe and supported in their work environment.

Moving higher in the hierarchy, belonging or **social needs** are fundamental in determining workplace engagement. Employees who feel part of a cohesive team and experience strong interpersonal relationships with colleagues and management are more likely to remain committed to their organization. Questions in this domain would focus on whether employees feel like they are part of a supportive team, how often they receive feedback and recognition from supervisors, and whether they feel comfortable raising concerns with management. If employees do not feel a sense of belonging or support, they are more likely to disengage, which is often a precursor to job dissatisfaction and turnover.

The next level, **esteem needs**, relates to recognition, career growth, and professional development opportunities. Employees who feel undervalued or lack clear advancement pathways are at greater risk of seeking opportunities elsewhere. Many in the survey expressed uncertainty about their career progression, reinforcing the importance of investigating whether employees feel recognized for their contributions, whether they see a clear career path, and whether they have access to professional development opportunities. If employees do not perceive upward mobility or acknowledgment for their efforts, their motivation to stay with the company diminishes.

At the highest level of the hierarchy, **self-actualization needs** focus on

personal fulfillment and alignment with one's career aspirations. Employees who feel empowered, valued, and able to contribute meaningfully to their organization are more likely to remain engaged and committed long-term.

Questions related to whether employees feel their role aligns with their professional goals, whether they feel empowered to take initiative, and what would make their job more fulfilling can provide insight into whether the organization fosters an environment of personal and professional growth.

Maslow's framework is particularly relevant to this project because it helps break down why employees disengage and what specific needs are not being met. If physiological and safety needs, such as proper pay, scheduling, and training, are neglected, employees will struggle with basic job satisfaction and burnout. If belonging and esteem needs, such as recognition and teamwork, are overlooked, employees will feel disconnected and seek opportunities elsewhere. Even when organizations meet these needs, failing to address self-actualization—by not providing meaning, purpose, and career progression—can drive employees to leave for jobs that offer more personal fulfillment.

By aligning interview questions with Maslow's hierarchy, this study ensures a structured approach to understanding workforce challenges. It allows for a nuanced exploration of employee engagement at different levels and helps pinpoint gaps that contribute to turnover.

More importantly, this framework also supports the development of targeted, people-centric solutions that address employee needs holistically, ultimately helping organizations like Ritz Carlton enhance workforce retention, reduce operational costs, and maintain high service standards.

✺ Key Questions Identified ✺

- What aspects of your daily work do you find most challenging?
- How do you feel about the level of recognition and feedback you receive?

- How do you support your team in overcoming challenges and improving performance?
- What barriers do you face in ensuring employee satisfaction and engagement?

- What trends have you observed in turnover and retention within your organisation?
- How effective are current training and onboarding programs for employee needs?

- How do you align workforce strategies with broader organisational goals?
- What factors do you believe significantly impact employee satisfaction and retention?

| Frontline Employees | Mid-level Managers | HR Professionals | Senior Leadership |

Front- Stage Employees

1. What aspects of your daily work do you find most challenging?
2. How do you feel about the level of recognition and feedback you receive?
3. Can you describe your onboarding experience? Did it prepare you well for your role?
4. Do you feel you have a clear career progression path within the organization?
5. What aspects of your job keep you engaged and motivated?
6. Have you ever considered leaving your job in the past six months? Why?
7. How do you balance work demands with personal well-being?
8. Do you feel physically or emotionally exhausted due to your work schedule?
9. Do you believe you have adequate opportunities for skill development and training?
10. How would you describe the communication between employees and management?
11. What kind of support do you receive from supervisors when you face challenges?
12. Do you feel comfortable voicing concerns or suggesting improvements in the workplace?
13. What are the biggest factors that affect job satisfaction in your role?
14. If you could change one thing about your work environment, what would it be?
15. How do you think employee engagement could be improved in your workplace?

Mid- Level Managers

1. How effective do you think the current onboarding process is in preparing employees for their roles?
2. What are the biggest challenges in retaining frontline employees?
3. How frequently do you provide feedback and recognition to your team members?
4. How do you address burnout and workload concerns among your staff?
5. Do you feel empowered to make decisions that improve employee engagement?
6. How do you support your team in overcoming challenges and improving performance?
7. What role does training and professional development play in your team's growth?
8. How do you handle conflict resolution and communication gaps between employees and management?
9. What factors contribute to employees leaving their roles within the first year?
10. What barriers do you face in ensuring employee satisfaction and engagement?
11. Do you believe the organization provides enough career advancement opportunities?
12. How do you ensure alignment between company expectations and employee aspirations?
13. What strategies have been successful in improving team morale and motivation?
14. What suggestions would you make to senior leadership regarding workforce retention?
15. In what ways can the organization better support managers in leading and engaging their teams?

HR Professionals

1. What are the key reasons employees cite for leaving the organization?
2. How do you measure employee engagement and satisfaction?
3. What initiatives have been implemented to improve employee retention, and how successful have they been?
4. What trends have you observed in turnover and retention within your organization?
5. How does the organization handle performance evaluations and feedback?
6. What role does workplace culture play in employee motivation and job satisfaction?
7. How effective are current training and onboarding programs for employee needs?
8. Do you see a gap between employee expectations and what the company offers in terms of career growth?
9. How does the organization support work-life balance and mental well-being?
10. What efforts are being made to improve communication between employees and management?
11. How do HR policies align with the overall strategic objectives of the company?
12. In your opinion, what is the biggest challenge in recruiting and retaining hospitality employees?
13. What kind of exit interview data has been most insightful for understanding turnover issues?
14. How does the organization address skill development and continuous learning for employees?
15. What changes would you recommend to improve workforce stability and engagement?

Senior Leadership

1. How do you align workforce strategies with broader organizational goals?
2. How does leadership approach long-term workforce planning in the hospitality industry?
3. What initiatives have been implemented to reduce employee turnover? Have they been effective?
4. What factors do you believe significantly impact employee satisfaction and retention?
5. How do you ensure that frontline employees feel valued and engaged?
6. In what ways does company culture impact talent attraction and retention?
7. How does the organization support career development and leadership growth for employees?
8. What steps have been taken to create a more inclusive and supportive workplace?
9. What challenges do you see in balancing profitability with employee well-being?
10. How does leadership encourage open communication between management and employees?
11. What role does technology play in improving workforce management and engagement?
12. How do you see the future of workforce engagement evolving in the hospitality sector?
13. What are the key leadership values that drive employee motivation and satisfaction?
14. How do you measure the effectiveness of workforce engagement initiatives?
15. If you could implement one significant change to improve workforce retention, what would it be?

Interview Insights

Disclaimer: The names used in the following interview results are fictitious and have been generated to disassociate from specific individuals and maintain anonymity, prioritising the focus on the insights presented.

A series of seven interviews were conducted, where the participants engaged in semi-structured conversations, about the specific questions to gather qualitative data about their experiences, opinions, and perspectives allowing for a detailed understanding.

James Rodriguez – Line Cook (Kitchen Staff)

Introduction
James is a Line Cook at a high-volume hospitality establishment, with over three years of experience handling various roles in the kitchen, including food preparation and cooking. His perspective provides valuable insight into the operational challenges, workplace culture, and structural gaps that impact back-of-house employees.

Summary
James highlighted the relentless physical and mental demands of working in a high-pressure kitchen environment. He emphasized that while he takes pride in his craft and enjoys the camaraderie with his colleagues, the demanding nature of the job often results in burnout and stress. He mentioned that recognition from management is rare, leading to a sense of being undervalued. Communication between kitchen staff and upper management is often ineffective, creating inefficiencies that add to the stress of an already intense job. James also expressed frustration over the lack of career advancement opportunities, stating that while he wants to grow within the organization, there is little clarity on promotions or skill development programs. While he remains committed to his role for now, he admitted that without changes in recognition, communication, and career progression, he would consider leaving.

Key Takeaways
James' experience reflects systemic issues in back-of-house operations, where efficiency and speed are prioritised over employee well-being. The lack of structured recognition programs fosters low morale; and unclear career pathways or skill development programs and poor communication between kitchen staff and management further exacerbates workplace challenges.

"I've learned a lot on the job, but most of it comes from figuring things out myself or watching the more experienced guys. There's no structured training,—just trial and error. I want to move up to a sous chef role someday. I love the work, but I don't know how long I can keep going without real recognition or a clear path to move up. Right now, it just feels like a dead-end job."

Key Questions
- What aspects of your daily work do you find most challenging?
- What kind of support do you receive from supervisors when you face challenges?
- If you could change one thing about your work environment, what would it be?

Sarah Bennett – Front Desk Associate

Introduction
Sarah Bennett is a Front Desk Associate at a full-service hotel, with two years of experience in guest interactions, check-ins, reservations, and complaint resolution. As the face of the hotel, she plays a critical role in guest satisfaction and retention, yet faces multiple workplace challenges that impact her experience.

Summary
Sarah enjoys engaging with guests and problem-solving, but she finds her job highly stressful due to unpredictable workloads, unclear management communication, and lack of work-life balance. She pointed out that policies and guest service expectations are not always communicated effectively by management, making it challenging to handle difficult situations efficiently. Career advancement also remains a concern—she does not see a clear growth trajectory within the hotel, making it difficult to stay motivated long-term. Scheduling unpredictability is another major challenge, as last-minute changes make it hard to plan personal time. Sarah admitted that she has considered leaving the job due to burnout and lack of career growth, though she still finds value in the hospitality experience she is gaining.

Key Takeaways
Sarah's experience highlights a disconnect between front-line employees and management, particularly in terms of communication and support. The unpredictability of scheduling adds unnecessary stress, making it difficult to maintain a healthy work-life balance. Additionally, the lack of career development pathways leads to disengagement, as employees struggle to envision long-term potential in their roles. While guest interactions provide some fulfilment, they are not enough to offset the stress of unclear support.

"I want to grow in hospitality—maybe move into guest relations or even hotel management—but there's no clear guidance on how to get there. I've taken on more responsibilities, but there's no structured leadership training or career path outlined for us. I wish the company really invested in fast-track development programs."

Key Questions
- How would you describe the communication between employees and management?
- Do you feel you have a clear progression path for your career within the organization?
- How do you balance work demands with personal well-being?

Marcus Carter – F&B Server

Introduction
Marcus Carter is an F&B Server at a high-volume hotel restaurant, with over a year of experience in managing guest dining experiences, handling complaints, and ensuring efficient service. His role is critical in shaping guest satisfaction, but he faces several systemic challenges that impact his engagement and long-term retention.

Summary
Marcus expressed that guest interactions are the most rewarding part of his job, particularly when they result in positive feedback or strong gratuities. However, he also noted the unpredictability of income, as tipping varies significantly based on guest demographics and business volume. The physical demands of the job are high, requiring him to work long hours on his feet with minimal break time, which often leads to exhaustion. Additionally, Marcus feels that recognition from management is inconsistent, with more focus on correcting mistakes rather than acknowledging excellent service. He also sees limited opportunities for training and skill development, which affects his ability to grow in the industry. While he enjoys hospitality, Marcus believes that without better recognition, structured training, and a stronger team dynamic, long-term job satisfaction will remain a challenge.

Key Takeaways
Marcus' experience underscores the dual nature of the Food & Beverage server's role—it offers fulfilling guest interactions and income potential, but operational challenges, lack of management recognition, and limited training opportunities make retention difficult. The absence of structured career development programs and inconsistent communication within teams can affect service efficiency and leave employees feeling stagnant.

"On a good night, I walk out of here feeling great—happy guests, good tips, smooth service. But on a bad night? It's exhausting. There's no real training on things like upselling, wine knowledge that could help me earn more and perform better. If they invested in skill-building programs, I'd feel like I'm working toward something bigger, rather than just showing up for shifts."

Key Questions
- Do you believe you have adequate opportunities for skill development and training?
- Do you feel comfortable voicing concerns or suggesting improvements in the workplace?
- How do you think employee engagement could be improved?

Daniel Thompson – Restaurant Manager

Introduction
Daniel is a Restaurant Manager at a high-volume hotel restaurant, overseeing daily operations, managing staff, ensuring guest satisfaction, and maintaining profitability. With eight years of experience in management, he is responsible for employee retention, team performance, and operational efficiency in a fast-paced environment.

Summary
Daniel shared his perspective on the challenges of retaining frontline employees, particularly servers, bartenders, and kitchen staff. While he tries to provide on-the-job coaching and feedback, he feels constrained by limited resources and time pressures. Burnout is another significant issue, as scheduling flexibility is limited, leading to work-life balance struggles for employees. Conflict resolution is a regular part of his role, particularly in managing communication gaps between staff and upper management. Daniel believes that professional development opportunities would greatly improve retention, but there is a lack of structured leadership training and skill-building programs. He expressed a strong need for greater support from senior leadership in recognising top-performing employees and providing managers with more autonomy to implement employee engagement initiatives.

Key Takeaways
Daniel sees employee retention as a systemic challenge driven by burnout, lack of structured career growth, and inconsistent recognition. He believes that structured skill-building programs, clearer career pathways, and stronger recognition from leadership would help reduce turnover. Additionally, empowering managers with more decision-making authority in engagement initiatives could create a more motivated and committed team.

"Most of my team doesn't see this as a long-term career because typically they don't have enough reason to. There's no structured training, no clear next step beyond just working more shifts, and often limited recognition. I believe, to retain employees, we need to show them there's a future here—whether it's through skill-building, promotions, or leadership training."

Key Questions
- What are the biggest challenges in retaining frontline employees?
- How frequently do you provide feedback and recognition to your team members?
- What role does training and professional development play in your team's growth?

Olivia Ramirez – Front Office Manager

Introduction
Olivia Ramirez is a Front Office Manager at a full-service hotel, responsible for overseeing front desk operations, managing guest relations, and leading a team of front desk associates. With about ten years of experience in hospitality, she plays a crucial role in ensuring employee engagement, retention, and service excellence.

Summary
Olivia emphasized the importance of training and professional development in keeping employees engaged but noted that the current onboarding process is not sufficient to fully prepare new hires. One of her biggest challenges is ensuring alignment between company expectations and employee aspirations—many employees join hospitality roles expecting career growth, but without clear advancement opportunities, they become disengaged. She highlighted that regular feedback and recognition significantly impact morale, but due to high guest volumes and administrative responsibilities, it can be difficult to provide consistent one-on-one coaching. She believes that providing managers with more leadership development tools and internal mobility programs for frontline employees would improve engagement and retention. She also suggested mentorship programs where senior employees guide newer hires, helping them navigate the challenges of the role.

Key Takeaways
She sees coaching, mentorship, and leadership training as key solutions for improving employee engagement but feels that managers need better support from the organization to implement these initiatives. Essentially investment in leadership development programs could create a more committed workforce.

"We lose a lot of employees after the first year because they feel lost. The onboarding process gives them the basics, but there's no real coaching beyond that. They don't see a future here because we're not showing them one. If we provided clearer career paths, leadership training, and structured mentorship, we wouldn't be constantly hiring and retraining new people."

Key Questions
- How effective do you think the current onboarding process is?
- What factors contribute to employees leaving their roles within the first year?
- In what ways can the organization better support managers in leading and engaging their teams?

Emma C. – Training & Development Coordinator

Introduction
Emma is a Training & Development Coordinator at a mid-sized hospitality organization, overseeing employee training, professional development, and engagement initiatives. With a background in human resources and workforce development, she plays a strategic role in enhancing employee retention, aligning HR policies with business goals, and fostering career growth within the company.

Summary
Emma provided a strategic perspective on the challenges and opportunities in employee development. Her team tracks employee engagement and satisfaction through periodic pulse surveys, retention analytics, and exit interviews, which have highlighted key trends. Emma emphasised that training and onboarding programs need to evolve to meet modern workforce expectations. While the company has implemented structured onboarding programs and leadership development initiatives, the effectiveness of these programs is hindered by inconsistent follow-through and limited long-term career mapping. Performance evaluations are conducted, but they tend to be more operational than developmental, missing opportunities to create individualized growth plans for employees. Finally, she stressed that HR policies must be more aligned with business strategy, shifting from a reactive hiring model to a proactive retention approach that focuses on developing employees rather than replacing them.

Key Takeaways
Emma highlighted the need to shift from a reactive hiring model to a proactive employee development approach. The most cited reasons for turnover—burnout, lack of career progression, and weak onboarding experiences—are areas where HR and management must collaborate.

"We're still treating hiring like a revolving door—bringing people in, training them for operational needs, and watching them leave. If we invested in leadership pipelines, and skills-based development programs, we wouldn't just retain employees longer; we'd actually build a stronger workforce from within. Right now, the biggest gap is the misalignment that's driving our turnover rates."

Key Questions
- How do you measure employee engagement and satisfaction?
- How effective are current training and onboarding programs for employee needs?
- Do you see a gap between employee expectations and what the company offers in terms of career growth?

Jonathan Whitmore – General Manager

Introduction
Jonathan Whitmore is the General Manager of a renowned hospitality establishment, overseeing all aspects of operations, guest experiences, and workforce management. With over 20 years in luxury hospitality, he has a strategic vision for aligning workforce initiatives with organisational goals, focusing on long-term retention, employee well-being, and leadership development.

Summary
Jonathan emphasised that attracting, developing, and retaining top-tier hospitality talent is central to the organisation's success. One of the most powerful tools for long-term workforce engagement is its Leadership Center, a globally recognized learning and development program that equips employees with the skills, knowledge, and service standards required to deliver world-class hospitality. This program provides structured training, mentorship, and internal mobility opportunities, allowing employees to advance.
Beyond leadership development, they currently also have a strong culture of daily engagement and service reinforcement. One of the most unique and impactful initiatives is the Daily Lineup—a practice where, at the start of every shift, employees across all departments gather for a brief team discussion on service philosophy, values, and employee achievements. He pointed out that this initiative is not just about operational reminders—it's about instilling a shared sense of purpose and pride in the work being done.

Key Takeaways
Jonathan's insights reinforce that the approach to workforce engagement is built on culture, career development, and continuous investment in employees.

"Here, we don't just hire employees—we develop future leaders in hospitality. Our brand's legacy is built on service excellence, but that excellence starts with the people who deliver it. Every strategic investment an organisation makes in training, recognition, and culture isn't just for the employees—it's for the guests, the business, and the future of luxury hospitality."

Key Questions
- How do you align workforce strategies with broader organisational goals and measure its effectiveness?
- How does the organization support leadership growth?
- How does leadership encourage open communication between management and employees?

3.4 Emerging Insights

In a service design project, the research phase is essential for uncovering emerging themes that provide a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities within a given system. These themes serve as guiding principles that shape the design process, ensuring that solutions are not based on assumptions but instead on real insights gathered from qualitative and quantitative data.

Emerging themes highlight recurring patterns, systemic inefficiencies, and critical areas for intervention, making them a crucial bridge between research findings and actionable strategies. Their relevance lies in the ability to clarify root causes, align stakeholder needs, and provide focus for ideation. Without them, the design process risks being unfocused and ineffective, lacking the strategic direction needed to drive meaningful change.

For this project, two key frameworks were used in conjunction- affinitization of data points to insights to themes and a double-triangulation square model- to help in distilling research findings into actionable themes.

The first is a more business-driven approach, ensuring themes are derived from operational and financial realities, while the second is a user-driven approach, mapping the experience from the employees' perspective to reveal the human impact of these challenges. These frameworks worked together to transform raw data into a clear understanding of systemic challenges, enabling a strategic approach to designing effective interventions.

The first framework is a structured synthesis method that helps identify recurring issues from qualitative and quantitative research. It began with collecting diverse data points such as employee feedback and industry best practices. These data points were then clustered into insights—statements that describe patterns emerging from the research. Once enough insights have been formed, they are clustered into emerging themes, like high employee turnover, significant costs associated with turnover, and evolving employee engagement practices. This approach ensures that themes are aligned with business challenges, helping organisations pinpoint the financial and operational impact of employee experience problems. It provides a high-level, data-backed foundation for making strategic design decisions that improve workforce retention, efficiency, and profitability.

The second framework, a double-triangulation square model, helps reveal how multiple challenges interconnect to create systemic issues. Instead of viewing employee experience issues in isolation, this model visualises how core challenges reinforce one another.

By utilizing these two frameworks together, the process helped uncover the most critical themes that must be addressed to improve employee retention and satisfaction. The first framework ensures that themes are backed by strong research, while the second model provides a clear structural understanding of how different challenges influence one another. All in all, this holistic approach encourages interventions that address both immediate pain points and deeper systemic challenges like career growth and turnover cycles.

In this context, the overarching critical insights emerging from the synthesis are given below. High turnover remains a persistent issue, involving recruitment and training costs, productivity losses and declining service quality. Traditional engagement methods are proving insufficient, prompting hotels to explore new strategies that prioritise well being, recognition, and career development. Furthermore, research reinforces a strong link between employee engagement and overall business success, where engaged employees drive better guest experiences, operational efficiency, and higher profitability. These insights point to that one larger theme- the need for a holistic employee experience strategy- one that moves beyond transactional benefits and focuses on long term employee satisfaction, growth and retention.

01

High Employee Turnover Rates

02

Significant Costs Associated with Turnover

03

Evolving Employee Engagement Practices

04

Impact of Employee Engagement on Profitability

1

"Many of my colleagues leave because they don't see any room for growth. It feels like we're just here to fill shifts." (FLE)

The hospitality industry experiences an annual turnover rate of over 70%. (source: Bureau of Labor Statistics)

"We spend so much time training new hires, only to see them leave in a few months. It's frustrating." (MLM)

High Employee Turnover Rates

Theme: Employee Retention Challenges

Develop Comprehensive Retention Strategies

**FLE- Front Line Employee; MLM- Mid Level Manager; HRP- HR Professional; SL- Senior Leadership

2

"Replacing just one employee can cost us thousands in recruitment, onboarding, and lost productivity." (HRP)

Replacing a single frontline employee in hospitality costs approximately $5,864. (source: Cornell Center for Hospitality Research)

"When someone leaves, it's not just about replacing them—it's the strain on the rest of the team while we search for a replacement." (MLM)

Significant Costs Associated with Turnover

Theme: Financial Implications of Turnover

Implement Cost-Effective Retention Measures

**FLE- Front Line Employee; MLM- Mid Level Manager; HRP- HR Professional; SL- Senior Leadership

3

Engaged employees contribute discretionary effort, crucial in the competitive hospitality sector. (source: Hospitality Sales & Marketing Association International)

"Agile engagement tools are becoming essential for staying connected with employees, especially across large teams." (SL)

We've started using monthly pulse surveys, and it's helped us act quickly on team concerns." (MLM)

Evolving Employee Engagement Practices

Theme: Enhancing Employee Engagement

Adopt Agile Engagement Tools

**FLE- Front Line Employee; MLM- Mid Level Manager; HRP- HR Professional; SL- Senior Leadership

4

"We've noticed a direct link between team engagement and our monthly performance metrics—it's not just about morale; it's measurable." (MLM)

Engaged employees are 21% more productive, leading to better service. (source: Gallup)

"When employees feel engaged and valued, they go above and beyond, and you can see the difference in customer satisfaction scores." (SL)

Impact of Employee Engagement on Profitability

Theme: Link between Employee Engagement and Business Performance

Strategic Investment in Employee Engagement

**FLE- Front Line Employee; MLM- Mid Level Manager; HRP- HR Professional; SL- Senior Leadership

The affinitisation process above, of synthesising data points to insights and insights to themes takes a more structured business perspective, focusing on how raw data translates into organisational challenges.

In contrast, the double triangulation square model takes a more user centred approach, helping to uncover how employees personally experience and perceive these challenges. Instead of focusing on overarching business metrics, this method maps out interconnected employee pain points in a way that highlights their root causes and how they contribute to larger systemic issues.

The model introduced ahead is designed around two adjacent triangulations, forming a square with four key issues. The concept of triangulation originates from geometry, where three points form a stable structure, ensuring accuracy in measurement. In this service design context, triangulation involves identifying interdependent relationships between different insights, problems, and data points to reveal deeper patterns and root causes.

The first triangle identifies two primary pain points- employee exhaustion and unclear career growth paths. These represent core challenges that shape an employee's day-to-day experience- exhaustion from long shifts, lack of breaks, and emotional demands of the job, coupled with the frustration of not seeing a clear future vision at times within the organisation which is also tangible.

These two primary stressors then interact with two additional problems, forming the second triangulation. The first is ineffective onboarding, where employees feel underprepared and unsupported from the start, leading to greater struggles with exhaustion and disengagement. The second is employees wanting to leave their jobs, a natural consequence of prolonged exhaustion and uncertainty about their future in the company. This, in turn, results in higher turnover rates, reinforcing a cycle where disengaged employees leave, forcing the company to continuously hire and train replacements—often without resolving the root causes of dissatisfaction.

From a strategic standpoint, triangulation signifies a deeper analytical process that uncovers systemic interactions between different factors. It allows businesses to avoid one-dimensional problem-solving by recognising that issues such as turnover, disengagement, and retention are multi-layered challenges requiring multi-layered solutions. In addition to enhancing predictive capabilities by understanding the domino effect of certain workplace conditions- for instance, how ineffective onboarding contributes to stress, which then impacts engagement and ultimately turnover..

As mentioned previously, by applying the two frameworks together, the service design process gains both a business-driven and a user-driven understanding of the problem space. The affinitization process ensures that themes are backed by data, making them tangible concerns for leadership and decision-makers. Meanwhile, the double-triangulation model humanises the research, illustrating how employees actually experience these challenges on the ground.

More than 70% of the hospitality employees said that they felt physically or emotionally exhausted due to your work schedule. (Survey conducted, 2025)

According to the Hospitality Workforce Report, over 60% of hospitality workers suffer from chronic stress and burnout, the highest among others. (EHL Hospitality Insights, 2023)

The World Health Organisation has recognized burnout as an occupational phenomenon resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed. (WHO, 2022)

63% of hospitality employees said they did not have a clear understanding of their career growth path within the company in the first three years. (Survey conducted, 2025)

A study found that only 22% of hospitality workers believe they have a clear career progression path, compared to 52% in other industries. (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022)

They want to know what skills they need to move up, but the process is often vague, and opportunities for internal growth aren't always well communicated. (Interview- Training Manager at a luxury hotel, Las Vegas)

Fig 3.4.1: First Triangulation- Identifying the core employee experience stressors

Employees who experience a structured onboarding process are 58% more likely to remain with the organization after three years. (Society for Human Resource Management, n.d.)

70% of respondents rated a 2/5 (Likert Scale: 1-Not at all, 5-Very well) to how well they believed their onboarding process prepared them for your role. (Survey conducted- 2025)

"We often see new hires coming in with a lot of excitement, but within a few weeks, they start feeling lost. The onboarding process is heavily focused on policies and procedures, but it lacks personalization. (Interview- HR Operations at a luxury hotel, Florida)

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The World Health Organisation has recognized burnout as an occupational phenomenon resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed. (WHO, 2022)

Approximately 75% of the hospitality employees considered leaving their job in the last six months. (survey conducted)

U.S. employee engagement has stagnated and factors include unclear expectations, lack of connection to the organisation's mission, and feeling undervalued. (Gallup, Jim Harter, 2024)

"Sometimes, it feels like management expects us to just deal with it because 'that's how hospitality is. I am currently looking for something else where I am valued." (Interview- Front Desk Associate, luxury hotel, California)

Fig 3.4.2: Second Triangulation- Uncovering the reinforcing challenges as a consequence to the stressors

Employees who experience a structured onboarding process are 58% more likely to remain with the organization after three years. (Society for Human Resource Management, n.d.)

70% of respondents rated a 2/5 (Likert Scale: 1-Not at all, 5-Very well) to how well they believed their onboarding process prepared them for your role. (Survey conducted- 2025)

"We often see new hires coming in with a lot of excitement, but within a few weeks, they start feeling lost. The onboarding process is heavily focused on policies and procedures, but it lacks personalization. (Interview- HR Operations at a luxury hotel, Florida)

63% of hospitality employees said they did not have a clear understanding of their career growth path within the company in the first three years. (Survey conducted, 2025)

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They want to know what skills they need to move up, but the process is often vague, and opportunities for internal growth aren't always well communicated. (Interview- Training Manager at a luxury hotel, Las Vegas)

More than 70% of the hospitality employees said that they felt physically or emotionally exhausted due to your work schedule. (Survey conducted, 2025)

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"Sometimes, it feels like management expects us to just deal with it because 'that's how hospitality is. I am currently looking for something else where I am valued." (Interview- Front Desk Associate, luxury hotel, California)

Fig 3.4.3: Double Triangulation square model- Mapping the systemic impact as a self reinforcing cycle

This Double Triangulation Square Model presented in figure 3.4.3 can be used as a powerful framework that visually decodes the systemic impact of key challenges. It helps reinforcing pain points in a more self-sustaining cycle, serving as an analytical tool for diagnosing problems and a strategic guide for intervention.

The significance of the white arrow in the diagram is particularly critical from a service design intervention perspective. Rather than being a static depiction of workplace issues, the arrow helps suggest a specific intervention point that, if addressed effectively, can disrupt the cycle and lead to systemic improvements. The arrow herein highlights the entry point where an organisation should focus its initial efforts to generate the most substantial and immediate positive impact across the entire employee experience framework.

The arrow, pointing towards onboarding efficiencies, implies that the onboarding process is a key leverage point for systemic change and turnover intent specifically caused by the stressors (as shown in figure 3.4.1). Improving onboarding could have a ripple effect that mitigates employee exhaustion by getting clearer role expectations, providing structured training, and offering better support systems early in an employee's tenure.

What is also seen currently, a common misconception in workforce

strategy, is that onboarding is merely the short term process focused on job orientation. (discussed in figure 2E and 2G)

However, in a service design approach, onboarding must be viewed as an ongoing journey that encompasses skill development, career progression, all amounting to cultural immersion. This diagram is key in representing tat if onboarding is designed as a long-term engagement strategy rather than a short term introduction, it can serve as a key driver of employee retention and organisational stability.

Rather than treating it as a one-time knowledge transfer, hotels should integrate structured learning pathways that allow employees to progressively build new skills and advance their careers within the organisation. Continuous upskilling opportunities with transparent roadmaps should be explored.

By redefining the ongoing, developmental process, the arrow in the diagram suggests a fundamental shift in how hotels should approach employee integration and retention. Rather than constantly sifting through new hires due to high attrition, organisations should invest in a comprehensive onboarding and upskilling strategy that transforms new employees into long-term assets.

The Double Triangulation Square Model ultimately provides a holistic service design framework. The white arrow is not just a directional marker—it is a strategic guidepost that signals. The long-term impact of this shift would be an organization that does not simply react to turnover but actively builds a sustainable talent pipeline.

Design Value Proposition 💎

The value proposition canvas is another strategic tool used to define and align a product or service's value proposition with that of the user needs, behaviours, and expectations. It helps designers and businesses articulate the key benefits and differentiators of their offerings by mapping out user pain points, desires and how the proposed design might address them. It is structured in a way that it is not only grounded in user insights but also portrays business viability.

Incorporating the value proposition canvas while discussing research and emerging insights is crucial since it can too bridge the gap between raw data and actionable design directions. The traditional canvas has two primary section, as seen in figure 3.5 on the right.

The right side of the canvas, the customer profile, represents the target audience by breaking down their characteristics into three categories: customer jobs, pains, and gains. Customer jobs refer to the tasks, problems, or needs that users aim to fulfil, which could be functional (e.g., completing a specific action), social (e.g., maintaining status or relationships), or emotional (e.g., feeling secure or confident). Pains are the obstacles, frustrations, or risks that users encounter while trying to complete these jobs. These range from usability challenges and inefficiencies to broader concerns like cost or accessibility. Gains capture the benefits or positive outcomes that users expect or desire. By structuring this section, the canvas allows designers to deeply understand the motivations and challenges of their users before moving into the solution space.

The left side of the canvas, the value map, translates insights from the customer profile. It is divided into three corresponding sections: products and services, pain relievers, and gain creators. Products and services refer to the core offerings that a design team is creating to address user needs. Pain relievers describe how the design directly alleviates the frustrations or difficulties identified in the customer profile. Gain creators focus on how the design provides additional value beyond simply solving problems, such as making an experience more enjoyable, more accessible, or more cost-effective. This approach ensures that each design decision is linked to a specific user pain or gain, making the value proposition clear and intentional.

The connection between these two sides is where the true power of the Design Value Proposition Canvas lies. It ensures that there is a direct relationship between what the user needs and what the design offers. Another significant advantage of the Design Value Proposition Canvas is its ability to bring together multiple disciplines into the process.

The canvas serves as a common language that enables cross-disciplinary collaboration, ensuring that diverse perspectives inform the design. Business teams validate market fit, engineers assess feasibility, and user researchers ensure alignment with user needs. This process helps minimize silos and enhance innovation.
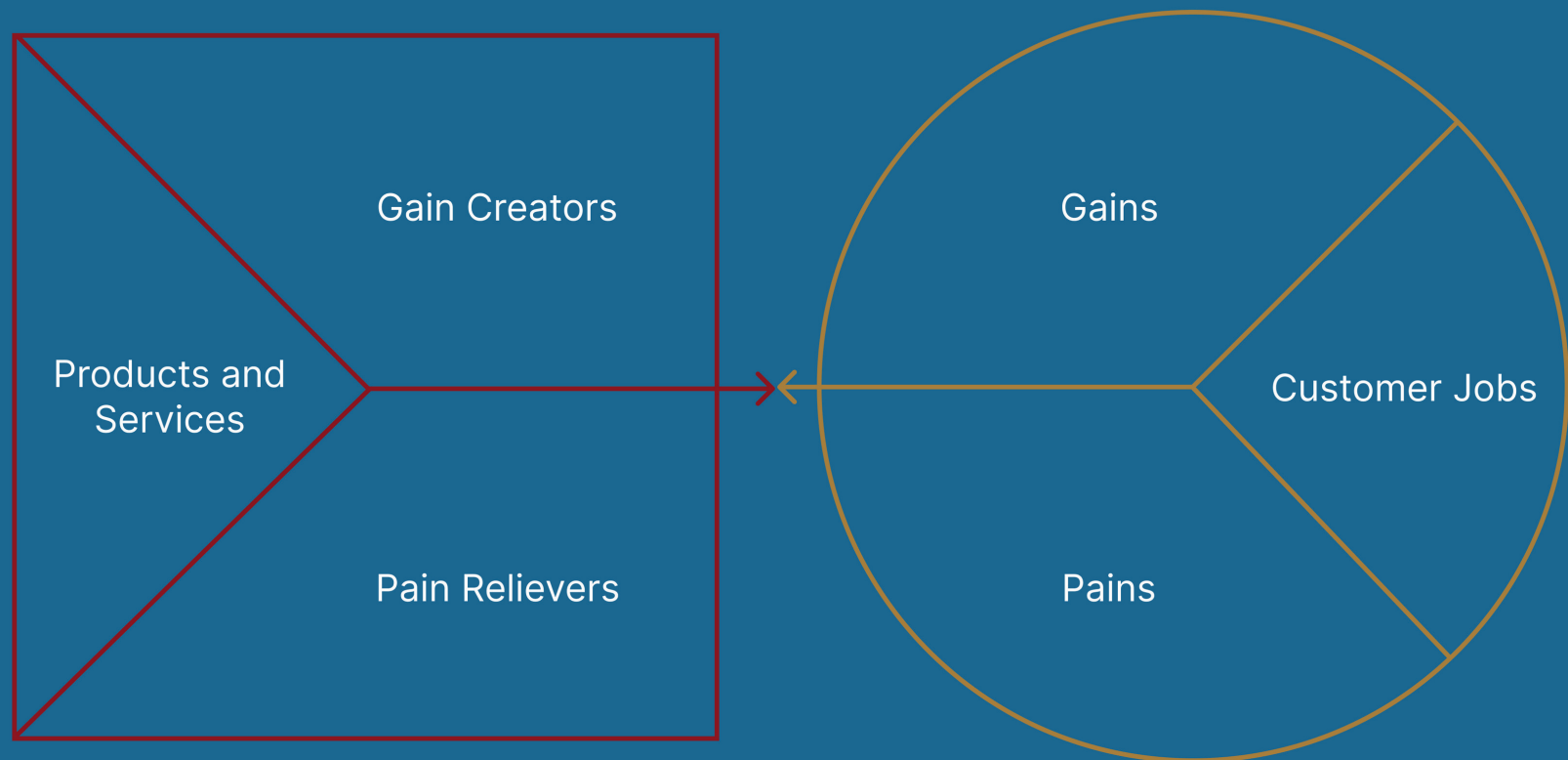
Fig 3.5: Value Proposition Canvas (Source: Osterwalder, A., Pigneur, Y., Bernarda, G., & Smith, A. (2014). Value proposition design: How to create products and services customers want. Wiley.)

Value Proposition

Experiences
(Pain Relievers)

Benefits
(Gain Creators)

Features
(Products & Services)

Customer Profile

Pains

Gains

Customer
Jobs
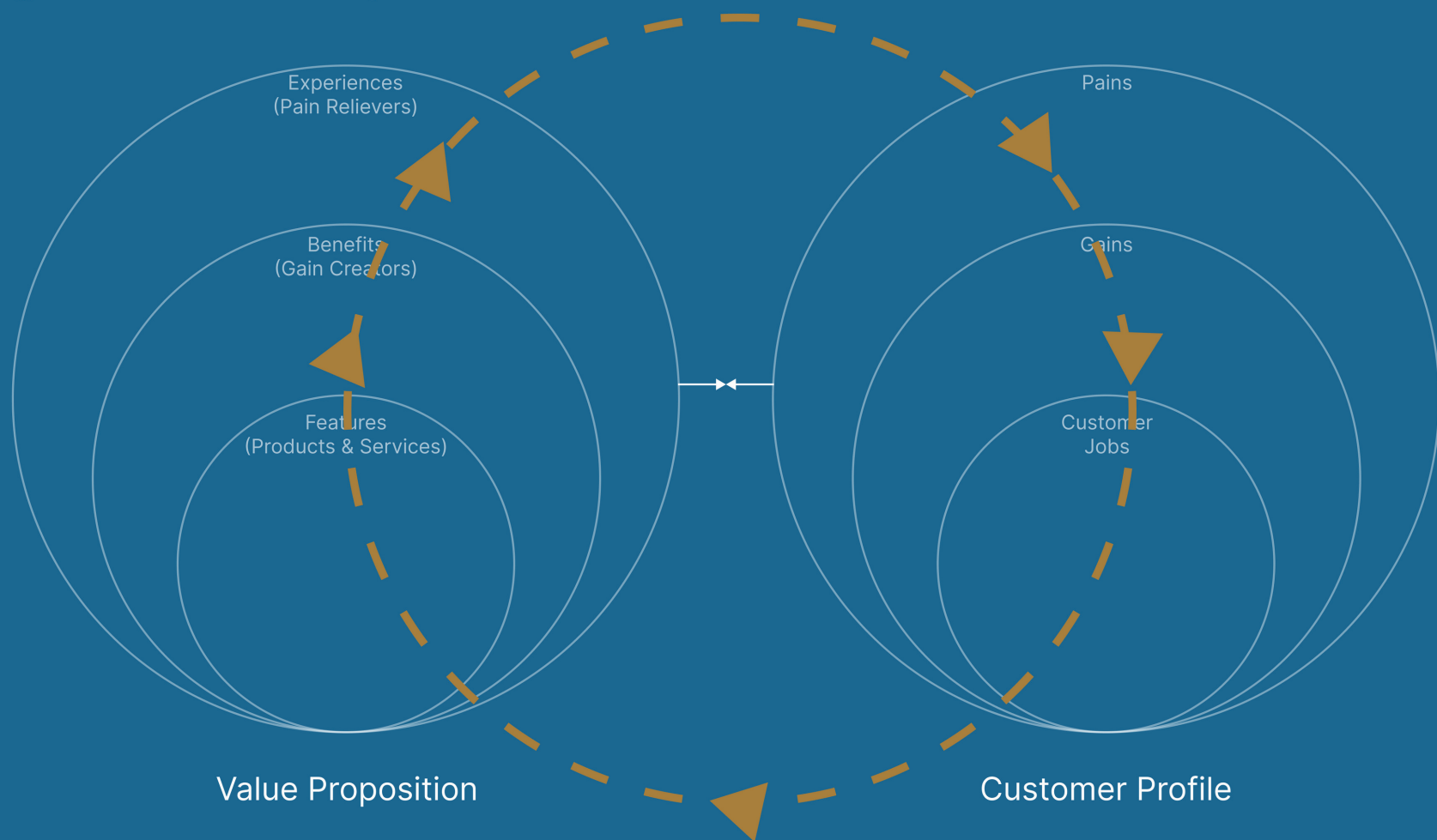
Fig 3.6: Revised Value Proposition Canvas with a cyclic correspondence

The traditional value proposition canvas a shown in figure 3.5 is often represented as a static, linear framework. While this structure helps clarify the connection between user needs and the solutions offered, it does not fully capture the dynamic, evolving nature of value creation. In the current project, for hotels, the user needs and business offerings are not fixed; they constantly shift in response to external changes, feedback, and emerging insights.

This is why a revised version of the canvas is presented (as seen in figure 3.6), reimagining the traditional approach by introducing a cyclic correspondence, offering a more accurate and flexible model for how value is designed, experienced, and refined over time.

A key reason why the traditional canvas should be reimagined in this way is that the process of aligning value propositions with user needs is not a one-time exercise. The traditional approach risks oversimplifying the interaction between users and design solutions, treating it as a straightforward mapping of problems to solutions. However, in reality, value is continuously shaped by interactions, expectations, and lived experiences. The revised canvas on the left also, strategically organises its elements into concentric circles rather than separate, segmented parts, fundamentally. This shift from a fragmented structure to a layered, circular model shows the canvas acknowledging the depth and interdependence of each component, reinforcing the idea that value creation is not a simple one-to-one correspondence but rather a multi-layered and evolving process. On the customer profile side, the concentric circles illustrate how different aspects of user needs—customer jobs, gains, and pains—exist in a hierarchy of importance and influence. At the core of the circle lies the customer job, representing the fundamental tasks, needs, or problems the user is trying to address. Surrounding this core are the gains and pains, which contextualize the job by adding layers of motivation and challenge. On the value proposition side, the concentric structure follows a parallel logic, mirroring the user profile to reinforce the alignment between user needs and design solutions. At its core are products and services, which form the foundation of the offering. Surrounding this core are gain creators and pain relievers, strategically layered to demonstrate how the core offering extends beyond functionality to create meaningful experiences.

The revised canvas aligns more naturally with methodologies such as human-centred design, agile development, and systems thinking, all of which emphasise iterative learning and adaptation. It recognises experience as a key component of value creation, placing it specifically as the outermost layer of the value proposition, highlighting that success is not solely about meeting functional needs but also about creating meaningful, enjoyable, and impactful interactions. The cyclic arrow also represents the ongoing interaction and feedback loop between customer needs and the value proposition.

Hence, this layout also allows for a more natural evolution of value propositions over time, enabling to iteratively refine outer layers based on insights gained from user engagement, without disrupting the fundamental structure at the core.

Value Proposition

Experiences
(Pain Relievers)

Structured onboarding
support and check ins

Career pathways and
talent mobility

Real time recognition

Benefits
(Gain Creators)

Personalised plans
from pre boarding

Quarterly check up
conversations

Employee Assistance
Programs

Features
(Products & Services)

Off site
initiatives

Interactive digital
onboarding

Microlearning, upskilling and
live training certifications

Narrative sessions
for company culture
immersion

Customer Profile

Pains

Limited mentorship
and support systems

Lack of structured
career development

Lack of recognition;
feeling disposable

Gains

Engaging onboarding

Regular feedback
loops

Employee wellbeing
initiatives

Customer
Jobs

Integrate smoothly
into a role

Have access to skills
building resources

Engage in and
understand company
culture

Fig 3.7: Revised Value Proposition Canvas for the employee experience interventions in the hotel sector

As discussed, the diagram (figure 3.6) moves beyond a traditional human resource approach to workforce management and instead embeds a service design mindset, ensuring that employee experience is treated with the same strategic importance as customer experience. The canvas (figure 3.7) transitions into an active blueprint for transformation- acknowledging that th employee experience too, is a complex and evolving ecosystem.

On the customer profile side, at the core lie the customer jobs, which articulate the fundamental responsibilities of employees, such as smoothly integrating into their roles, acquiring skills, and internalising company culture. This core is significant because it acknowledges that employee success is not just about task execution but also about personal development and cultural alignment, elements that are often overlooked. Surrounding this core, the gains reflect the aspirations that elevate an employee's day-to-day experience; indicating that employees require more than just a salary or a job description to feel invested in their work. The outermost layer, pains, highlights the systemic obstacles employees face, such as limited mentorship, lack of structured career development, and feeling undervalued.

On the value proposition side, the interventions are structured to match and counteract the employee experience layers. At its core, products & services—such as interactive digital onboarding and micro-learning-serve as the foundation for seamless role integration and skill-building. This layer directly combats the friction that new employees often experience, ensuring that they are not left to navigate their roles in isolation but are actively supported through structured learning and cultural immersion. Surrounding this, gain creators—including personalised pre-boarding plans, quarterly check-in conversations, and employee assistance programs—provide sustained engagement beyond initial onboarding. These elements reinforce the idea that employee experience is not just about the first few weeks but must be nurtured continuously to maintain motivation and alignment with the company's vision. Finally, the outermost layer, pain relievers, introduces transformative experiences, all of which directly respond to the employee pain points mapped on the opposite side.

The information presented in the figure, each element whether a pain point, gain, or intervention—has been carefully mapped based on recurring patterns identified. It is built on validated employee experiences and organisational challenges discussed throughout the previous chapters and figures (such as 2E, 2F, 2G, also figures 3.1.0 through to 3.1.9).

The overarching story the figure 3.7 tells, is one of transformation- moving from research-driven insights that capture the voice of employees to designing a meaningful system. It can be considered more than just a visual redesign. It embeds agility, continuous feedback, and iterative refinement ideologies into the employee experience design. It is capable of not only addressing today's workforce challenges but also anticipating and preparing for the demands of the future.

How Might We ✨

The Value Proposition Canvas captures the current state of employee experience in hospitality by mapping employee needs, pain points, and aspirations against targeted service interventions. However, while this model effectively aligns insights with solutions, it remains a static representation of the problem-solution relationship. The "How Might We" (HMW) section, shifts the project, research backed challenges to open-ended design prompts that drive creative problem-solving.

The HMW questions help break down the complex issues into focused design opportunities, ensuring that interventions are scalable, adaptable, and experience-driven. The three emerging HMW questions strategically align with the three concentric layers of value within the canvas (Features, Benefits, and Experiences).

The first HMW question builds directly from the pains of unstructured onboarding and lack of career mobility. The canvas (figure 3.7) already identifies solutions like interactive digital onboarding, cultural immersion sessions, and career development pathways, but the HMW question pushes the design process further. It shifts the focus from what needs to be done to how it can be done in a way that creates meaningful experiences, ensuring that onboarding is not just a process but a foundation for professional growth and long-term commitment.

The second HMW question emerges from the lack of real-time recognition and structured feedback loops highlighted in the canvas. The value proposition already suggests real-time recognition programs and structured mentorship, but the HMW question challenges to think beyond traditional performance reviews and towards a fully integrated feedback culture. This ensures that solutions are not isolated interventions but part of a growth mechanism that directly influences career advancement and job satisfaction.

The third HMW question extends from the identified pain of employee exhaustion and disengagement due to high workloads and lack of mental health support. While the canvas presents well-being initiatives such as assistance programs and off-site training, the HMW reframing ensures that these are not just seen as external benefits. This question is essential in designing overall well-being as a structural component rather than an occasional intervention, ensuring that employee sustainability is built into workplace policies, management practices, and operational workflows.

These "How Might We" statements collectively form the foundation for the next phase of ideation. They reinforce the idea that upskilling and career development should not be add-ons. By integrating continuous learning and mentorship into these core experience pillars, the project moves towards creating a hospitality workforce that is confident, engaged, valued, and sustainably supported for long-term success.

HMW design a dynamic feedback
and recognition ecosystem that
ensures continuous growth,
employee engagement, and a sense
of value within hospitality roles?

How Might We create a seamless and
engaging onboarding experience that
fosters early confidence, career
clarity, and long-term retention in the
hospitality industry?

How Might We integrate well-being
initiatives into daily hospitality
operations to reduce burnout,
promote work-life balance, and
create a sustainable workforce?
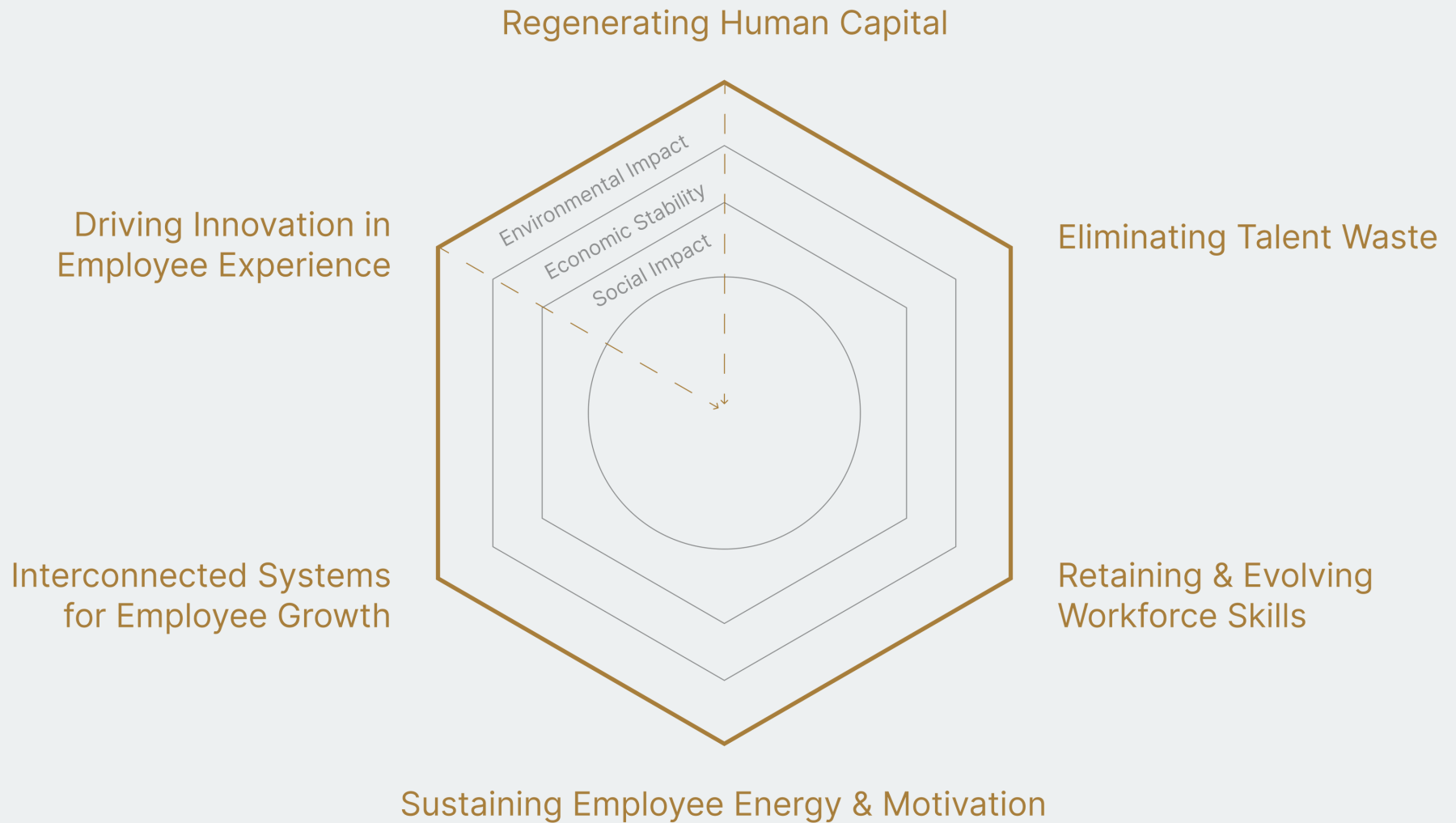
Fig 3.8: Revised Circular Economy Framework applied to elevating the employee experience (source: Geissdoerfer, Savaget, Bocken & Hultink, (2017). The circular economy- A new sustainability paradigm?)

Figure Description (figure 3.8)

The Circular Economy Framework, traditionally applied to environmental and economic sustainability, provides a powerful lens for examining workforce sustainability in the hospitality sector. The six core pillars—Regenerate, Share, Optimize, Loop, Virtualize, and Exchange—align closely with the ideology of this project, which aims to regenerate human capital, eliminate talent waste, retain and evolve workforce skills, sustain employee energy and motivation, foster interconnected systems for growth, and drive innovation in employee experience. By shifting from a linear workforce model (hire-train-burnout-replace) to a circular approach that prioritizes retention, skill evolution, and workforce well-being, organizations can enhance long-term stability while mitigating economic, social, and environmental costs associated with high turnover rates.

1. Regenerating Human Capital
The principle of regeneration in a circular economy focuses on restoring and maintaining resources rather than depleting them. In the context of human capital, this translates to prioritizing employee well-being, work-life balance, and professional growth to sustain motivation and prevent burnout.
The hospitality industry is notorious for excessive work demands leading to physical and emotional exhaustion, which reduces employee productivity and accelerates turnover. Implementing wellness initiatives, flexible work arrangements, and holistic career development strategies ensures that employees remain engaged and energized, allowing organizations to benefit from long-term workforce stability rather than constantly expending resources on recruitment and retraining.

2. Eliminating Talent Waste
The share principle emphasizes maximizing resource utility through shared access and collaboration rather than redundant production. Applied to workforce management, this means leveraging internal talent pools, promoting cross-functional skill development, and facilitating internal mobility rather than constantly seeking external hires. A workforce model that encourages internal job rotation, upskilling, and knowledge-sharing platforms allows organizations to redistribute talent dynamically, ensuring employees remain engaged and adaptable. This reduces talent waste and enhances career progression while minimizing the environmental and economic costs of frequent recruitment cycles.

3. Retaining and Evolving Workforce Skills
Optimization in the circular economy involves increasing efficiency, reducing waste, and enhancing system resilience. In human capital terms, this means investing in continuous learning, digital training programs, and AI-driven workforce analytics to ensure employees are always equipped with relevant skills. The hospitality industry often struggles with skill obsolescence due to rapid technological advancements and evolving guest expectations. By embedding a culture of lifelong learning, mentorship, and personalized development plans, businesses can optimize talent retention and keep employees aligned with industry trends. This approach not only strengthens organizational resilience but also minimizes economic instability caused by high turnover and skill gaps.

4. Sustaining Employee Energy & Motivation
The loop principle emphasizes designing systems that recapture and

reuse resources instead of discarding them. In workforce strategy, this means preventing employee attrition by reintegrating and redeploying talent instead of replacing it. Many hospitality employees leave due to limited career growth, poor work-life balance, or lack of engagement—issues that could be mitigated through structured career pathways, retention incentives, and internal redeployment opportunities. By maintaining long-term relationships with employees, even those who leave, through alumni networks or return-ship programs, businesses can recapture experienced talent, reducing the financial and environmental impact of constant turnover.

5. Interconnected Systems for Employee Growth
Virtualization in the circular economy encourages digitization to reduce physical resource dependency. In the hospitality workforce, technology-driven solutions such as AI-powered scheduling, virtual training modules, and employee experience platforms can enhance efficiency while minimizing labor waste. For example, data-driven workforce planning can predict peak demand periods and optimize staffing levels, preventing overwork and burnout. Digital learning tools ensure continuous skill development without excessive time or financial investment in traditional training models. Virtualization not only improves operational agility but also reduces the carbon footprint associated with excessive hiring processes, printed training materials, and redundant resource use.

6. Driving Innovation in Employee Experience
The exchange principle highlights rethinking traditional business models and adopting innovative, more sustainable alternatives. The hospitality sector often operates on a rigid employment structure that

fails to accommodate evolving workforce expectations. By redefining work models through gig-based employment, hybrid roles, and skills-based hiring rather than tenure-based promotions, organizations can drive workforce sustainability while enhancing employee satisfaction. Moreover, integrating circular HR practices such as sustainable hiring, ethical compensation policies, and inclusive work environments fosters greater employee commitment, leading to higher retention, reduced economic volatility, and long-term social impact.

Integrating circular economy principles into workforce management enhances economic stability by reducing turnover costs and optimizing talent utilization, ensuring financial resilience. It drives social impact through greater job security, career growth, and well-being initiatives, improving employee satisfaction and reducing stress-related health concerns. From an environmental perspective, minimizing workforce turnover and leveraging digital training reduces recruitment-related travel, paperwork, and resource wastage, promoting a low-carbon, sustainable model.

Lastly, it strengthens industry competitiveness and innovation by fostering a continuously evolving, engaged workforce, enabling hospitality businesses to maintain service excellence while adapting to industry shifts.

04

New Possibilities

Ideation is a deeply human process- it's not just about generating concepts but also about forging connections between people, needs, and solutions. It is where empathy, curiosity, and intuition collide to spark new possibilities, making it the lifeblood of meaningful change and design.
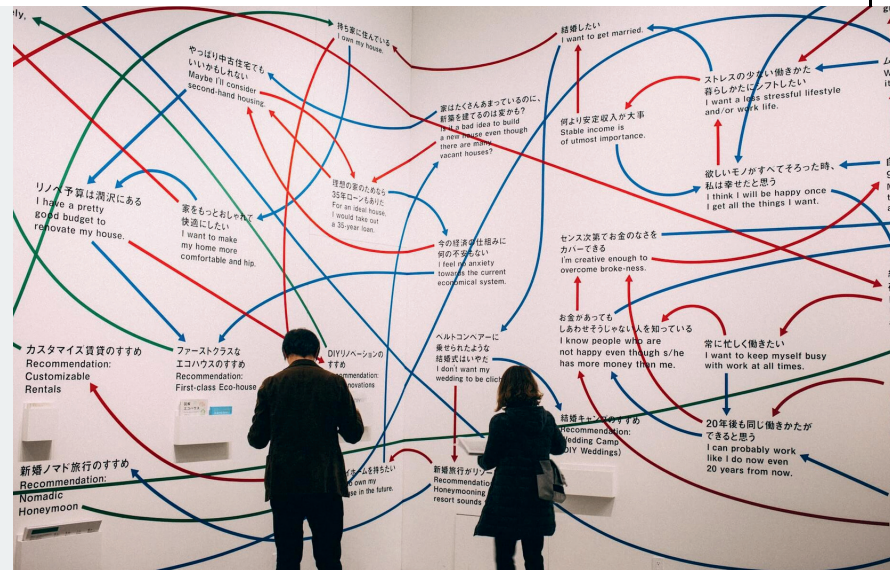
4.1 Idea Generation

After defining the "How Might We" (HMW) statements- the ideation process unfolds systematically to generate, refine, and eventually validate potential solutions.

The process began with the typical brainstorming, a method that fosters divergent thinking to freely generate ideas. This stage allowed for the explorations of both incremental improvements, like optimising scheduling processes, and transformative innovations, such as AI driven stress management tools. Brainstorming ensured a rich pool of ideas grounded in the lived experiences of employees. However, without a push for creativity, the project may default towards familiar solutions. This is where the crazy 8s came in handy.

This rapid ideation technique forced participants to think beyond the obvious and uncover unconventional approaches. The fast paced nature of this method mirrors the hospitality industry's high energy environment as well, helping to surface innovative solutions such as gamified employee recognition programs, redesigned break spaces for mental well-being, and real time feedback loops between staff and the management. The crazy 8s were carried out as a co-creative session with two of the frontline employees working in subsidiaries of the Marriott group, like the Ritz Carlton.

This helped generate a broad set of ideas in place, however, due to the lack in diversity of employee perspectives, and to avoid ideas from becoming self-reinforcing rather than exploratory; the six thinking hats method was utilised. It ensures that solutions are examined from multiple perspectives before implementation. Each of the six "hats"

represents a distinct way of thinking, helping avoid cognitive biases and ensuring that no critical aspect of a solution is overlooked.

The White Hat focuses on data and feasibility, assessing whether the idea aligns with operational constraints and industry trends. The Red Hat considers the emotional response of employees, ensuring the solution resonates with their real needs and experiences. The Black Hat identifies potential risks and downsides, while the Yellow Hat explores the best-case scenario and long-term benefits. The Green Hat injects further creativity, seeking opportunities to enhance or merge ideas, and the Blue Hat ensures the discussion remains organised and solution-driven. By methodically applying these lenses, it helps refine concepts, prioritising the most viable and impactful solutions while mitigating potential risks.

Despite several different ideation methods, co-creation still remains an invaluable step. It is definitely challenging, requiring time, trust, and a shift away from hierarchal decision making, however, it beautifully ensures that stakeholders participate in shaping and testing the solutions. Unlike traditional top-down decision-making, co-creation fosters ownership and ensures that the innovations are not just theoretical but practical and implementable in real hospitality environments. Further, some of the targeted co-creative methods are highlighted that enabled a transition into a process of generating ideas that are possibly more relevant, effective, and embraced by those who will use them.

Co creative design thinking 🤝

This service design project is deeply embedded in co-creative design thinking. This method emphasises collaboration, iteration and human centred problem solving, ensuring that solutions are not just design for employees but co-designed with them. The process moves beyond the traditional, expert driven methods and into a participatory space where stakeholders such as employees, actively contribute to defining and shaping their work environment.

The diagram mentioned in figure 4.1, is thus, foundational in understanding co-creation as a paradigm shift and how it is inculcated in the process of ideation as well.

The process initially begins with a research-led, expert-driven approach within the user-centred design quadrant, where essentially contextual inquiry in the form of surveys and interviews is conducted to gather foundational quantitative and qualitative data. At this stage, employees participate as subjects rather than active designers. The outcomes from this phase include a comprehensive understanding of employee pain points, key friction points in operations, and data-driven insights that highlight areas for improvement.

With a solid research base, the process moves into participatory design, where employees transition from subjects to co-creators of change. This phase ensures that innovations are not just imposed from the top. The outcome of this phase is an employee-driven set of practical, implementable solutions that align with their real-world experiences.

To push beyond conventional improvements, the process then moves into generative design research, incorporating crazy 8s and generative tools such as experience mapping and scenario building to explore creative, emotionally resonant solutions. Employees are encouraged to sketch, ideate, and visualise their ideal workplace scenarios in fast-paced, iterative sessions. This method forces innovation by generating unconventional ideas that might not surface in traditional brainstorming.

Finally, looking forward, the process can move towards critical design techniques, utilising cultural probes and speculative design to challenge traditional assumptions about hospitality work culture. Instead of accepting high stress and burnout as industry norms, this stage questions the fundamental structures that contribute to the very employee dissatisfaction.

By using the framework as a base and moving through the quadrants, the design process evolves from expert-led analysis to participatory co-creation, from practical improvements to visionary transformation.
The idea overall is that, co-creation builds ownership and commitment—employees are more likely to support and sustain changes they helped design, leading to higher job satisfaction and lower turnover in hospitality settings.
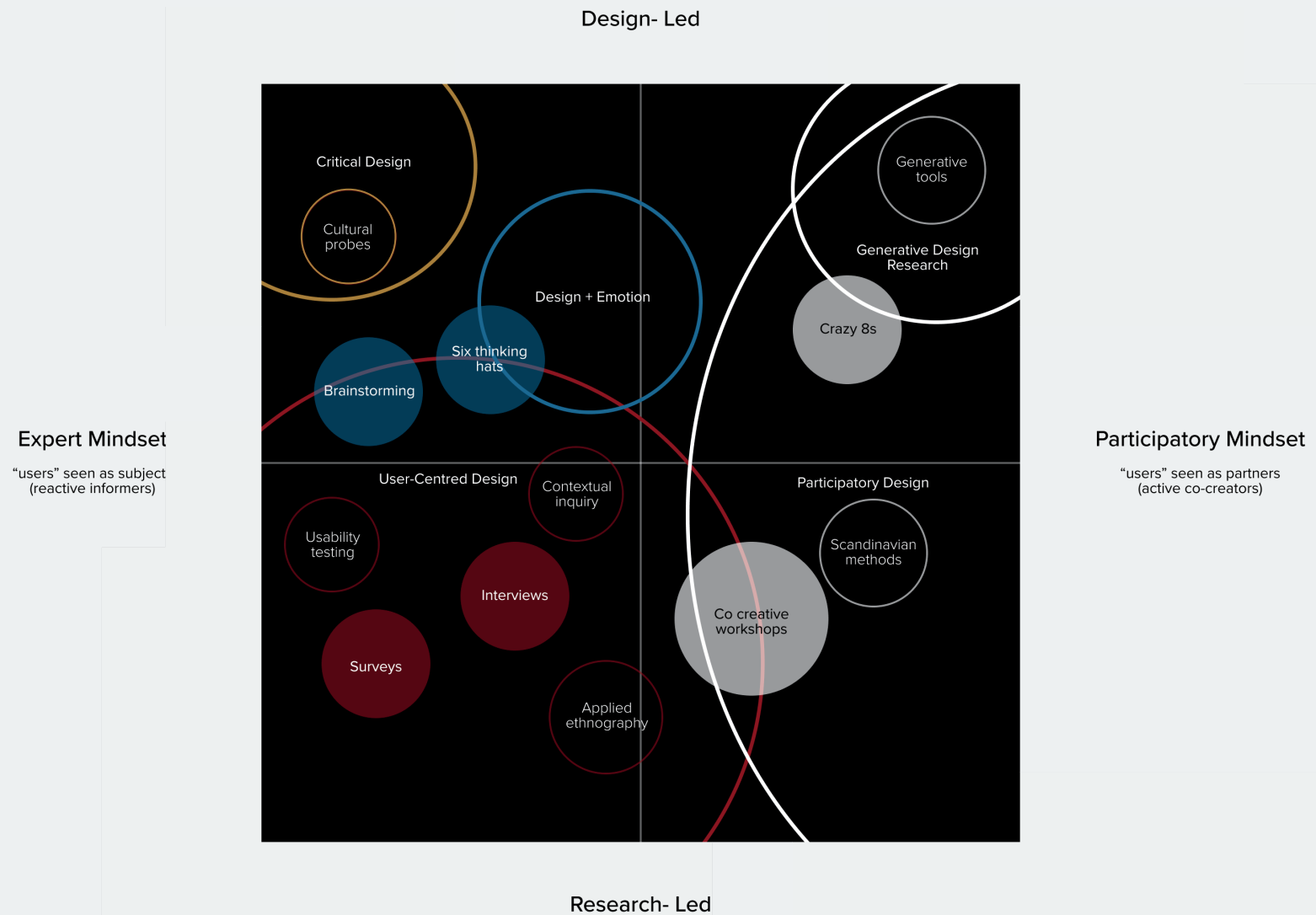
Figure 4.1: Co-creative Design Research and Ideation Framework- Updated for the given project
(source: Sanders, E.B. N. and Stappers, P.J., 2008. Co-creation and the new landscapes of design. Co design, 4(1), pp. 5-18.
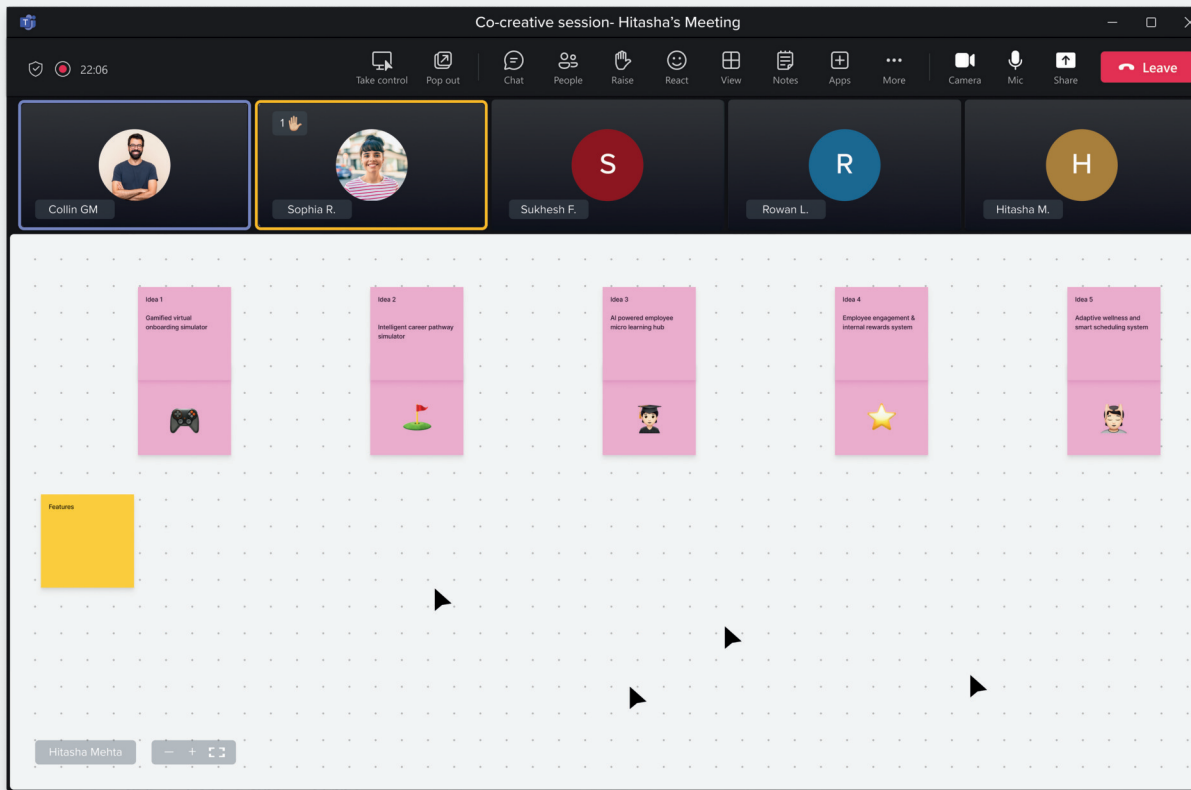
Co-creative session photo gallery (clockwise- online session, vision collages, brainstorming)

Social Desirability

High
Medium
Low

Economic Viability   Environmental Feasibility

1. Gamified virtual onboarding simulator

2. Intelligent career pathway simulator

3. AI powered employee micro learning hub

4. Employee engagement & internal rewards system

5. Adaptive wellness and smart scheduling system
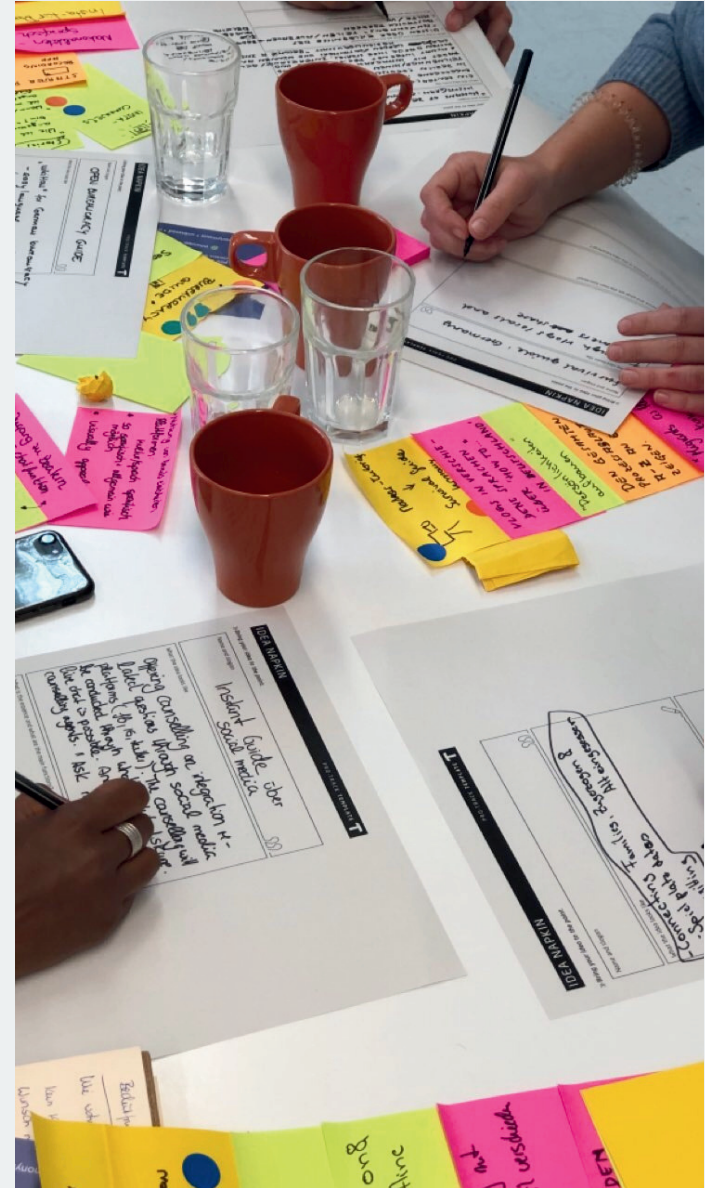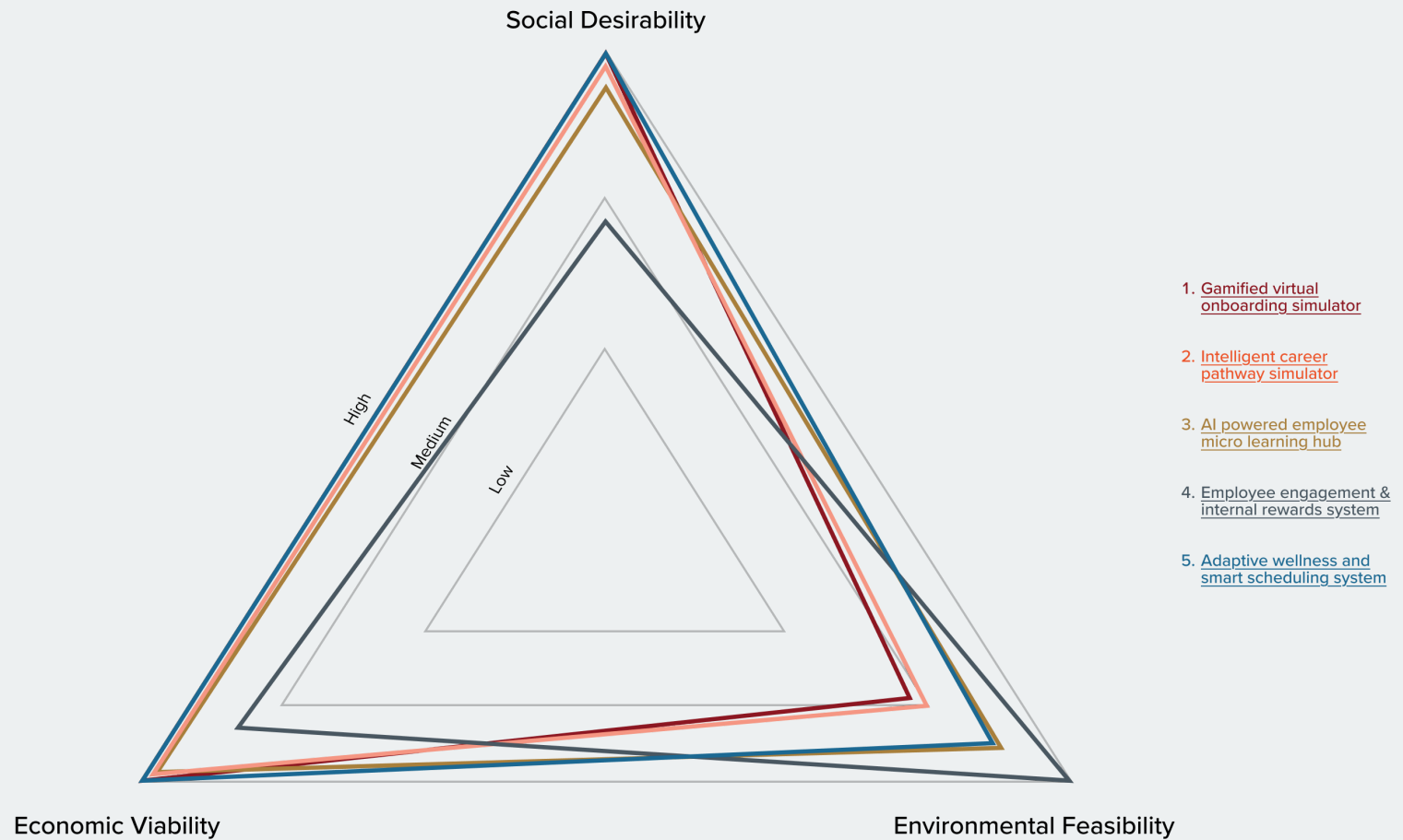
Figure 4.1.1: Revised Desirability, Viability and Feasibility matrix with prioritised ideas mapped across the parameters

The traditional Desirability, Viability, and Feasibility (DVF) is a great tool for idea prioritisation. In this case, the DVF model is blended with the three consequential layers of Environmental Impact, Economic Stability and Social Impact (as discussed in figure 3.8). This placement thus, helps inform the next steps by identifying quick wins (eg: micro-learning and wellness systems) for immediate rollout, while high-impact but moderately feasible ideas (e.g., career and onboarding simulators) require strategic investment in technology for long-term execution. Prioritising feasibility ensures a phased implementation approach to maximise organisational adoption as well as employee engagement.

Gamified virtual onboarding simulator 🎮

An engaging, game-based virtual training environment designed to simulate real-world hospitality scenarios, helping new hotel employees rapidly develop essential skills, familiarise themselves with hotel culture, and smoothly transition into their roles, thereby improving employee confidence and retention from day one.

- Scenario-based, interactive training modules simulating real-life hotel experiences.

- Gamification mechanics such as achievements, leaderboards, and progress badges.

- Real-time guidance and personalized feedback for accelerated learning and growth.

- Immersive narratives aligned with hotel brand and values.

- Accessible and mobile-friendly design for learning flexibility.

Welcome to the office!

Intelligent career pathway simulator 🚩

A "smart" and interactive platform enabling hospitality employees to visualise personalised career advancement paths within the organization, providing clarity on required skills, career opportunities, and professional growth options, thereby increasing motivation, employee engagement, and long-term retention.

- Personalized AI-driven recommendations for career progression.

- Interactive career exploration scenarios detailing different hospitality roles.

- Skill-gap analysis and tailored professional development planning.

- Real-time integration with employee performance data.

- Visual dashboards showcasing future advancement opportunities and requirements.
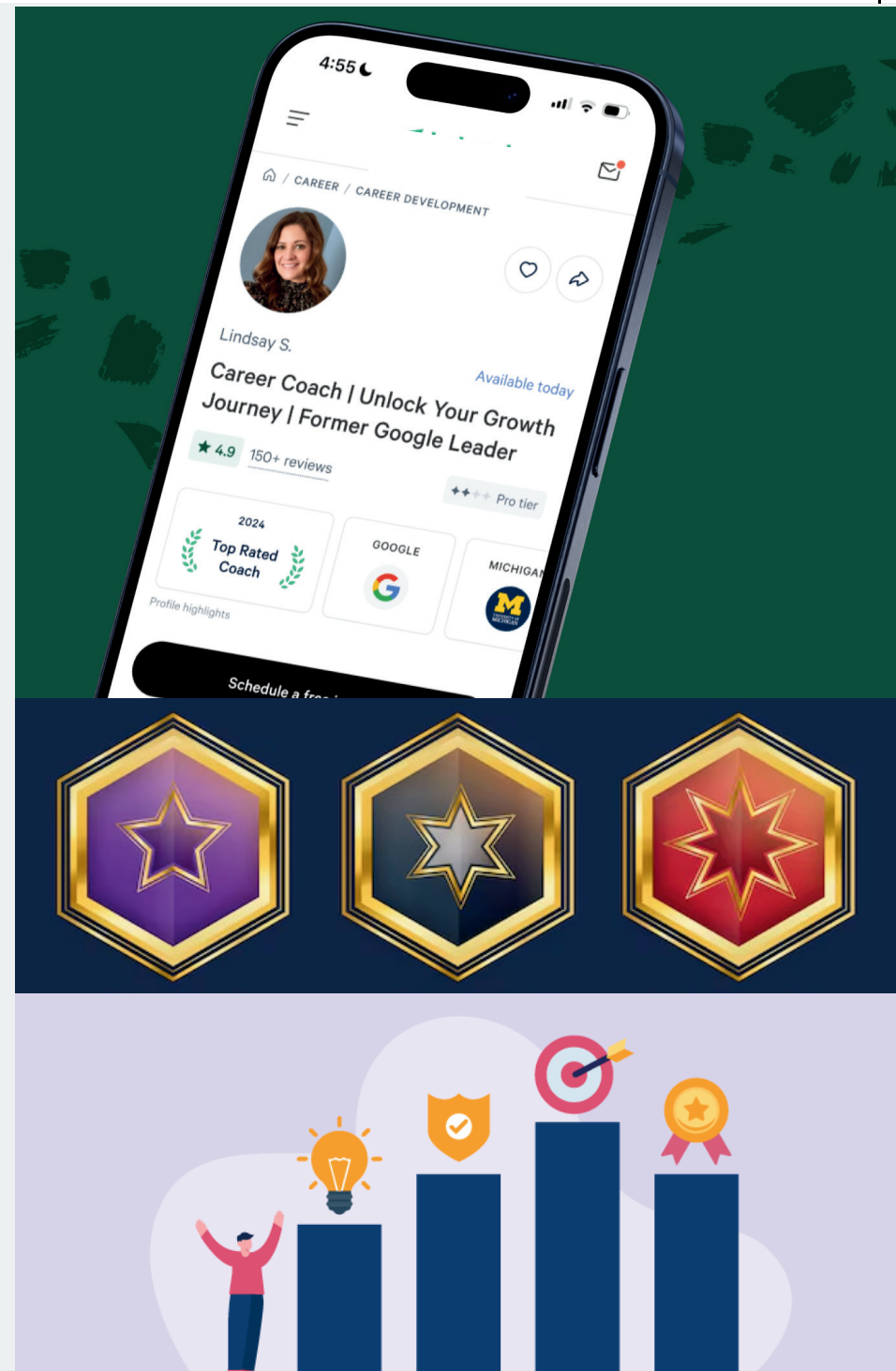
AI powered employee micro-learning hub 👨🏻‍🎓

A dynamic digital learning platform offering personalised, concise, and targeted training content for hospitality employees, designed to efficiently enhance their job-specific skills, support continuous learning, and enable immediate knowledge application, boosting both competence and confidence in their roles.

- AI-based content curation tailored to employee roles, interests, and skill levels.

- Short, engaging, and easily accessible multimedia modules.

- Instant quizzes with adaptive difficulty for effective knowledge testing and retention.

- Social collaboration tools for peer-to-peer knowledge sharing.

- Detailed analytics and progress-tracking dashboards for personalized development insights.
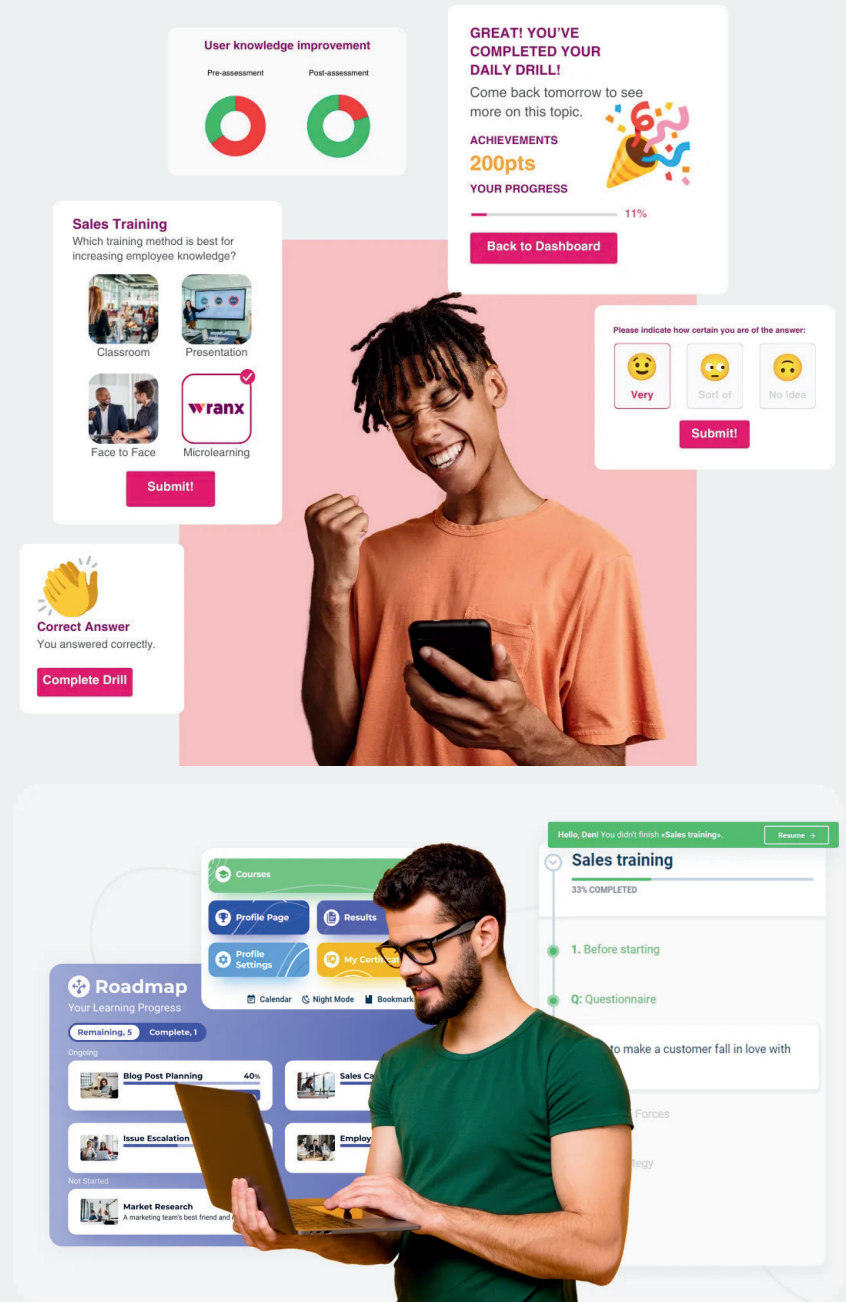
Employee engagement & internal rewards system ⭐

A comprehensive digital engagement and incentive platform designed to recognise, reward, and motivate hotel employees through a structured system of achievements, peer recognition, and gamified activities, fostering a positive work environment, improved morale, and a stronger internal community.

- Points-based recognition system rewarding engaged performance and behaviour.

- Peer-to-peer acknowledgment fostering a culture of appreciation.

- Gamified challenges and activities promoting team collaboration.

- Real-time visibility of accomplishments via leaderboards, announcements and social sharing.

- Redemption options including tangible rewards and meaningful experiences, within internal establishments (eg: restaurant discounts, workshop scholarships).
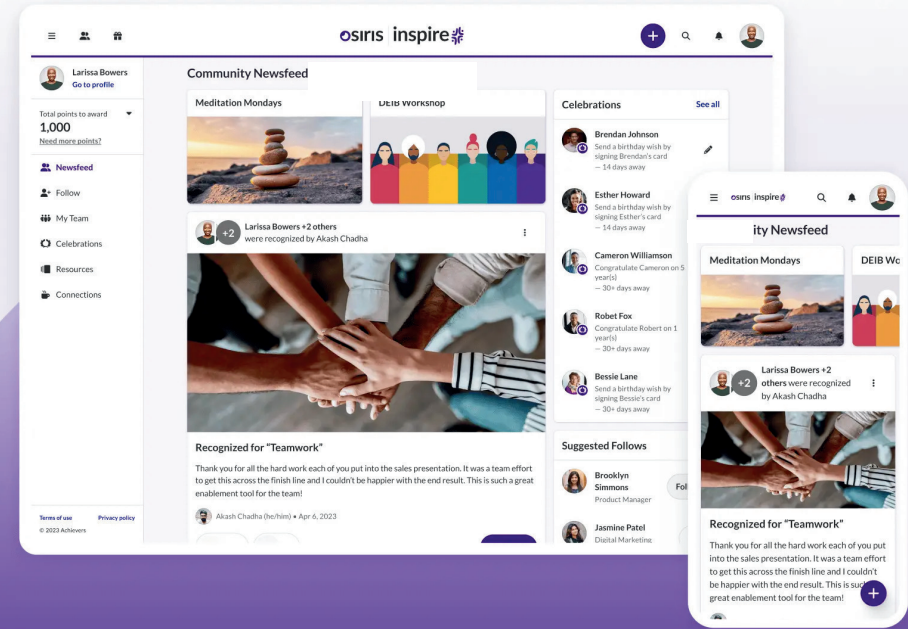
Adaptive wellness and smart scheduling system 🙇‍♀️

A sophisticated, AI-driven scheduling solution integrated with wellness insights, designed specifically for hospitality employees, which proactively balances workload, employee health, and personal preferences, reducing burnout, enhancing employee satisfaction, and optimizing workforce productivity and overall well-being.

- AI-enabled dynamic scheduling that integrates and accommodates personal employee preferences and well-being metrics.

- Track impact of wellbeing on productivity and performance.

- Holistic wellness monitoring integration (mental, physical, financial).

- Proactive identification and mitigation of burnout risks using predictive analytics.

- Continuous employee feedback loop integration for ongoing system optimisation.
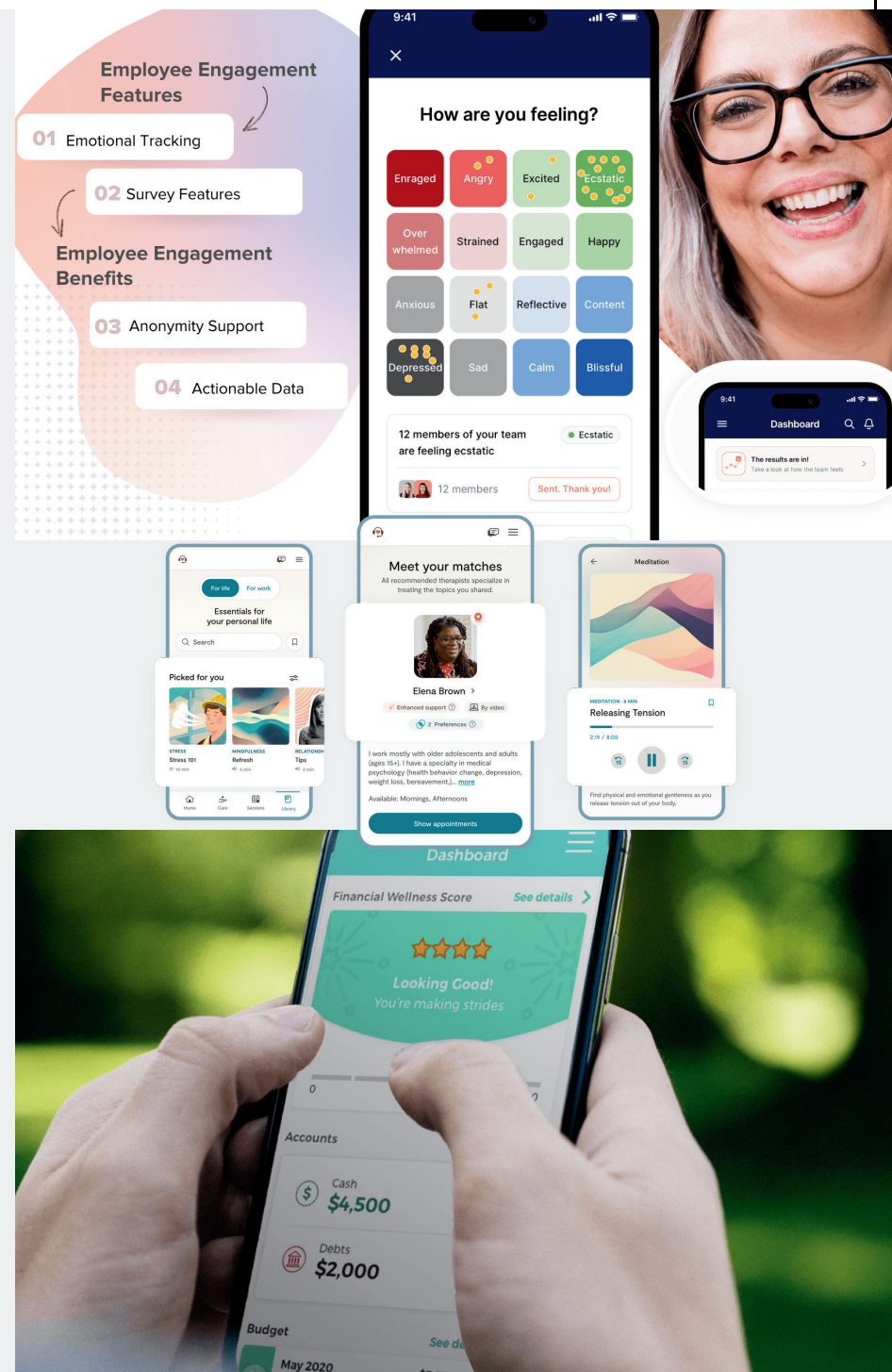
4.2 Visual Explorations

Visual exploration plays a crucial role, especially in service design, particularly for this project focused on crafting an optimal employee experience within luxury hospitality brands such as The Ritz-Carlton. The complexities of hotel operations—where employees navigate high-touch guest interactions, operational demands, and brand expectations—necessitate a deep, structured analysis of service workflows and workplace culture.

Through the use of visual tools such as the service blueprint, experience map, ecosystem map, and business model canvas, the design process bridges the gap between the current state and an improved future, ensuring that strategic decisions are both data-driven and human-centred.

The service blueprint serves as the foundational tool for understanding how employees interact with guests, technology, and internal processes. By creating both a current state and a future state blueprint, the design process first identifies inefficiencies, pain points, and moments of friction that employees face in their daily workflows; and then builds on this analysis, incorporating solutions such as digital tools, streamlined workflows, and redesigned service roles to create a more seamless and fulfilling employee experience. This visualisation is essential for aligning cross-functional teams, ensuring that changes to employee experience do not disrupt service excellence.

While the service blueprint focuses on structured processes and interactions, the experience map delves deeper into the emotional and psychological aspects of the employee journey. Employees in luxury hospitality are expected to perform at a high standard, often under intense pressure, making their engagement, motivation, and emotional well-being crucial to service success. The map illustrates the highs and lows of their journey.

Beyond individual employee experiences, the ecosystem map expands the perspective to the broader interconnected system in which employees operate. It also helps highlight dependencies, such as the role of digital tools in reducing administrative burden or the impact of guest expectations on employee stress levels. This broader view is essential for ensuring that proposed changes contribute to a holistic and sustainable transformation across the organization.

To complement these employee-focused tools, the business model canvas (BMC) brings a financial and operational perspective into the service design process. The BMC helps outline key resources, partnerships, and value propositions related to employee experience, ensuring that workforce improvements align with business growth and customer satisfaction.

The Sankey visualization, in turn, provides a dynamic representation of how resources—such as time, training investments, and operational costs—flow through the system. This visualization helps quantify the impact of service design interventions.

All of these visual tools are deeply interconnected, creating a comprehensive framework for an innovative redesign of the employee experience in luxury hospitality, when used in tandem.

Service Blueprint

Experience Flow

Ecosystem Map

Business Model Canvas

	Onboarding and Integration	Training and Development	Performance and Career Growth	Employee Engagement	Retention and Succession
Phase	Onboarding and Integration	Training and Development	Performance and Career Growth	Employee Engagement	Retention and Succession
Steps	1. Complete onboarding paperwork 2. Attend welcome sessions 3. Understand brand values and culture 4. Participate in 2 day cultural orientation 5. Engage in 20 days of position-specific training led by certified trainers 6. Receive a recap of values, guest handling, and benefits on day 21 7. Complete certification process within 30 days	1. Obtain role specific certifications 2. Engage in ongoing training (320 hours per year for line employees, 250 for leaders) 3. Receive annual refresher training and psychological re-hiring on day 365	1. Receive performance reviews 2. Discuss internal mobility options 3. Engage in leadership training 4. Participate in benchmarking evaluations and random guest surveys to improve service quality	1. Attend recognition events 2. Engage in social and team-building activities arranged 3. Provide feedback & suggestions 4. Empowered to spend up to $2,000 per guest for exceptional service 5. Engage in problem-solving initiatives to wow guests	1. Evaluate career satisfaction 2. Engage in leadership pipeline programs 3. Plan succession and career transition
Timeline	Day 1-30	Day 1-365 (ongoing)	Day 30 (ongoing)	Ongoing	Day 365
Touch points	Orientation materials and welcome emails Mentor introductions HR onboarding portal Initial feedback sessions	Feedback surveys E learning modules On site training sessions	Performance review meetings Internal job posting Leadership coaching sessions Employee assessments	Employee social platforms Recognition events Employee satisfaction surveys	Career planning discussions Leadership pipeline meetings Compensation discussions Exit interviews Feedback collection- surveys
Back Stage & Support Processes	1. HR paperwork processing 2. IT system access provisioning 3. Compliance training setup 4. New hire training content distribution 5. Training materials development 6. Trainer selection and certification 7. HR coordination for benefits enrolment	1. Learning management system setup 2. Scheduling training sessions 3. Curating training content and quality assurance of material 4. Employee development tracking 5. Scheduling and execution of 320/250-hour training programs 6. Tracking certification status and refresher participation	1. Human Resource analytics & performance data collection 2. Internal job posting & matching 3. Leadership readiness assessments and data analysis from 30-day survey cycles 4. Process improvement based on benchmarking guest survey results	1. Event planning & coordination 2. Feedback analysis for improvements and tracking and reviewing guest service initiatives 3. Employee satisfaction surveys 4. HR engagement strategy refinement 5. Budget allocation and monitoring for service enhancements 6. Manager coaching on employee empowerment	1. Workforce planning 2. Retention risk analysis 3. Executive coaching sessions 4. Exit interview data analysis
Jobs to be done	1. Provide a warm welcome aligned with legendary hospitality. 2. Ensure smooth paperwork and system access setup. 3. Introduce employees to service standards and company culture.	1. Ensure employees master Ritz-Carlton's Gold Standards of service. 2. Provide continuous learning for excellence in guest interactions. 3. Foster professional growth through certifications and skills training.	1. Conduct regular performance evaluations with constructive feedback. 2. Offer career development plans and internal promotions. 3. Retain top talent through recognition and growth opportunities.	1. Maintain high employee morale through recognition and wellness initiatives. 2. Foster a collaborative and inclusive work culture. 3. Keep employees motivated to deliver outstanding guest experiences.	1. Ensure long-term employee satisfaction and commitment to Ritz-Carlton's brand. 2. Address employee concerns proactively to reduce turnover. 3. Identify future leaders within the organization and ensure seamless transitions for key leadership roles. 4. Maintain Ritz-Carlton's legacy of excellence through internal talent.
Opportunities	Personalise onboarding (eg: welcome kits, mentor assignments) Streamline IT and HR paperwork digitally before Day 1 Use storytelling sessions with senior employees to instill brand values	Implement immersive training using VR simulations for real-life guest scenarios Offer cross-training in multiple roles to build career pathways Provide on-demand digital learning for service excellence	Develop AI-driven performance analytics to personalise coaching Implement leadership grooming programs for high-potential employees Introduce a rewards program linked to service excellence	Launch mobile-based feedback tools for real-time engagement insights Expand wellness programs to include mental health support and work-life balance initiatives	Tailored career roadmaps for each employee, showing clear growth Pair high-performing employees with executive mentors Use predictive analytics to identify risks and intervene early for potential leaders

Figure 4.2.0: Current State Service Blueprint for a Ritz hotel employee (referencing figure 2E)

Phase

| Onboarding and Integration | Training and Development | Performance and Career Growth | Employee Engagement | Retention and Succession |

Front stage interactions

- Attend welcome sessions and cultural orientations
- Employees receive personalized microlearning modules based on skill gaps
- Personalised career path recommendations
- AI-driven mentorship matching
- Recognition programs with gamified leaderboards
- Engage in problem-solving initiatives with the $2000 spend limit to wow guests
- Evaluate career satisfaction
- New hires engage with a virtual, game-based onboarding platform
- Engage in ongoing training and obtain role specific certifications
- AI-driven recommendations for courses and certifications
- Performance tracking dashboard
- Social engagement through digital rewards
- Plan succession and career transition
- Engage in leadership pipeline programs
- Chatbot gives real time feedback and answers queries
- Interactive onboarding quests cover company policies, culture, and team introductions
- Gamified learning challenges and progress badges
- Automated feedback loops and goal setting
- Real-time engagement surveys with adaptive suggestions
- Smart scheduling for work-life balance
- AI tutor for real-time Q&A and performance insights
- Attend recognition events
- Engage in social and team-building activities arranged
- Wellbeing resources and burnout detection
- Wellness dashboards with AI-driven recommendations

Touch points

- Orientation materials and welcome emails
- Employee social platforms
- AI-powered scheduling assistant
- Virtual onboarding platform
- AI driven learning platform
- Mobile micro-learning application
- Mentorship Portal
- Leadership coaching sessions
- Recognition events
- Digital rewards system
- Employee wellness dashboard
- AI-powered chatbot
- Interactive onboarding quests
- Employee assessments
- Internal job postings
- Employee satisfaction surveys
- Career planning discussions
- Progress tracking dashboard
- Leadership pipeline meetings
- Employee feedback surveys

Back Stage & Support Processes

- Integration with existing HRIS and knowledge management systems
- AI analyses employee performance and skills to suggest learning paths
- Managers receive progress reports and coaching suggestions
- AI-driven performance analytics and talent scoring
- Data analysis from 30-day survey cycles
- Event planning and coordinaation
- Workforce planning
- HR manages onboarding content and tracks completion rates
- Updating Learning Management Systems (LMS)
- Human Resource analytics & performance data collection
- Process improvement based on benchmarking guest survey results
- HR analytics dashboard to measure engagement trends
- Integration with employee wellness platforms
- AI adapts learning modules based on the user's pace and engagement
- LMS integrates with AI-based content curation
- Machine learning models to predict future skill needs
- Tracking and reviewing guest service initiatives
- insights on employee morale and attrition risks
- Executive coaching sessions
- AI work patterns for stress and workload optimization

Value

- Ensures consistency in training delivery
- Increases accessibility to learning
- Enhances employee motivation through clear career paths
- Strengthen workplace culture through recognition
- Increase productivity by preventing burnout
- Enhances engagement and retention through interactive learning
- Improves engagement with bite-sized, personalized training
- Increases retention by offering internal career growth opportunities
- Reduces employee turnover by improving morale
- Improve employee well-being through personalised wellness initiatives
- Reduces onboarding time by streamlining the process
- Boosts efficiency through skill development
- Supports proactive talent development and succession planning
- Enhance real-time engagement insights for HR teams
- Enhance retention by promoting a balanced work environment

Rollout Strategy

- Define objectives
- Set KPIs
- Develop an MVP (Minimum viable Product) for the systems
- Initiate pilot testing with selected departments
- Roll out the Gamified Onboarding Simulator
- set up AI-powered scheduling in limited departments
- Gather feedback
- expand rollout across hotel branches
- Gather employee feedback
- Conduct feasibility testing
- Integrate with HR platforms
- launch micro-learning modules
- Optimise features
- refine algorithms based on data

Stage 1   Stage 2   Stage 3   Stage 4

- Based on the current state   - Suggested new improvement

Figure 4.2.1: Proposed Future State Service Blueprint for preliminary foundation building
(Goal for year 1- To establish the core functionalities and pilot key features for early adoption)

Phase:

Onboarding and Integration	Training and Development	Performance and Career Growth	Employee Engagement	Retention and Succession

Front stage interactions

- Attend welcome sessions and cultural orientations
- Employees receive personalized microlearning modules based on skill gaps
- Personalised career path recommendations
- Alumni newsletters with company updates, and professional development resources
- Peer support groups for wellness discussions and mental health check-ins
- New hires engage with a virtual, game-based onboarding platform
- Access to the simulator via the company's learning platform
- AI-driven recommendations for courses and certifications
- Knowledge-sharing sessions and Peer-led learning circles
- Alumni can offer wellness and work-life balance advice via company-hosted wellness forums or mentorship programs
- Smart scheduling for work-life balance
- Chatbot gives real time feedback and answers queries
- Interactive onboarding quests cover company policies, culture, and team introductions
- Access to a mentorship matching feature, pairing with experienced colleagues and alumni mentors based on career interests and skills.
- Alumni can offer career talks, webinars, or be part of advisory boards to guide current employees
- Personalized wellness programs include fitness challenges, meditation sessions, and stress management coaching
- Wellness dashboards with AI-driven recommendations

Touch points

- Orientation materials and welcome emails
- Corporate learning management system (LMS)
- Internal mentorship platform for mentor-mentee matching with alumni
- Employee social platforms
- AI-powered scheduling assistant
- Virtual onboarding platform
- AI driven learning platform
- Employee self service portal
- Mentorship Portal
- Leadership coaching sessions
- Recognition events
- Employee wellness dashboard
- AI-powered chatbot
- Alumni career networking portal
- Internal job postings
- Employee well-being interface
- Smart HR scheduling tool
- Progress tracking dashboard
- Alumni portal & networking events with company-hosted industry roundtables

Back Stage & Support Processes

- Integration with existing HRIS and knowledge management systems
- AI analyses employee performance and skills to suggest learning paths
- Managers receive progress reports and coaching suggestions
- HR facilitates mentor-mentee connections, including alumni, and monitors interactions
- Workforce planning
- HR manages onboarding content and tracks completion rates
- Updating Learning Management Systems (LMS)
- Alumni association helps connect former employees with current talent through career fairs and mentoring initiatives
- Integration with wearable devices to track employee stress levels and health indicators
- Integration with employee wellness platforms
- AI adapts learning modules based on the user's pace and engagement
- LMS integrates with AI-based content curation
- Alumni are invited to participate in training initiatives and leadership discussions
- HR and wellness teams organize mentorship-driven wellness coaching
- Executive coaching sessions
- AI work patterns for stress and workload optimization

Value

- Ensures consistency in training delivery
- Increases accessibility to learning
- Enhances employee motivation through clear career paths
- Strengthens external networking and industry connections through alumni engagement
- Strengthens company culture by prioritizing mental and physical health
- Enhances engagement and retention through interactive learning
- Enhances collaboration and internal networking
- Reduces employee turnover by improving morale
- Alumni gain the opportunity to give back, stay connected, and potentially return to the organization in future roles.
- Reduces onboarding time by streamlining the process
- Boosts efficiency through skill development
- Supports proactive talent development and succession planning
- Encourages peer to peer support and team growth
- Increase productivity by preventing burnout
- Creates and establishes a strong talent pipeline
- Improve employee well-being through personalised wellness initiatives

Rollout Strategy

- Improve AI models based on usage data
- enhance gamification
- Personalized AI-driven learning paths
- Integrate with external certifications
- Add wellness analytics
- Implement self-service scheduling
- predictive wellness tracking
- introduce career progression tracking
- Implement advanced career simulations
- Enhance AI-driven learning recommendations
- Deploy AI-powered real-time adaptive scheduling
- Automated employee career guidance

Stage 5   Stage 6   Stage 7   Stage 8

Legend:
- Based on the current state
- Suggested improvement (preliminary)
- Suggested new improvement (intermediate)

Figure 4.2.2: Proposed Future State Service Blueprint for intermediate expansion and enhancement
(Goal for year 3- Scale up functionalities, optimize AI models, and expand adoption across all employees)

Phase	Onboarding and Integration	Training and Development	Performance and Career Growth	Employee Engagement	Retention and Succession

Touchpoints

Measurable value

Onboarding Completion Rate		Training Completion Rate		Internal Promotion Rate	Employee wellness index
Time to Productivity	Shift/ schedule Satisfaction Score	Learning engagement rate	Training ROI (Impact on Guest Satisfaction)	Average Time to Promotion	Burnout rate
Knowledge Retention Rate		Skill Competency Improvement		Customer effort score for engagement	Absenteeism rate
Early attrition rate	Employee Satisfaction Score (eNPS - Onboarding Phase)	Mobile Learning Adoption Rate	Manager Feedback Score	Skills Progression Rate	Retention rate

Rollout Strategy

AI-driven tailored onboarding experiences	Career coaching	Integrate employee performance analytics into business strategy		AI driven well being alerts	Proactive burnout prevention	Fine-tune long-term career mapping using AI insights	
	Automated real-time feedback loops		Optimise shift planning using predictive analytics	Real-time productivity tracking practice		Expand AI-based learning to augmented reality (AR)	Explore integrations with wearable tech
Stage 9		Stage 10		Stage 11		Stage 12	

Gamified Virtual Onboarding Simulator   Intelligent Career Pathway Simulator   Employee Micro-Learning Hub   Adaptive Wellness & Smart Scheduling System

Figure 4.2.3: Proposed Future State Service Blueprint representing full maturity and optimisation of services
(Goal for year 5- Achieve full-scale automation, predictive analytics, and advanced personalisation)

The figure 4.2.3, presents a visual representation of the impact and time frame of the four suggested employee experience solutions across the key employee lifecycle phases in a luxury hotel set-up. The timeline indicates that immersive onboarding solutions have an early and more immediate impact, while career pathway simulations and micro-learning hubs drive ongoing skill development and career progression, fostering motivation and reducing turnover. The wellness and smart scheduling system emerges as the most sustained initiative, emphasising its growing role. Ultimately, it provides a blueprint for HR and leadership teams to create a sustainable, engaging, and growth-oriented setting.

How do I get recognized for my contributions?

How does the platform recognize and reward employees?

gamification, leaderboards, rewards, and peer feedback

Can I request feedback on my skills and performance?

Request manager feedback or review self-assessment tools.

I need to improve my skills in [a specific area]. Where do I start?

Do I get certifications after completing training?

How do I know if I am progressing toward a promotion?

Can managers track performance improvements?

Can it identify employees ready for leadership roles?

Search for relevant courses or get AI-driven suggestions

Check certification details in the course module.

Performance dashboard and career development plan.

What types of training modules are available for current employees?

How does the system support career growth?

Can employees receive recommendations for internal promotions?

Can it help reduce employee turnover?

Is there a way to provide feedback on my work experience?

Browse course catalog, filter by skills and departments.

Career development plans and skill mapping.

AI-driven recommendations for career advancement.

Engagement trends and retention strategies.

Engagement surveys and feedback forms.

Where do I find my onboarding checklist?

Can employees track their progress?

Can I pause my training and continue later?

Can I see my growth potential within the company?

How do I express interest in leadership opportunities?

Access assigned onboarding tasks via the platform.

Enable progress tracking, review reports.

Use the platform's progress-saving feature.

Review personalized career path insights.

Career progression tools and leadership training programs.

What kind of training is provided for new employees?

Review available learning paths & role-specific modules.

Who do I contact to help with the onboarding process?

Is the training personalized based on job roles?

How does this training help me in my role?

How does training align with career paths?

What skills do I need for my next career step?

How does it support long-term career planning?

What happens if I feel overwhelmed with work?

Use platform chat/support to reach HR or mentors.

Implemented AI-based recommendations for training.

Check how skills align with career progression pathways.

Aligned training modules with career progression

Get AI-driven skill gap analysis and recommendations.

Mentorship programs and succession planning tools.

Wellness programs, talk to HR, or adjust workload through the platform.

How can this service help with onboarding?

Does this system integrate with our existing HR software?

What engagement insights does it provide for HR?

How does the system encourage continuous learning?

Are there mentorship opportunities in the company?

How can we improve workplace morale?

Can I nominate a colleague for an award?

Explore onboarding modules and resources.

Connect platform with HR systems, check data sync.

Real-time reports on engagement metrics.

Access learning milestones and incentives.

Apply for mentorship programs via the platform.

Enable peer recognition and feedback mechanisms.

How can I stay motivated in my role?

How does this platform prevent burnout?

What initiatives does the platform offer?

I missed an onboarding session. Can I reschedule?

Can we customize onboarding modules for different roles?

Request a rescheduled session or access recorded training.

Configure onboarding templates based on job roles.

Participate in wellness challenges, learning rewards, and career growth discussions.

Introduce wellness programs, track employee well-being.

What wellness resources are available for me?

Mental health resources, and work-life balance support.

Onboarding & Integration | Training & Development | Performance & Career Growth | Employee Engagement | Retention & Succession Planning

Technical questions — Transitions → User thoughts

Connections

Solutions

Connections

Actions

Figure 4.2.4: Ideal experience flow for the preliminary foundation building (Referencing figure 4.2.1)

Figure 4.2.5: Proposed Future Ecosystem visualisation for preliminary foundation building (Referencing figure 4.2.4)

Figure 4.2.6: Ideal experience flow for the intermediate expansion and enhancement (Referencing figure 4.2.2)

The flowchart contains the following elements:

Onboarding & Integration path:
- What is the company culture like here? — *Attending welcome sessions and cultural orientations*
- How do I complete my onboarding tasks? — *Engaging with virtual, game-based onboarding platforms*
- Where can I find essential company resources? — *Receiving chatbot feedback in real time*
- How does the onboarding integrate with HR systems? — *API-based data syncing of platform with HR tools*

Training & Development path:
- How does AI recommend courses for people? — *ML models analyzing past training data*
- Can onboarding progress be tracked by employees? — *Dashboard with completion tracking feature*
- What courses are available for employees to upskill? — *Using AI-driven recommendations for training*
- Can the training materials be accessed offline? — *Mobile-friendly downloadable content available*
- Can I access training at my own pace? — *Accessing company learning platforms and simulators*
- What skill gaps do I have, and how can I improve? — *Engaging with personalized microlearning modules*

Performance & Career Growth path:
- What are my career path options within the company? — *Receiving personalized career path recommendations*
- Who can mentor me for career progression? — *Using mentorship matching features on the platform* — AI-based mentor matching
- How do I track my progress and goals? — *Completing certifications and career-aligned training* — Integration with HR analytics

Employee Engagement path:
- What initiatives can I join to feel more involved? — *Engaging in external networking via alumni programs*
- How can I connect with colleagues for support? — *Participating in peer learning circles and knowledge-sharing sessions*
- How can I continue growing within the company? — *Alumni participation in career talks and networking*
- How can I connect with colleagues for support? / How do peer learning circles operate in general? — *Scheduled discussion forums with knowledge-sharing tools*

Retention & Succession Planning path:
- How does the company support my well-being? — *Accessing wellness forums and mental health check-ins*
- What long-term benefits does the company offer? — *Strengthening company culture through wellness initiatives*
- What opportunities exist for alumni engagement? — *Dedicated alumni platforms with ongoing opportunities* / *Supporting succession planning and leadership development*
- How will succession planning be managed? — *Human Resources analytics and predictive modeling*

Bottom summary bars:
- Gains familiarity with resources and expectations
- Improves competency and confidence
- Become engaged and transition into stronger workplace roles
- Long-term commitment and satisfaction, leading to better retention

Legend:
- Onboarding & Integration
- Training & Development
- Performance & Career Growth
- Employee Engagement
- Retention & Succession Planning
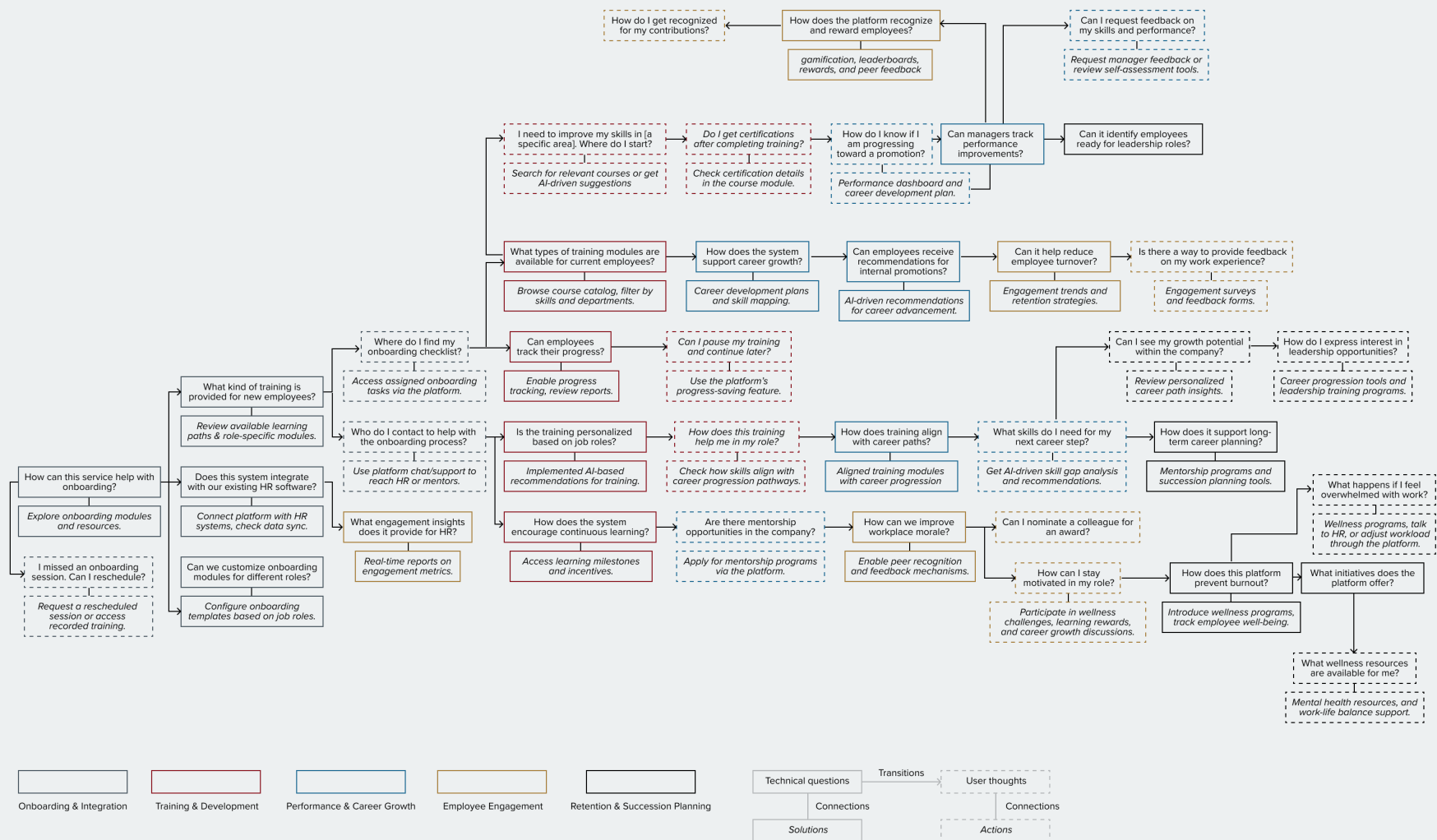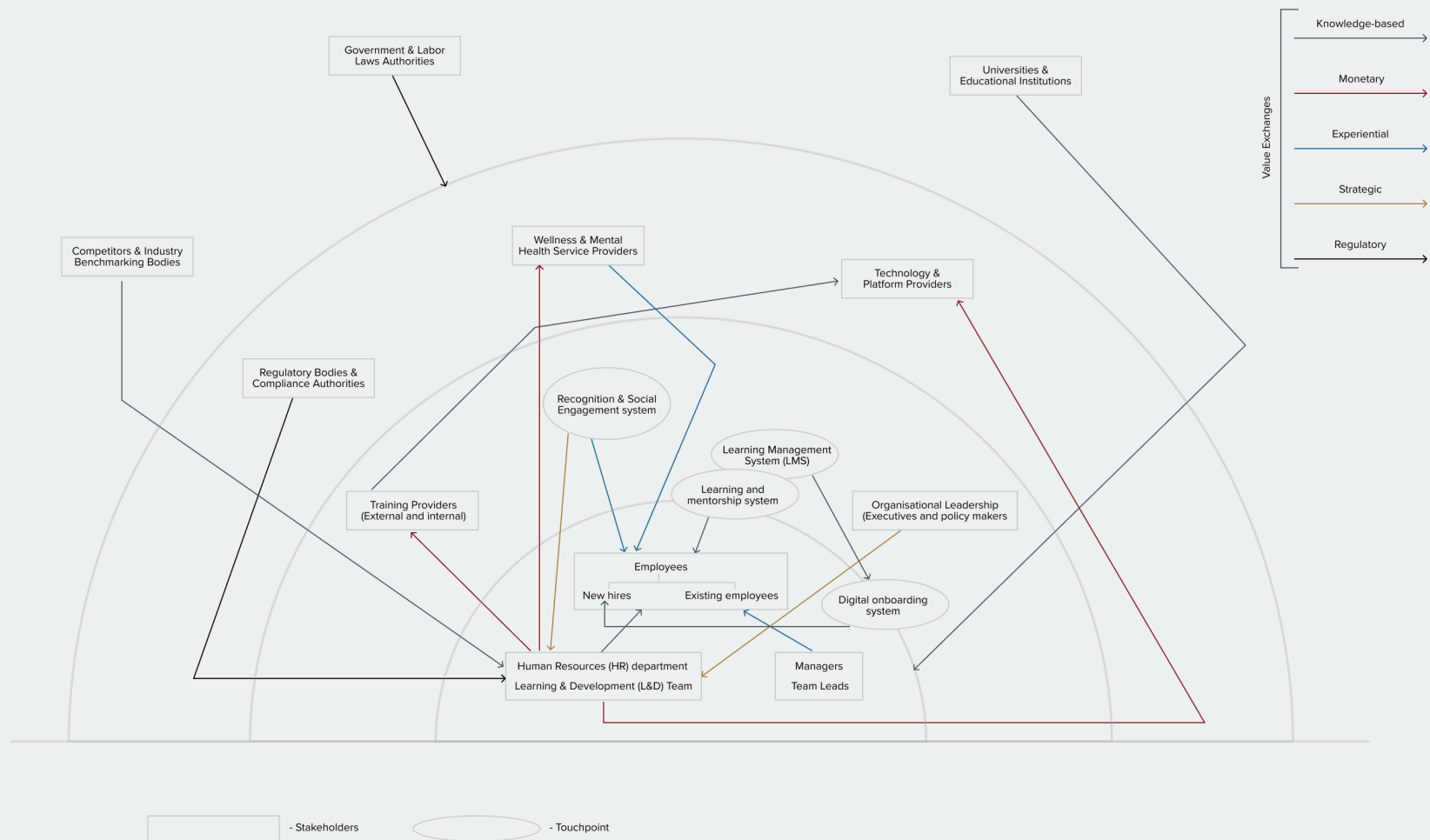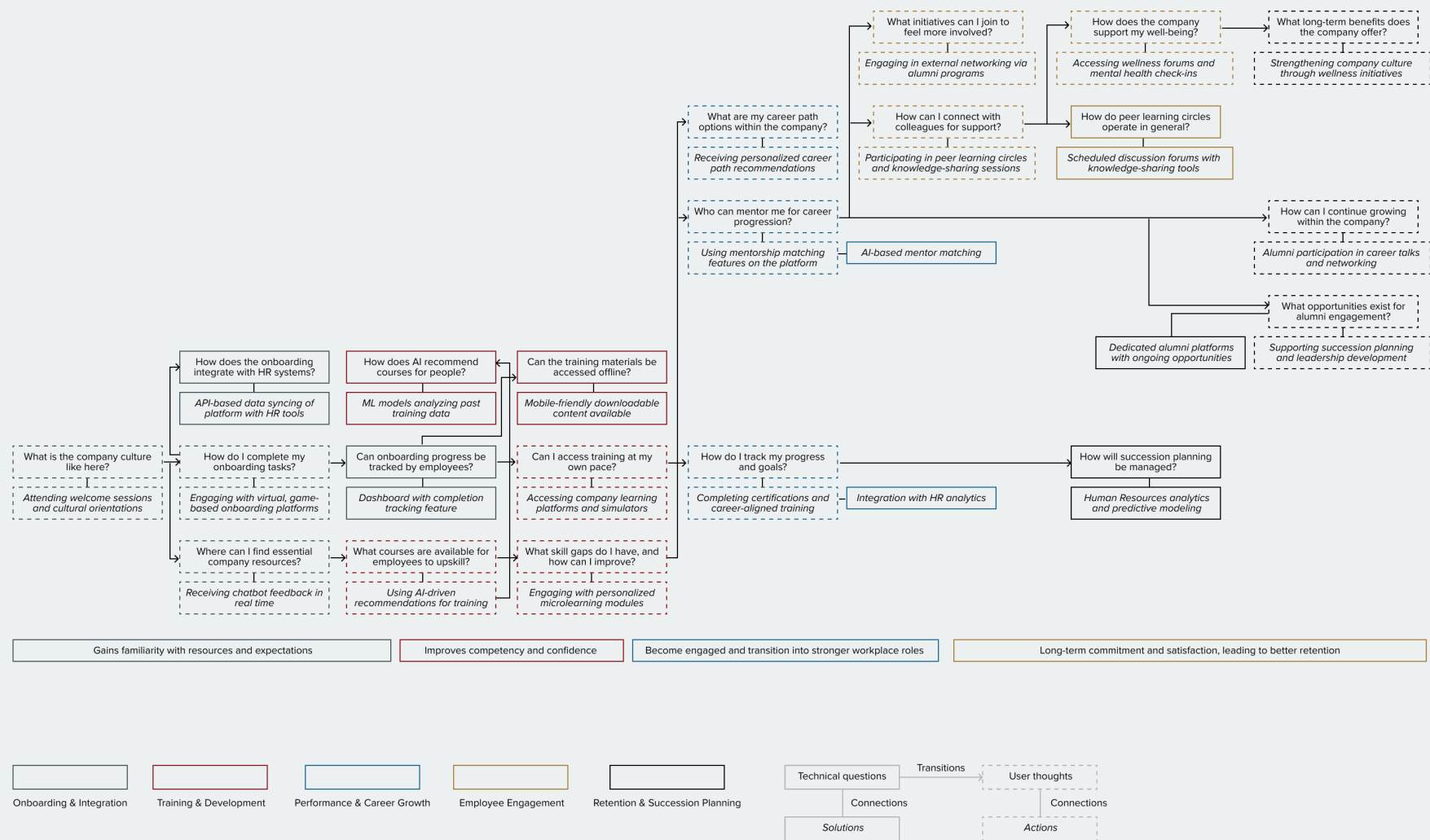- Technical questions — Transitions — User thoughts
- Connections — Connections
- Solutions — Actions
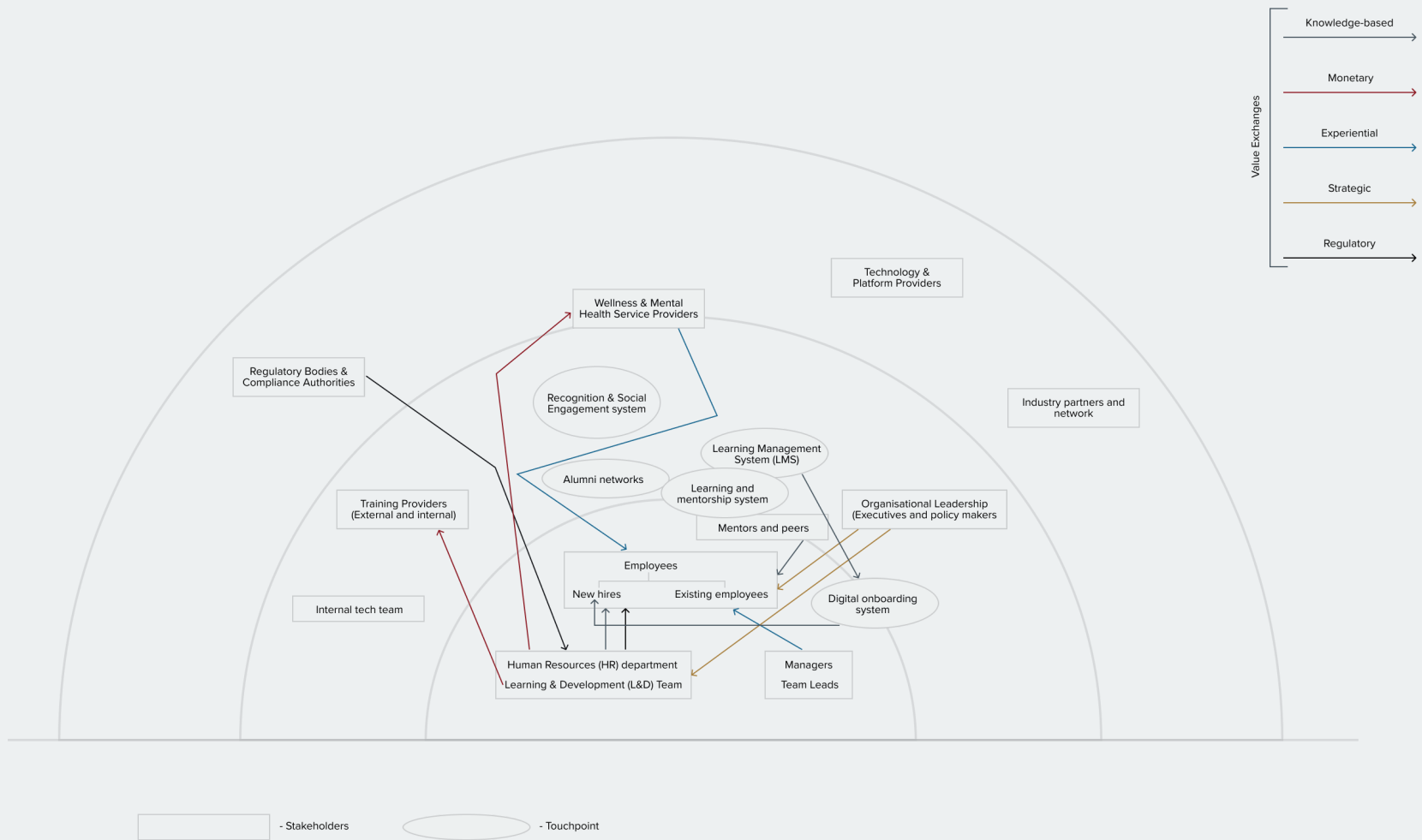
Figure 4.2.7: Proposed Future Ecosystem visualisation for intermediate expansion and enhancement (Referencing figure 4.2.6)

Technology & Platform Development (software, learning system with AR/VR integration, tracking tools, cloud-based data storage and analytics)

Human Resources (designers, developers, specialists like coaches or mental health professionals for services extended)

Financial Resources (tech infrastructure, maintenance and upgrades, incentives for initiatives)

Key Resources

Technology & AI Partners (LMS providers, scheduling and HR tech companies, gamification and simulation developers)

Wellness & Employee Experience Experts (corporate psychology and stress management consultants)

Educational & Training Institutions (Hospitality training programs, and certification partners for professional development)

In-House HR, learning and development & Management Teams

Key Partnerships

Physiological Needs (better work-life balance, reducing burnout, and wellness integration)

Safety Needs (fair workload distribution, offers mentorship and career guidance)

Social Needs (sense of belonging, community, peer support)

Esteem Needs (achieving mastery, being recognised and incentives)

Self Actualisation (sense of purpose and fulfilment)

Value Proposition

Digital Platforms (mobile app, desktop, gamified elements, in platform updates)

Internal Communication Channels (newsletters, employee portals, and communication media, AI chatbots for FAQs and guidance)

Onboarding & Training Programs (in person and virtual)

Wellness & Engagement Events

Channels

Personalization & AI Adaptation

Mentorship & Community Support

Gamification & Rewards

Real-time Feedback & Improvement

One-on-one meetings

Customer Relationships

Frontline Hotel Staff- Primary Users

Supervisors & Team Leads

HR & Training Departments

Hotel Leadership & Management
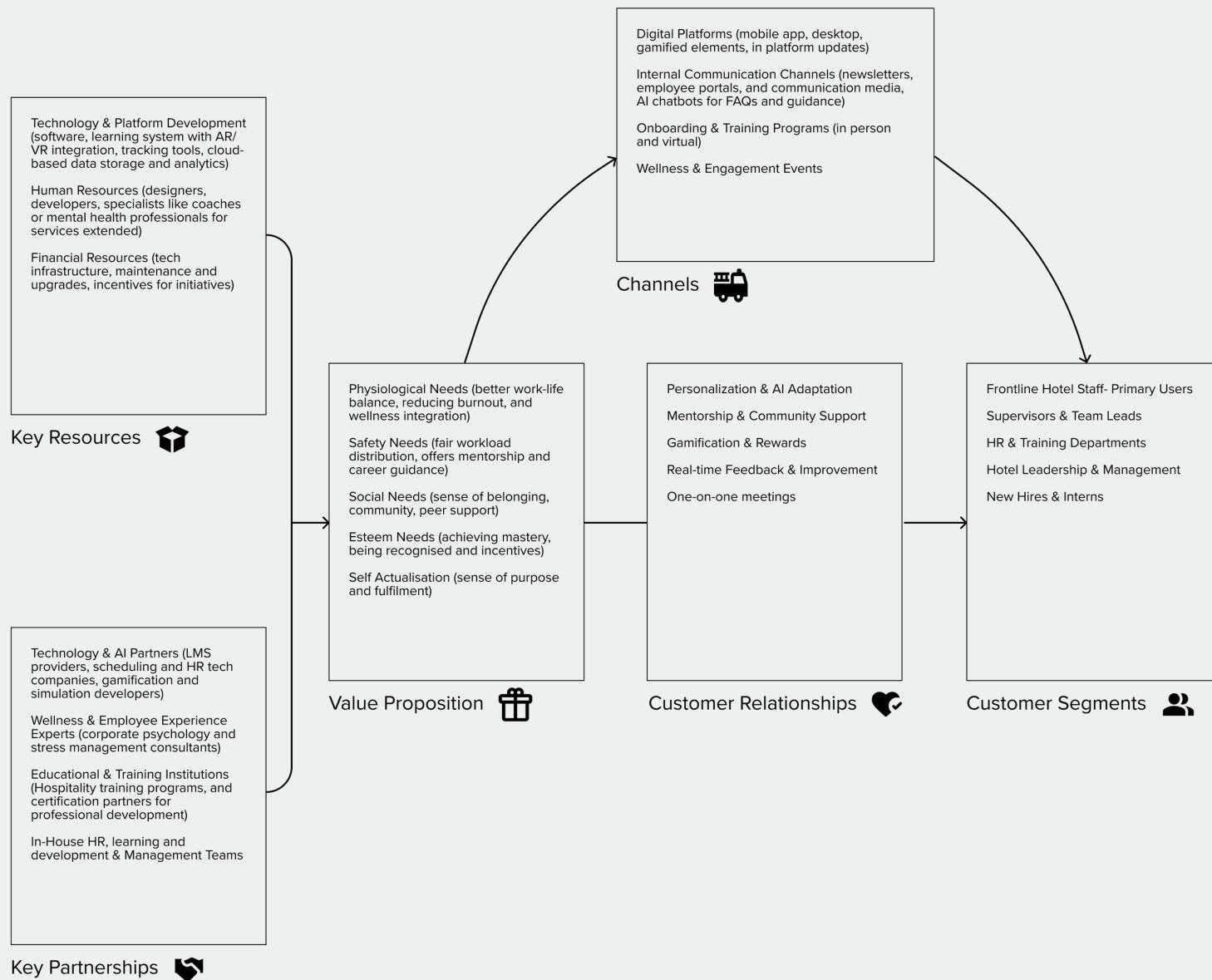
New Hires & Interns

Customer Segments

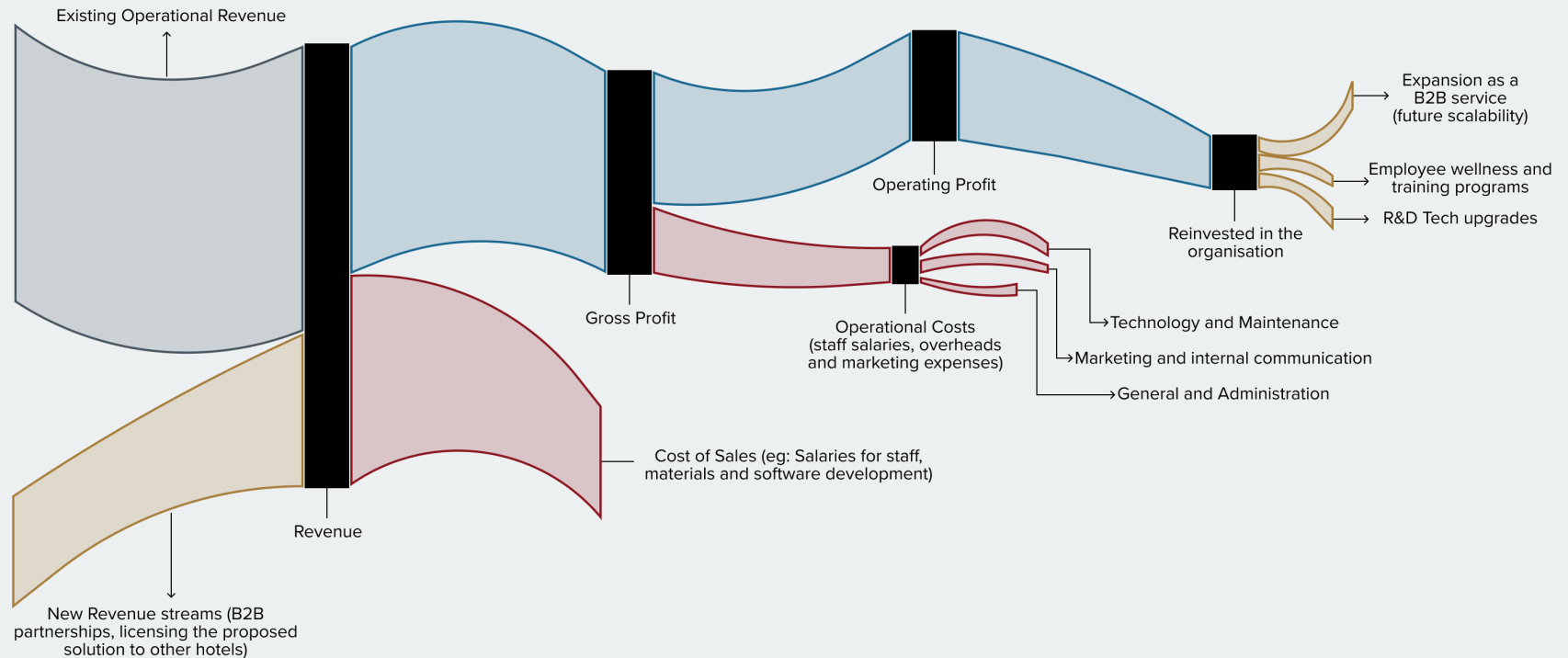Figure 4.2.8: Reimagined Business Model Canvas for the proposed ideas in figure 4.3.2)

Figure 4.2.9: Visualisation for the proposed solution to impact the cost and income structure

The proposed solutions are designed to enhance the employee experience through an integrated ecosystem. The business model ensures that the value proposition aligns with the employees' needs while leveraging technological and strategic partnerships that directly impacts customer service quality and brand reputation.

The sankey diagram (in the above figure 4.2.9) also complements this structure illustrating the financial mechanics behind the business model. By balancing cost of sales, operational expenses, and reinvestments, the model creates a sustainable cycle that enhances employee

satisfaction while generating long-term value for the organization. Investing in these solutions would aim to reduce overtime costs and inefficiencies, while the monetisation of partnerships ensures continuous funding for platform enhancements.

This holistic approach aligns with The Ritz-Carlton's brand philosophy of "Ladies and Gentlemen serving Ladies and Gentlemen", ensuring that employees experience the same level of care and development that guests receive. This project would elevate the internal journey of an employee, pioneering an employee-centric innovation as a leader.

4.3 Building Blocks

Studies have found that organisations with highly engaged employees are more profitable and have a lower rate of absenteeism, emphasising that employee engagement is not just a perk but a key driver of organisational success. Bearing this idea in mind, the future of luxury hotels hinges on a unified ecosystem that prioritises employee engagement, learning, wellness, and career development to ensure long term business success as is the aim of this project. Hence the convergence of the proposed ideas previously offers a blueprint for the future. This section explores the prioritised ideas and their corresponding features. The MoSCoW method- standing for Must Have, Should Have, Could Have, and Won't Have- is also utilised to further guide the development of the strategic features.

The Must Have category consists of the non-negotiable features that are crucial for the project's success and must be included in the initial implementation. These features form the foundation of the ecosystem, ensuring operational efficiency and setting a high standard. The Should Have features enhance the project by adding value without being critical to the core functions. These features are still important but can be rolled out in later phases if necessary. The Could Have features are nice-to-have additions that would further improve the system but are not essential for its initial success. These features may be implemented later as resources allow or based on employee feedback. Finally, the Won't Have category represents features that are not planned for the current iteration however, could be considered for future upgrades or separate projects, depending on business needs.

Now shifting the focus to the converged ideas- Gamified Onboarding Simulation, Micro-Learning and Mentorship platform, and Adaptive

Wellness & Smart Scheduling- the goal is to create a well balanced system and an internal community of sorts.

The gamified onboarding simulation transforms the initial intensive introductory process into an interactive and immersive experience. This approach fosters immediate engagement and learning, contributing to service excellence.

The Micro-Learning Platforms offer short, on-demand learning opportunities, enabling employees to acquire new skills or refresh existing ones quickly. By collecting data on learning patterns, the platform can evolve to provide personalized pathways, aligning with both immediate operational needs and long-term career development goals. The Mentorship Hub connects experienced employees with newer staff, facilitating continuous growth through personalized guidance. By leveraging data-driven matching and offering seamless communication tools, this system supports both professional development and cultural integration within the company.

In addition to this, the Adaptive Wellness & Smart Scheduling focuses on employee well-being, allowing them to manage their health and ensure a balanced workload.

Failing to invest in an integrated ecosystem that fosters employee growth, engagement, and well-being is not just a missed opportunity—it would be an innovation gap. The real loss lies in overlooking the transformative potential of a motivated and empowered workforce.

Must Have (Critical or absolutely necessary)

Interactive training modules

Personalized Wellness Plans

Flexible Scheduling Options

Real-time feedback and performance metrics

Analytics and progress tracking

Bite sized learning content

Mentor-Mentee Matching System

One-on-One Communication Tools

Time-Off management

Should Have (Important but not vital)

Progress tracking and rewards

Mentor and Mentee Profiles

Gamification for learning

Real- time Scheduling Adjustments

Mobile accessibility

Progress and Feedback Tracking

Learning pathways based on role

Push notifications for learning reminders

Recognition of Mentor Contributions

Wellness Check-Ins

Workload balancing alerts

Social Learning & Peer Discussions

Integrated with the HR system

Team Collaboration features

Integration with External Career Development Tools

Group Mentorship Options

Offline Access

Advanced Virtual Reality Learning

Resource Library for Mentors and Mentees

Mature Artificial intelligence programs for scheduling

Social Wellness Programs

Could Have (Nice to have but essential)

Won't Have (Considered for future iterations)

| Gamified Virtual Onboarding Simulator | Employee Micro-Learning and Mentorship Hub | Adaptive Wellness & Smart Scheduling |

Figure 4.3.0: Mapped solution features across a MoSCoW matrix to help prioritise further

Gamified Onboarding Simulation
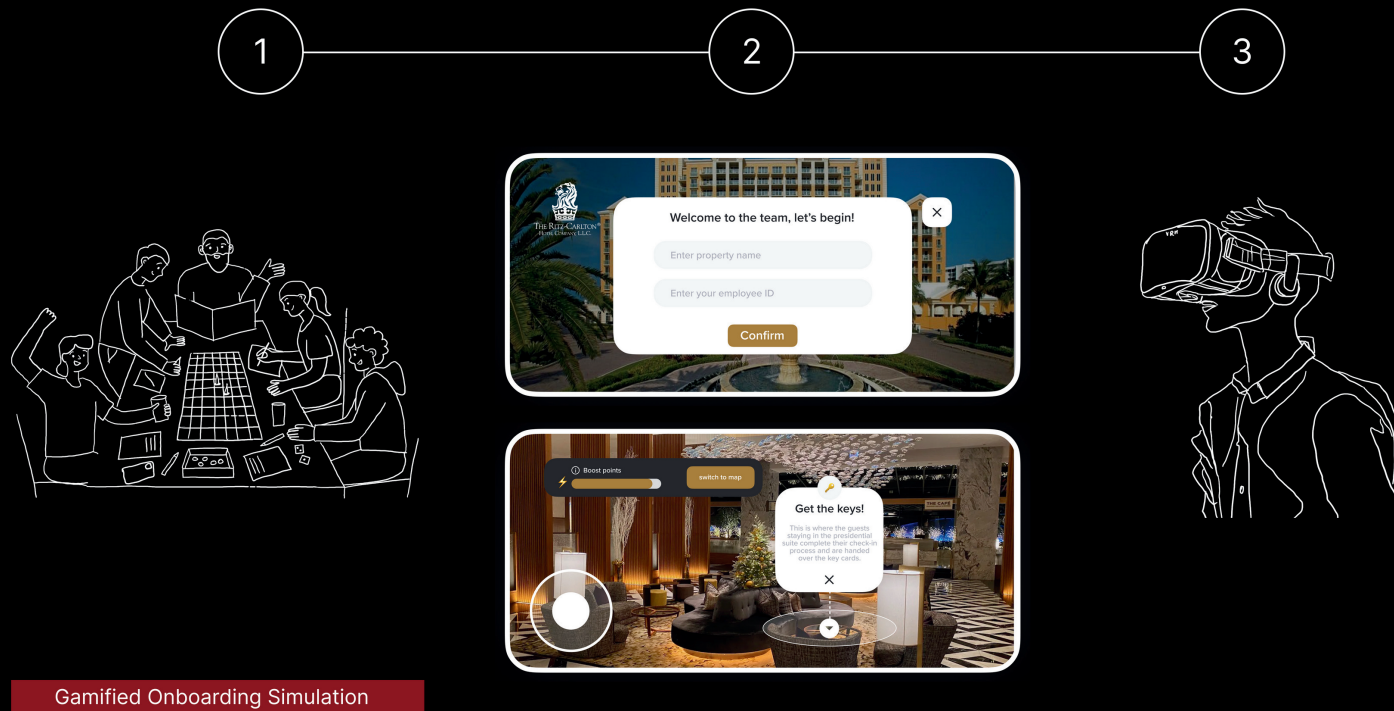
Figure 4.3.1: Phased out strategy to move to conceptualisation of idea 1

The idea of a gamified onboarding solution revolves around transforming the employee induction into an engaging, interactive experience that accelerates and strengthens learning from day one.

Initially, the foundation would be built with scenario-based role-playing modules that simulate real-life hotel situations, allowing new employees to practice responding to common challenges. This approach ensures that employees get hands-on experience in a risk-free environment, with immediate feedback to guide their growth.

For the next phase, the solution would evolve to incorporate augmented reality (AR) onboarding simulations on mobile devices. They could walk through hotel corridors, interact with virtual guests, and solve challenges directly related to their workplace environment.

In the final stage, the solution would transition to virtual reality (VR). Employees could virtually even practice complex guest scenarios and experience the hotel's operations from multiple roles to gain a comprehensive understanding of the business.

Pilots train on a simulator first. On the path to augmented reality (AR), what might a simulator look like for hotel employees?

When thinking about how a simulator could be used for hotel employees, especially in the early stages of training, it's essential to understand the role it plays in creating an immersive learning environment. Similar to how pilots begin their training in a simulator before taking to the skies, hotel employees can benefit from an immersive, controlled environment where they can practice essential skills, problem-solving, and customer service interactions before engaging with real guests.

For hotel employees, a simulator would likely start as an immersive room designed to replicate key areas of the hotel, such as the front desk, guest rooms, dining areas, and back-office operations. This space would be equipped with elements that allow employees to respond to realistic scenarios, such as managing guest requests, solving service issues, or dealing with emergency situations.
In this initial phase, the room could use a combination of role-playing scenarios and interactive displays to provide feedback to the employee. For instance, employees could be faced with a simulated guest who requires a special service, and their reactions would be monitored. Real-time feedback would guide them, showing what they did well and what areas needed improvement. This type of training ensures that employees can practice their skills in a low-risk environment, building confidence and proficiency before they interact with actual guests.

As the training progresses, this simulator should be designed to evolve into a more advanced system that evolves with them, adapting to different scenarios as they move through their shifts.
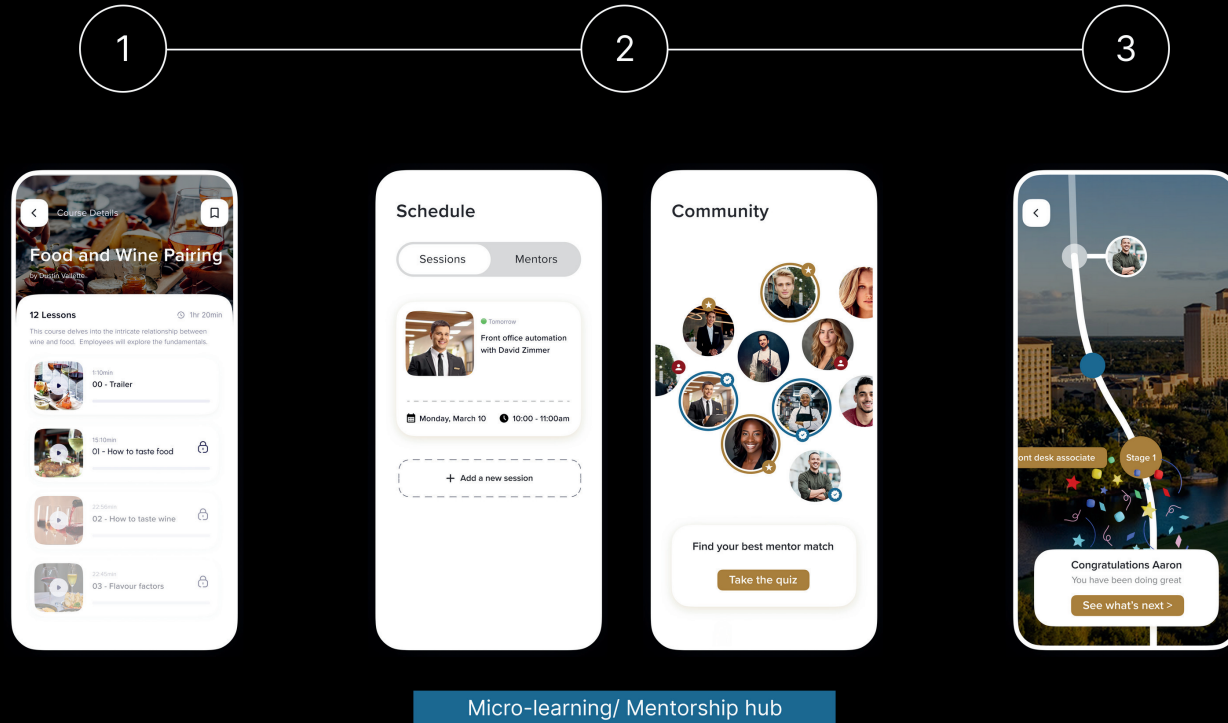
Figure 4.3.2: Phased out strategy to move to conceptualisation of idea 2

The micro-learning and mentorship proposal aims to provide employees with accessible learning opportunities while fostering a culture of continuous development and community.

Initially, the foundation should be built with personal learning modules— short, targeted courses tailored to specific job roles, ensuring that employees can easily engage in learning during their workday without interrupting productivity.
For the subsequent phase, the solution would incorporate mentorship

matching based on career aspirations and expertise. Community features would be further enhanced with discussion forums, group learning, and peer-to-peer support, making the learning experience even more collaborative and dynamic.
In the next stage, the solution could include career pathways mapping, allowing employees to visualize their growth, access role-specific learning pathways, and plan their career trajectories. By this, the system ensures employees are not only equipped for their current roles but also supported in reaching higher levels of success within the company.

Figure 4.3.3: Phased out strategy to move to conceptualisation of idea 3

The adaptive wellness and smart scheduling solution is designed to support employee well-being while optimizing work schedules for a balanced and productive lifestyle.
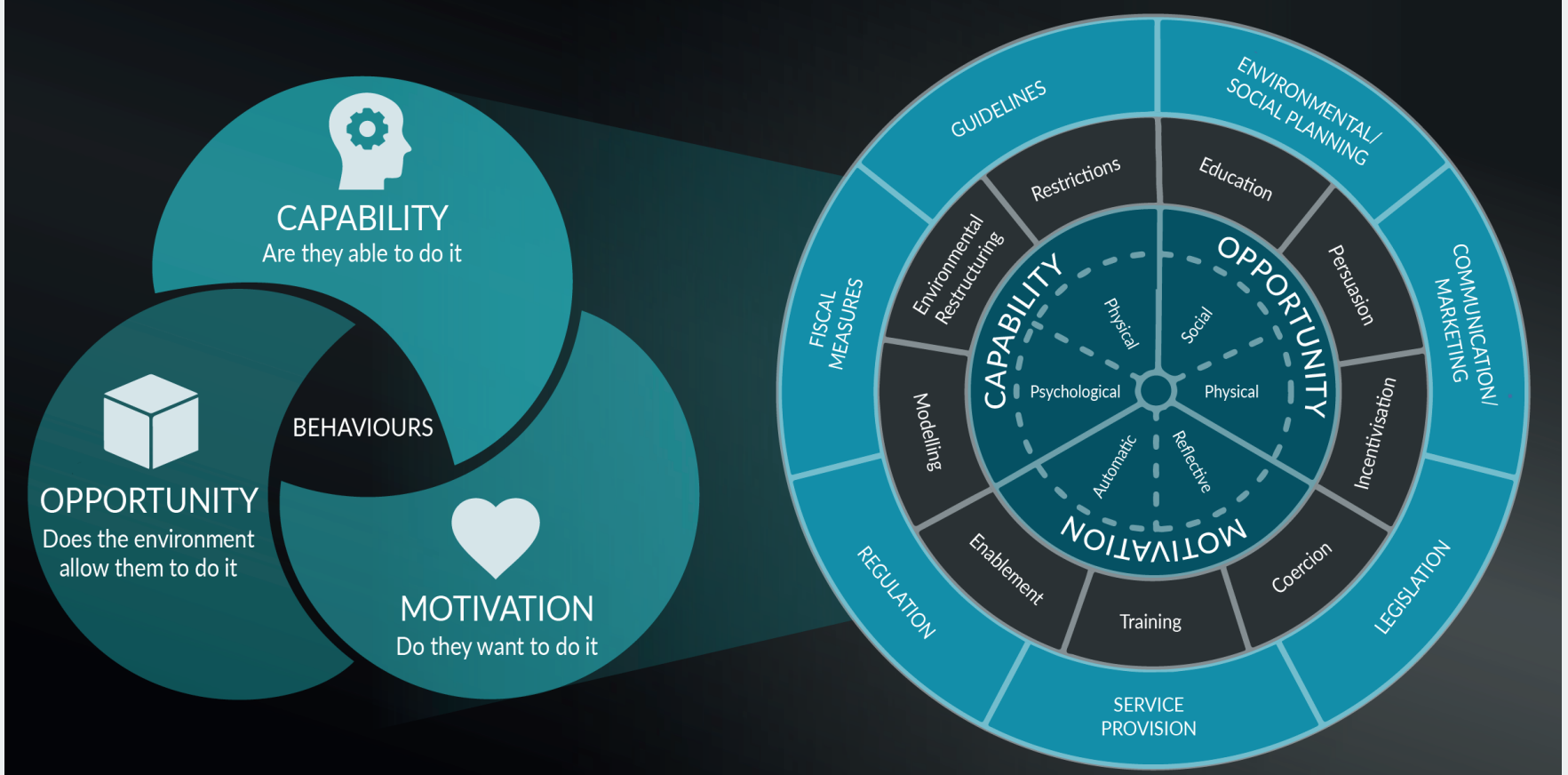
Initially, the foundation should be built with personal self-reporting tools, allowing employees to track their physical and mental health and report stress levels. This data is later used to generate personalized wellness recommendations and provide insights into employee needs, helping managers make more informed decisions regarding workload and support. The solution could expand to incorporate community building, where employees can access wellness resources such as fitness programs, mindfulness exercises, and stress management workshops. Insights gathered from the data are planned to be used to refine wellness offerings and better align them with employee preferences. In the final series, the system could integrate with wearable devices enabling real-time monitoring of employee health metrics. This integration will allow for more precise recommendations and proactive adjustments to scheduling driving long-term health improvements.

05
Delivering Change

Change is not a destination but a continuous journey- to thrive one must not treat it as a fixed outcome but a collaborative and evolving process. For true transformation happens when individuals not only accept change in an organisation but are active participants in shaping its success.

CAPABILITY
Are they able to do it

OPPORTUNITY
Does the environment
allow them to do it

BEHAVIOURS

MOTIVATION
Do they want to do it

GUIDELINES

ENVIRONMENTAL/
SOCIAL PLANNING

COMMUNICATION/
MARKETING

LEGISLATION

SERVICE
PROVISION

REGULATION

FISCAL
MEASURES

Restrictions

Education

Environmental
Restructuring

Persuasion

Modelling

Incentivisation

Enablement

Coercion

Training

CAPABILITY

OPPORTUNITY

MOTIVATION

Physical

Social

Psychological

Physical

Automatic

Reflective

5.1 Measuring Impact

A well-structured metric system plays a critical role in any conceptual project. The figure provided illustrates a comprehensive framework that aligns financial, operational, and customer experience outcomes with measurable performance indicators. This framework is essential in ensuring that employee experience improvements directly contribute to both guest satisfaction and business performance.

At the core of this metric system is the connection between financial outcomes and employee engagement. The figure outlines that increasing the profitability of hospitality properties is directly linked to reducing turnover. High turnover is a persistent challenge in the hospitality industry, often leading to increased recruitment and training costs, disruptions in service quality, and diminished guest satisfaction. The financial outcome serves as the ultimate business objective, while employee satisfaction and engagement serve as the driving forces behind it. The CX Business Outcomes section in the figure underscores the role of employee experience in shaping guest interactions. Employees who are empowered, engaged, and satisfied with their work are more likely to provide exceptional service, resolve guest issues autonomously, and maintain a high standard of hospitality.

This section is also structured around three core factors—Happiness & Engagement, Adoption & Retention, and Engagement & Task Success— each marked with a heart icon, signifying the integration of the HEART Framework by Google. This framework, commonly used in experience design, evaluates human-centric metrics. By incorporating this, the system ensures that employee experience is measured not just in terms of efficiency but also in terms of emotional and behavioural factors that drive long-term satisfaction.

Operational metrics provide the quantitative foundation for evaluating employee and service performance. Key indicators such as Guest Satisfaction Scores (CSAT), Employee Effort Scores (EES), offer clear insights into how employee experience influences the broader business ecosystem. These metrics help managers identify specific areas for improvement. By consistently monitoring these figures, it helps to proactively address workforce challenges and create an environment that fosters both professional growth and employee well-being.

The customer-facing KPIs section highlights the direct impact of employee experience on guest satisfaction. Metrics such as Information Utilization, Value Creation, and Service Delivery Efficiency ensure that employee training and engagement initiatives result in positive guest experiences. Furthermore, tracking the number of complaints or service issues provides valuable feedback for refining operational processes. These KPIs bridge the gap between internal workforce strategies and external customer satisfaction, reinforcing the strategic importance of employee experience in achieving business success.

A well-designed metric system is more than just a collection of performance indicators. The famous management thinker Peter Drucker once stated, "What gets measured, gets managed." Although going beyond this, what gets measured is not just managed, but also optimised to create a more resilient, motivated, and high-performing ecosystem—ultimately leading to better experiences and stronger business outcomes.
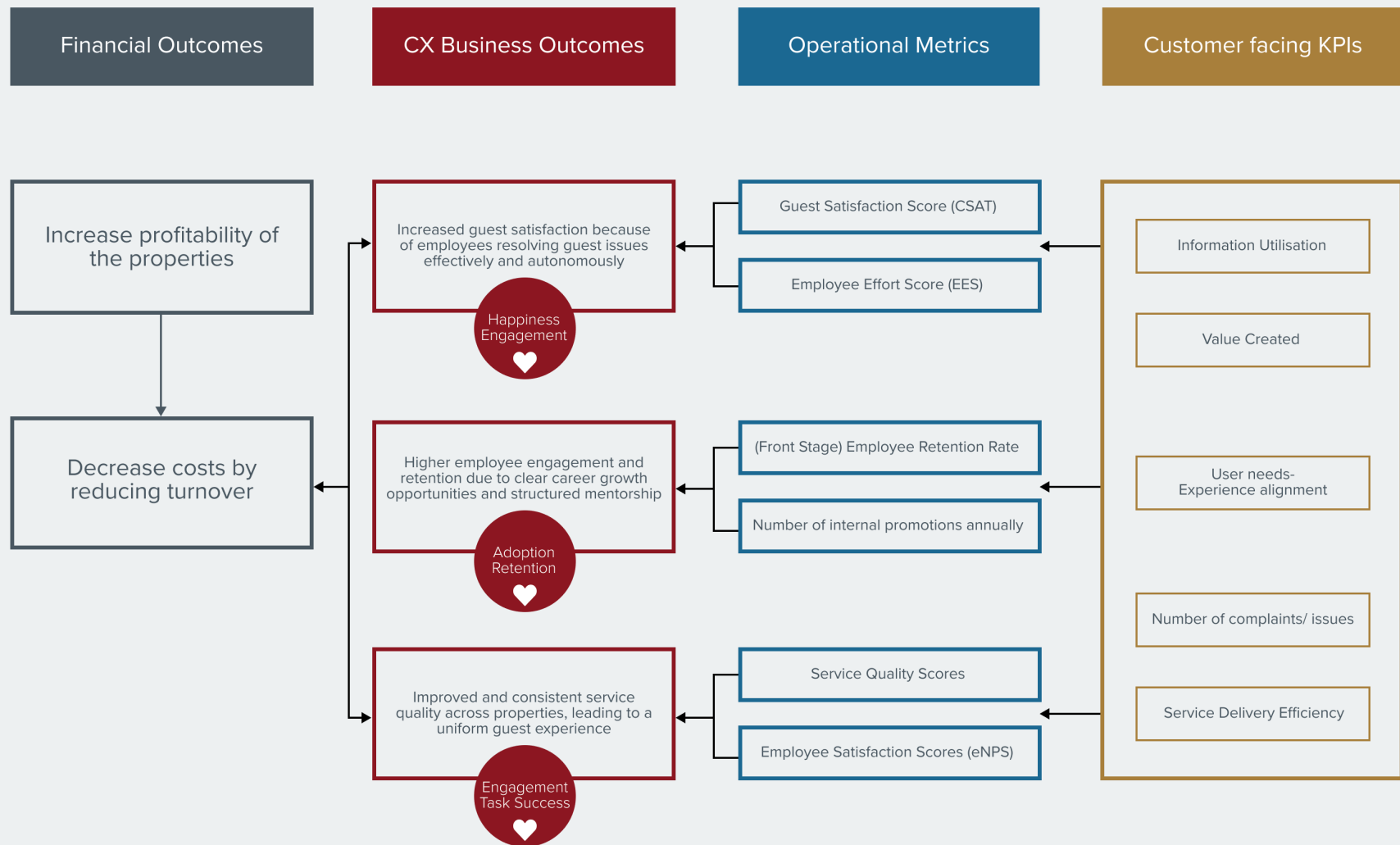
Financial Outcomes	CX Business Outcomes	Operational Metrics	Customer facing KPIs

Increase profitability of the properties

Increased guest satisfaction because of employees resolving guest issues effectively and autonomously

Happiness Engagement ♥

Guest Satisfaction Score (CSAT)

Employee Effort Score (EES)

Information Utilisation

Value Created

Decrease costs by reducing turnover

Higher employee engagement and retention due to clear career growth opportunities and structured mentorship

Adoption Retention ♥

(Front Stage) Employee Retention Rate

Number of internal promotions annually

User needs- Experience alignment

Number of complaints/ issues

Improved and consistent service quality across properties, leading to a uniform guest experience

Engagement Task Success ♥

Service Quality Scores

Employee Satisfaction Scores (eNPS)

Service Delivery Efficiency

Figure 5.1: Outcome based metric system overlayed with the HEART framework by Google for the proposed solution ecosystem
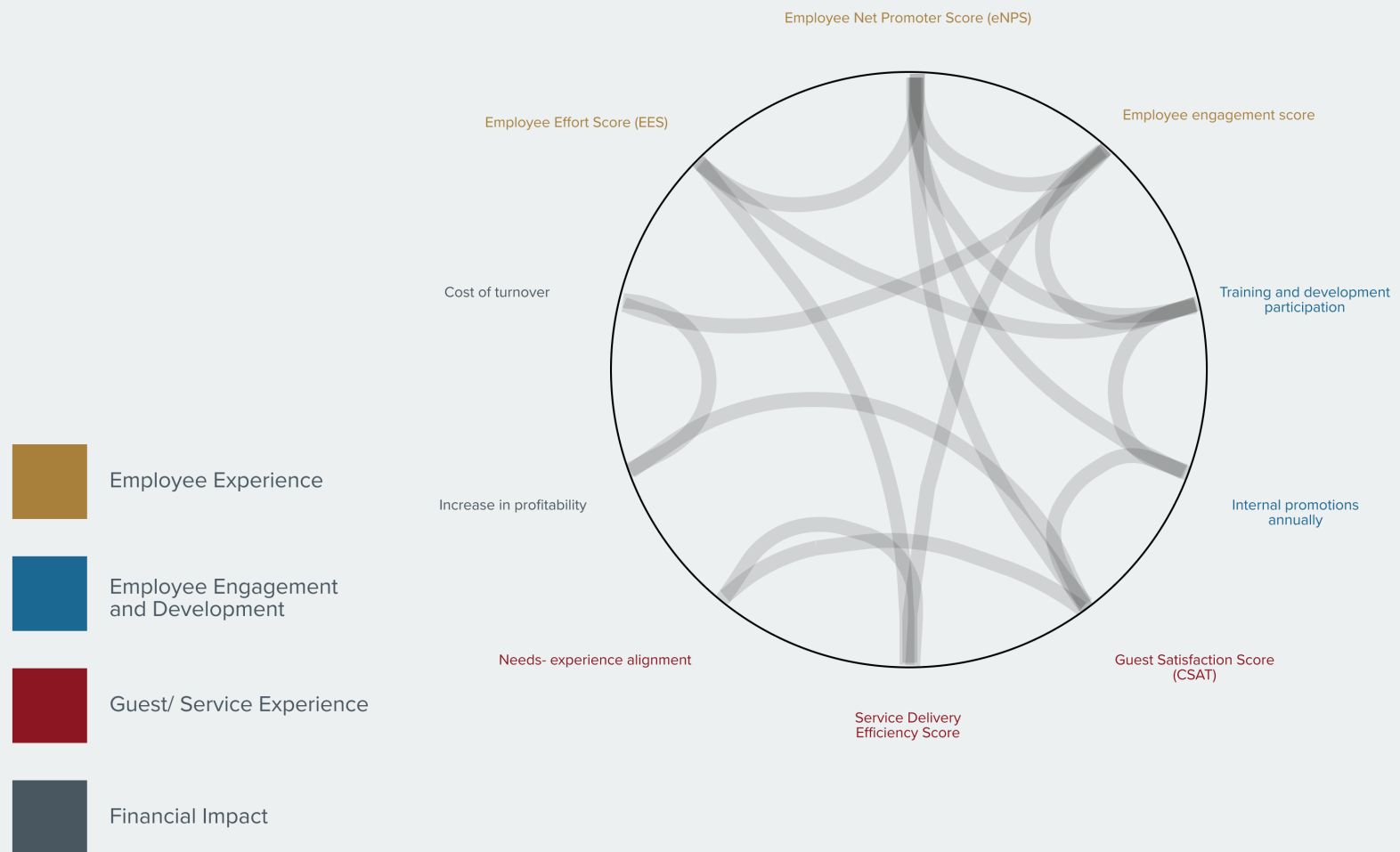
Employee Net Promoter Score (eNPS)

Employee Effort Score (EES)

Employee engagement score

Cost of turnover

Training and development participation

Increase in profitability

Internal promotions annually

Needs- experience alignment

Service Delivery Efficiency Score

Guest Satisfaction Score (CSAT)

Employee Experience

Employee Engagement and Development

Guest/ Service Experience

Financial Impact

Figure 5.1.1: Visualising connections among key metrics impacted by the proposed solutions

The interconnected metric system shown in figure 5.1.1, visually represents how various key business metrics—spanning employee experience, engagement, guest service, and financial impact—are linked. Each node in the diagram represents a measurable factor and the lines between these nodes indicate direct relationships, demonstrating how improvements in one area lead to positive (or negative) changes in another.

A key takeaway from the diagram is the relationship between employee experience and business outcomes. Employees who find their work efficient and rewarding are more engaged, which in turn leads to higher participation in training programs. Increased training participation fosters internal promotions, providing career growth and stability, which further contributes to higher employee retention rates. This reduction in turnover minimizes hiring costs and enhances service efficiency, allowing employees to deliver a more seamless guest experience. The Guest Satisfaction Score (CSAT), which is influenced by employee engagement and service delivery efficiency, plays a crucial role in financial performance. As CSAT increases, profitability rises, as satisfied customers are more likely to return, leave positive reviews, and make additional purchases. Conversely, high turnover incurs significant costs, directly impacting profitability in a negative way, as shown in the link between Cost of Turnover and Decrease in Profitability.

A particularly crucial aspect of this system is the role of training and development in shaping long-term business success. The Training ROI (Return on Investment) metric evaluates the financial effectiveness of training programs by comparing the benefits gained (such as increased productivity, customer satisfaction, and turnover reduction) against the

costs incurred (including instructor fees, materials, and employee time). The formula for calculating Training ROI is:

$$ROI (\%) = \frac{Total\ Revenue - Total\ Cost}{Total\ Cost} \times 100$$

For example, if a company spends $17,000 on training but gains $38,000 in benefits through increased sales, reduced turnover, and productivity improvements, the Training ROI would be 123.5%, meaning for every dollar spent on training, the company gains back $2.23 in benefits. This directly validates the impact of investing in employee skill development. Training ROI is highly significant because it provides a quantifiable measure of how training programs contribute to business performance. It helps leaders make informed decisions regarding budget allocation, ensuring that high-impact training programs receive sufficient funding. A business that focuses on employee training as a strategic investment rather than a cost will see substantial improvements in both workforce efficiency and customer satisfaction.

The overall system demonstrates a clear cause-and-effect relationship. It is also very much aligned with what Richard Branson once said that one must train people well enough that they can leave, but treat them well enough that they might not even want to. This reinforces the connection between training, employee satisfaction, and retention, proving that well-trained employees value their roles and contribute to business success.

5.2 Conceptualisation

The figure 5.2 represents a transformation from service values to design principles, illustrating how the Ritz Carlton's service philosophy informs an employee-facing initiative aimed at enhancing the internal guest (employee) experience. While the Service Drivers on the left capture the essence of how Ritz Carlton delivers exceptional hospitality to its guests, the Design Drivers on the right reinterpret these values to shape an initiative focused on improving the experience of employees within the organization. This parallel structure highlights the idea that just as guests require thoughtfully curated experiences, employees also thrive in environments where engagement, mastery, and personalization are embedded into their daily work.

The Service Drivers include three key components: Mystique, Emotional Engagement, and Functional. Functionality underscores the importance of seamless, efficient, and practical service execution, ensuring that operations run smoothly without disrupting the guest's experience. Emotional Engagement ensures that guests feel deeply connected, valued, and immersed in their journey. It is the emotional bond that transforms a simple visit into a lasting memory. Lastly, Mystique represents the sense of exclusivity, allure, and storytelling embedded in the guest experience, making each stay feel unique and prestigious.

These Service Drivers are then translated into corresponding Design Drivers: Service Alchemy, Guided Mastery, and Personalization. Personalisation stems from the Functional driver, highlights the importance of tailoring the experience to individual needs and preferences. A functional service design does not merely focus on efficiency but also on adaptability. Guided Mastery, linked to Emotional

Engagement, emphasises the intentional design of experiences that convey expertise and refinement. Employees should not feel lost or stagnant in their roles but should experience a sense of guided progression, where they receive support to master their craft while still feeling challenged and motivated.

Ultimately, Service Alchemy, inspired by Mystique, is about the art of transformation—taking ordinary service initiatives and seamlessly integrating them into meaningful, almost magical interactions. This concept reflects the idea that employees are not just performing tasks but contributing to an experience that carries an almost intangible yet deeply powerful sense of excellence. Like an alchemist turning base metals into gold, well-designed service interactions transform routine touch-points into unforgettable moments, making luxury feel both natural and deeply engaging.

By adapting Ritz Carlton's service philosophy to an employee-focused initiative, this framework acknowledges that a great guest experience starts with a great employee experience.
Just as guests feel the magic of seamless service, employees should feel the magic of a workplace designed to inspire, engage, and support them. The integration of these drivers ensures that employees feel connected to the organisation, fostering a culture of excellence, passion, and commitment.
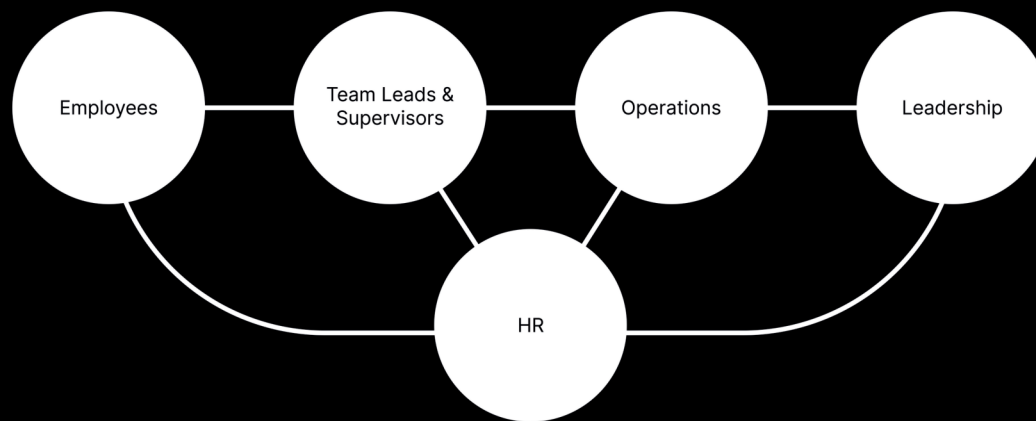
Service Drivers

Design Drivers

Figure 5.2.1: Represented parallelly the service values of Ritz Carlton (on the left; also mentioned in figure 2.9 previously) and the subsequently inspired design drivers for the following project (on the right)
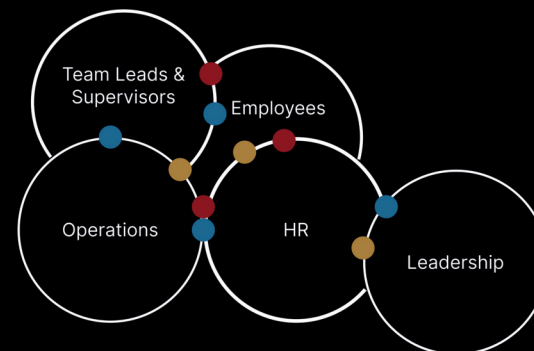
Current Ecosystem

Gamified Onboarding Simulation   Micro-learning/ Mentorship hub   Adaptive wellness & smart scheduling

Proposed Ecosystem

Figure 5.2.2: Evolution of the current system flow and structure to the proposed one with the corresponding solutions representing nodes that connect the various actors

The diagram on the left illustrates the proposed evolution of the current ecosystem. This transformation signifies a shift from a rigid, regulatory approach to a more dynamic, interconnected, and employee-centric model. The proposed changes aim to remove silos, foster engagement, and create a more holistic support system for employees by integrating gamification, mentorship, and wellness initiatives.

In the current ecosystem, the organizational structure is relatively hierarchical and compartmentalized, with HR at the center acting as a regulatory body rather than an enabler of seamless collaboration. Employees primarily interact with their team leads and supervisors, who serve as intermediaries between them and other organizational functions such as operations and leadership. HR's role in this model is largely compliance-driven, ensuring that rules, policies, and administrative processes are followed rather than actively fostering engagement, development, and well-being. This structure creates a linear flow of communication, where employees rely on structured, top-down interactions rather than having access to direct, dynamic connections with leadership, operations, or HR itself. The result is a system that, while functional, may feel impersonal, bureaucratic, and slow to adapt to individual employee needs.

In contrast, the proposed ecosystem introduces a more interconnected, fluid, and employee-focused structure. Instead of HR acting as a gatekeeper or regulator, it becomes an active enabler of growth, learning, and well-being, seamlessly integrating with other parts of the organization. Employees are no longer limited to hierarchical communication channels; they have direct access to HR, operations, leadership, and team leads, allowing for real-time feedback,

personalized support, and enhanced engagement. This new system creates multiple pathways of interaction, ensuring that employees feel more involved, valued, and empowered in their roles. A key aspect of this transformation is the introduction of three strategic interventions, represented as connection nodes in the proposed ecosystem.

The transformation depicted in the diagram highlights the importance of breaking down hierarchical barriers, fostering meaningful interactions, and integrating technology-driven solutions to enhance the employee journey. By implementing these interventions, the organization ensures that employees are not just participants in a system but active contributors to a dynamic, supportive, and engaging workplace. They become champions of the organisation's vision, driving it forward with passion and purpose.

This is not just an evolution of a system; it's shaping the future of hospitality, the transformation of a culture—one that ensures employees are not just part of the company but an integral force behind its success.

Ritz Carlton Leadership Center

The Ritz-Carlton Leadership Center (RCLC) has established itself as a world-class consultancy, extending far beyond the hospitality industry to help organizations enhance their leadership, culture, and customer service. While rooted in The Ritz-Carlton's legendary reputation for luxury and impeccable service, the Leadership Center functions as an independent advisory entity, sharing its proven strategies with businesses across multiple sectors. Organizations in healthcare, finance, retail, government, and other industries turn to RCLC for insights into how they can transform their service culture, engage employees, and build strong leadership teams that drive customer loyalty and long-term success.

At the core of the Ritz-Carlton Leadership Center's philosophy is the belief that exceptional customer experiences are the result of strong leadership and a deeply ingrained service culture. Through its specialized programs, RCLC helps organizations move beyond transactional customer interactions and instead build meaningful, long-term relationships with their clients or customers. Unlike traditional leadership training, which often focuses on abstract theories, RCLC offers practical, experience-driven methodologies that can be immediately applied to create tangible business improvements.

One of the key ways RCLC supports organizations is through advisory and consulting services, where its experts work closely with businesses to assess their current service culture, identify gaps, and develop customized strategies for improvement. This hands-on approach ensures that solutions are not only aspirational but also practical and

sustainable, embedding The Ritz-Carlton's gold-standard principles into the company's daily operations. To make its expertise more accessible, RCLC also offers onsite training programs and virtual experiences that cater to businesses of all sizes and locations.

The impact of RCLC's programs is evident across various industries. Many financial institutions now train their employees to deliver highly customized experiences that mirror the level of service excellence expected at a luxury hotel. The retail industry has also benefitted, with brands implementing RCLC strategies to elevate the shopping experience, improve customer retention, and differentiate themselves in competitive markets.

What makes The Ritz-Carlton Leadership Center unique is its ability to customize service excellence principles for any business environment, regardless of industry. The principles that have made The Ritz-Carlton brand an icon in hospitality—personalization, attention to detail, and a relentless commitment to customer satisfaction—are now being leveraged by businesses worldwide to achieve the same level of excellence in their own industries.

By focusing on the intersection of leadership, culture, and service innovation, it empowers organizations to not only meet but exceed the expectations of their customers and employees alike. In doing so, RCLC proves that the principles of world-class hospitality are transferable.
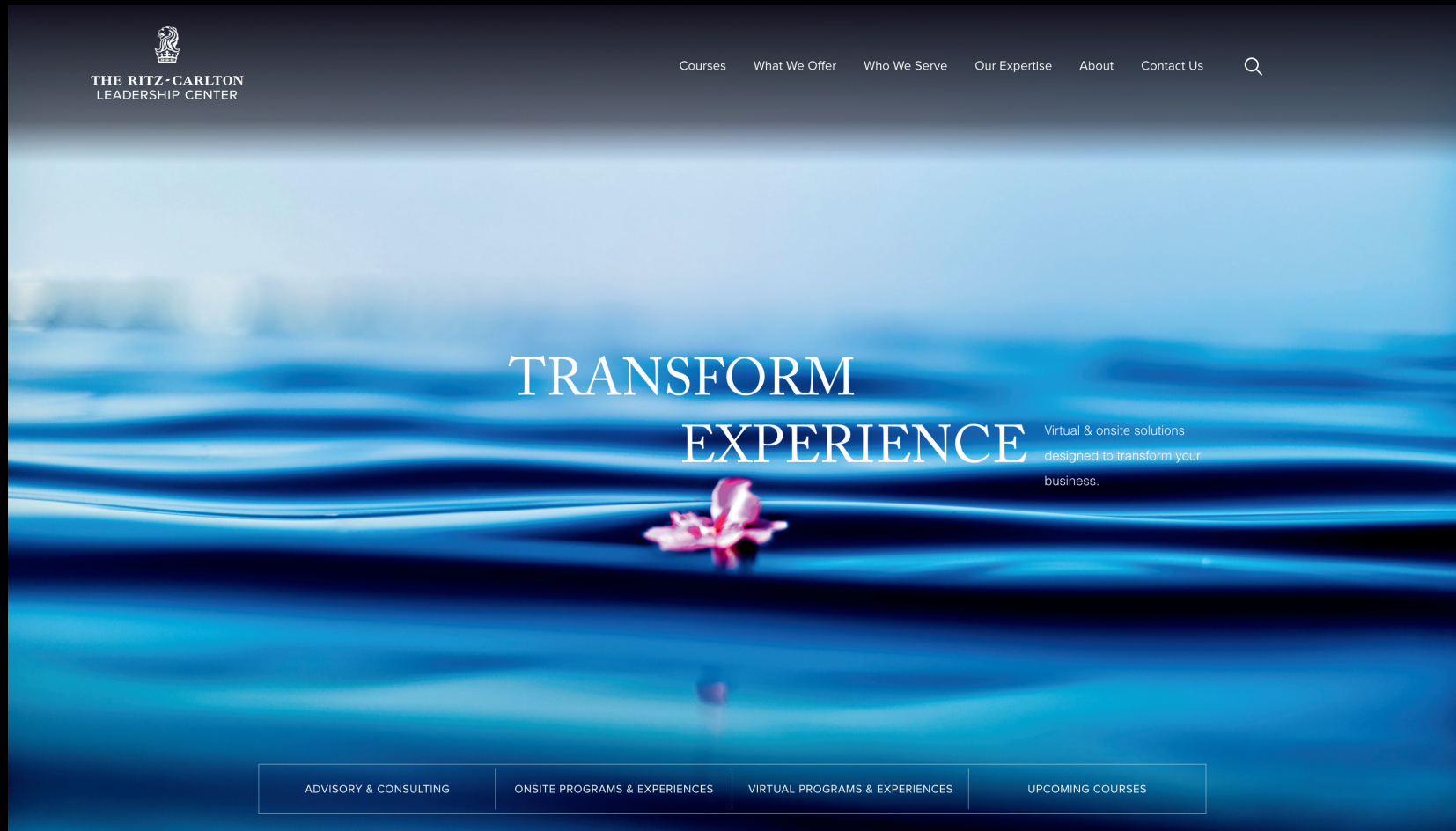
Figure 5.2.3: The Ritz Carlton Leadership Center website landing page

Service Alchemy- The Proposal

At the heart of The Ritz-Carlton's legendary reputation lies a fundamental philosophy: service excellence is not merely a process, but an art—an alchemy that transforms the ordinary into the extraordinary. While The Ritz-Carlton Leadership Center (RCLC) has successfully extended this philosophy outward, helping organizations refine their customer service experience, true transformation must begin within.

Recognizing this, The Ritz-Carlton introduces AUROR, an internal initiative designed to elevate employee engagement, leadership development, and workplace culture to the same gold standard that defines its exceptional guest experience.

Inspired by the principles of Service Alchemy, AUROR takes the everyday employee experience and refines it into something exceptional, ensuring that The Ritz-Carlton's Ladies and Gentlemen receive the same level of care, recognition, and investment that they provide to guests worldwide. AUROR derives its name from "Aurora" (representing transformation, enlightenment, and new beginnings) and "Aurum" (Latin for gold, symbolizing excellence and intrinsic value).

The name itself is a direct nod to The Ritz-Carlton's Gold Standards of Service, the foundation upon which its legendary hospitality is built. Just as The Ritz-Carlton has set the global benchmark for luxury service, AUROR seeks to establish a gold standard for internal excellence, ensuring to create a workplace where employees feel valued, empowered, and inspired to contribute their best work. Beyond leadership, AUROR places a strong emphasis on personalized employee growth and experiential learning. Recognizing that each employee's career aspirations and learning needs are unique, AUROR offers customized mentorship programs, skill-building workshops, and hands-on learning experiences to empower employees in their professional journeys. This focus on tailored development not only enhances individual performance but also ensures that organizations cultivate a workforce that is agile, innovative, and prepared for future challenges. Companies that implement AUROR will see higher retention rates, increased employee satisfaction, and a more engaged workforce that drives business success.

A key differentiator of AUROR is its commitment to creating a culture of mental well-being initiatives, flexible workplace strategies, and proactive engagement models, fostering an environment where employees feel respected, balanced, and invested in their work.

The benefits of AUROR extend beyond employee satisfaction—it creates a direct and measurable impact on business performance. Companies that prioritize workforce engagement and leadership development see higher levels of innovation, stronger collaboration, and improved service delivery. In essence, AUROR serves as the internal counterpart to The Ritz-Carlton Leadership Center's customer-facing excellence initiatives.Just as The Ritz-Carlton's service philosophy has transformed the guest experience, AUROR will redefine how companies attract, retain, and develop world-class talent.
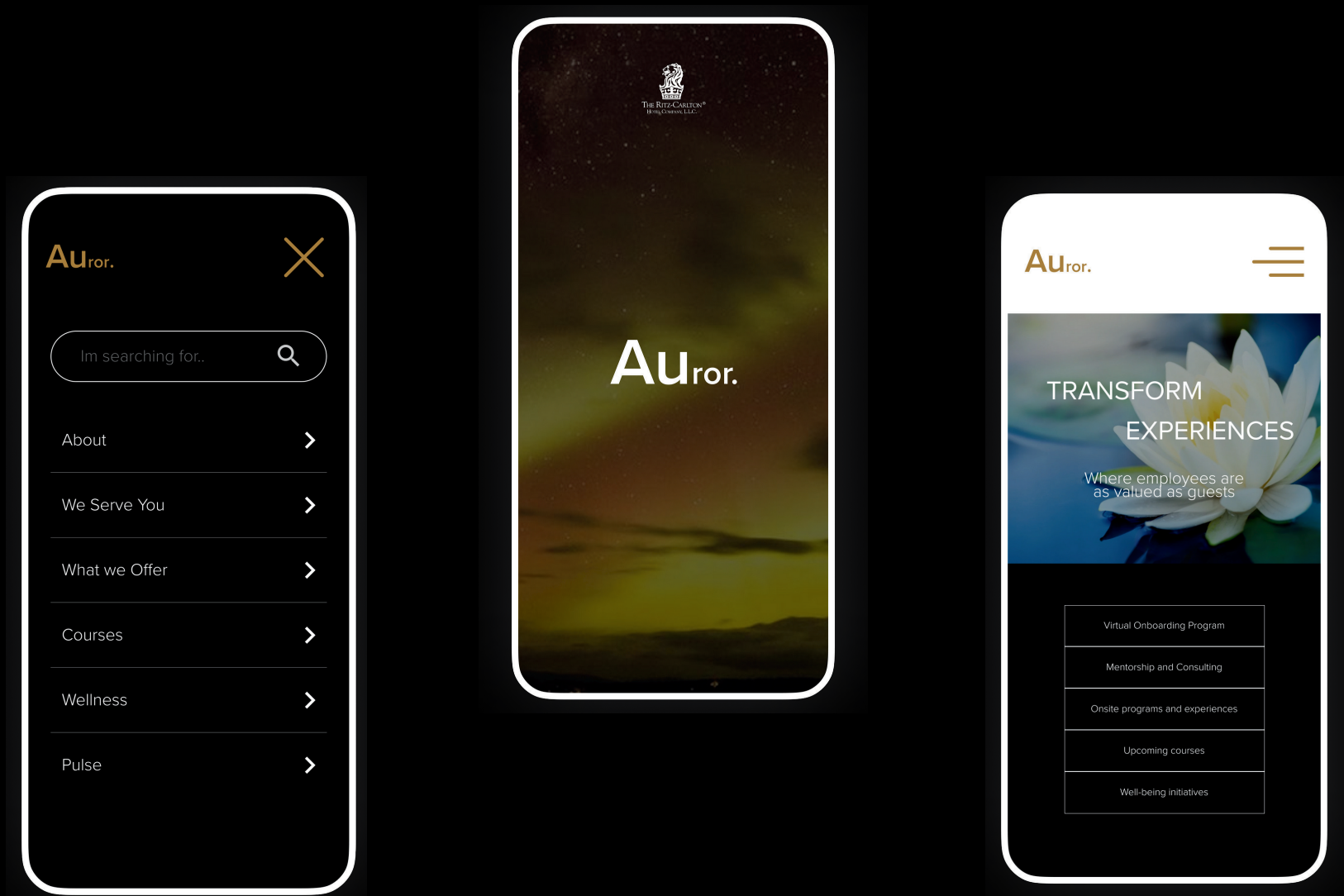
Figure 5.2.4: (left to right) Service offering menu navigation, splash screen with branding, and landing screen for platform
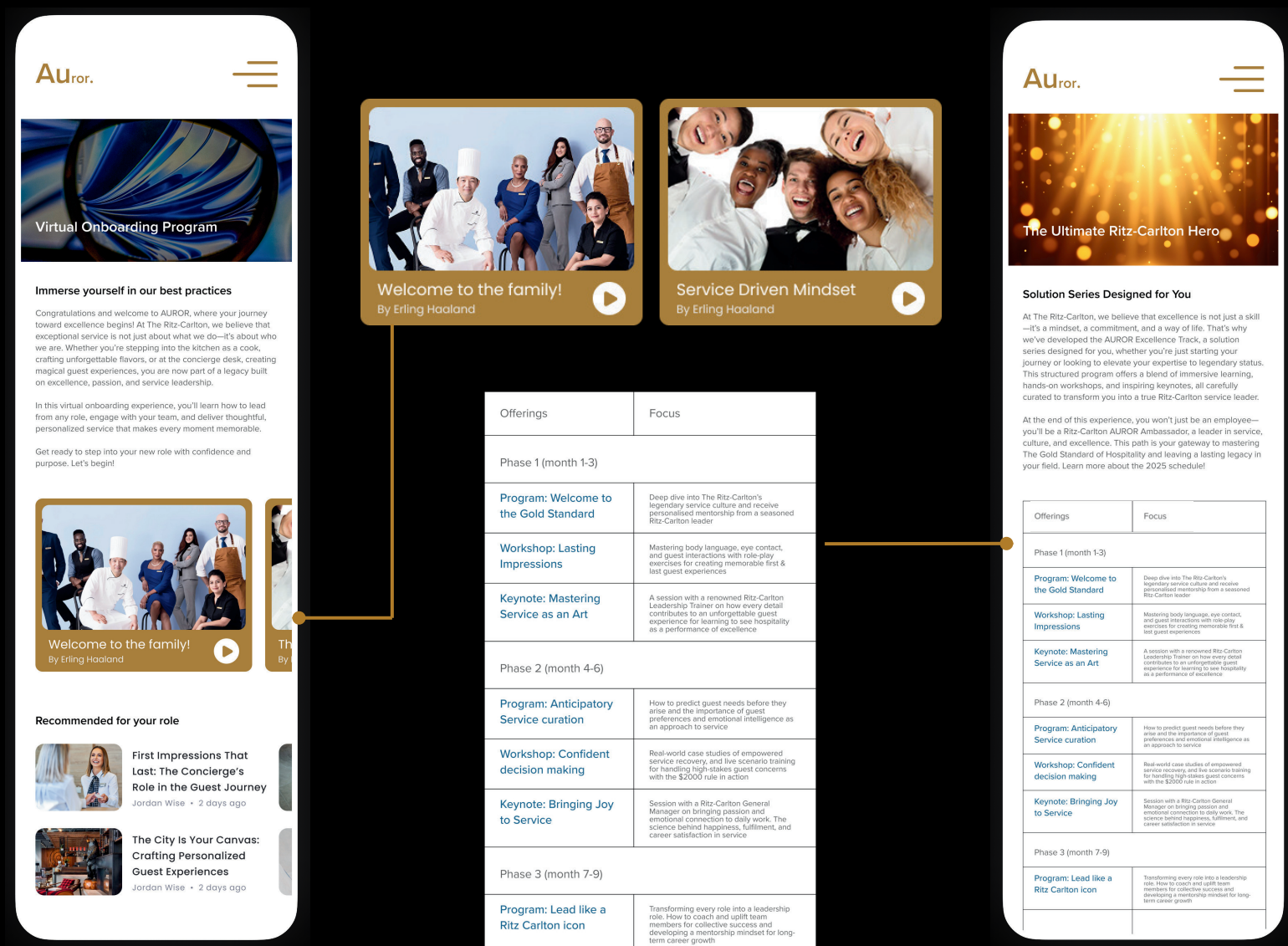
Auror.

Virtual Onboarding Program

Immerse yourself in our best practices

Congratulations and welcome to AUROR, where your journey toward excellence begins! At The Ritz-Carlton, we believe that exceptional service is not just about what we do—it's about who we are. Whether you're stepping into the kitchen as a cook, crafting unforgettable flavors, or at the concierge desk, creating magical guest experiences, you are now part of a legacy built on excellence, passion, and service leadership.

In this virtual onboarding experience, you'll learn how to lead from any role, engage with your team, and deliver thoughtful, personalized service that makes every moment memorable.

Get ready to step into your new role with confidence and purpose. Let's begin!

Welcome to the family!
By Erling Haaland

Th...
By ...

Recommended for your role

First Impressions That Last: The Concierge's Role in the Guest Journey
Jordan Wise • 2 days ago

The City Is Your Canvas: Crafting Personalized Guest Experiences
Jordan Wise • 2 days ago

Welcome to the family!
By Erling Haaland

Service Driven Mindset
By Erling Haaland

Offerings	Focus
Phase 1 (month 1-3)	
Program: Welcome to the Gold Standard	Deep dive into The Ritz-Carlton's legendary service culture and receive personalised mentorship from a seasoned Ritz-Carlton leader
Workshop: Lasting Impressions	Mastering body language, eye contact, and guest interactions with role-play exercises for creating memorable first & last guest experiences
Keynote: Mastering Service as an Art	A session with a renowned Ritz-Carlton Leadership Trainer on how every detail contributes to an unforgettable guest experience for learning to see hospitality as a performance of excellence
Phase 2 (month 4-6)	
Program: Anticipatory Service curation	How to predict guest needs before they arise and the importance of guest preferences and emotional intelligence as an approach to service
Workshop: Confident decision making	Real-world case studies of empowered service recovery, and live scenario training for handling high-stakes guest concerns with the $2000 rule in action
Keynote: Bringing Joy to Service	Session with a Ritz-Carlton General Manager on bringing passion and emotional connection to daily work. The science behind happiness, fulfilment, and career satisfaction in service
Phase 3 (month 7-9)	
Program: Lead like a Ritz Carlton icon	Transforming every role into a leadership role. How to coach and uplift team members for collective success and developing a mentorship mindset for long-term career growth

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Auror.

The Ultimate Ritz-Carlton Hero

Solution Series Designed for You

At The Ritz-Carlton, we believe that excellence is not just a skill—it's a mindset, a commitment, and a way of life. That's why we've developed the AUROR Excellence Track, a solution series designed for you, whether you're just starting your journey or looking to elevate your expertise to legendary status. This structured program offers a blend of immersive learning, hands-on workshops, and inspiring keynotes, all carefully curated to transform you into a true Ritz-Carlton service leader.

At the end of this experience, you won't just be an employee—you'll be a Ritz-Carlton AUROR Ambassador, a leader in service, culture, and excellence. This path is your gateway to mastering The Gold Standard of Hospitality and leaving a lasting legacy in your field. Learn more about the 2025 schedule!

Offerings	Focus
Phase 1 (month 1-3)	
Program: Welcome to the Gold Standard	Deep dive into The Ritz-Carlton's legendary service culture and receive personalised mentorship from a seasoned Ritz-Carlton leader
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Phase 3 (month 7-9)	
Program: Lead like a Ritz Carlton icon	Transforming every role into a leadership role. How to coach and uplift team members for collective success and developing a mentorship mindset for long-term career growth

Figure 5.2.4: (left to right) Virtual onboarding and training modules for progressive multi-phased skill development

Auror.

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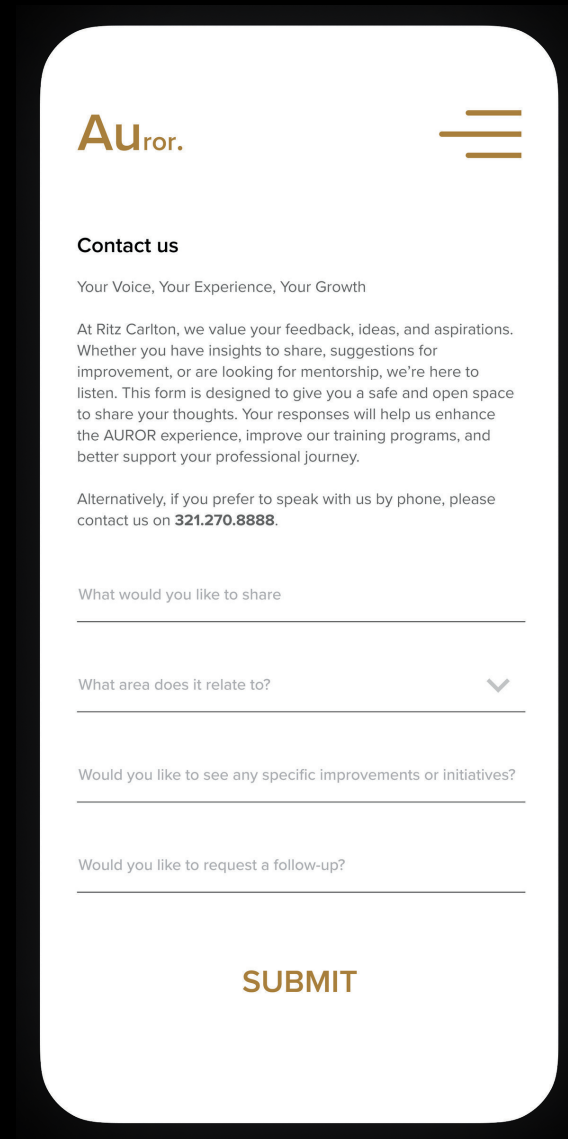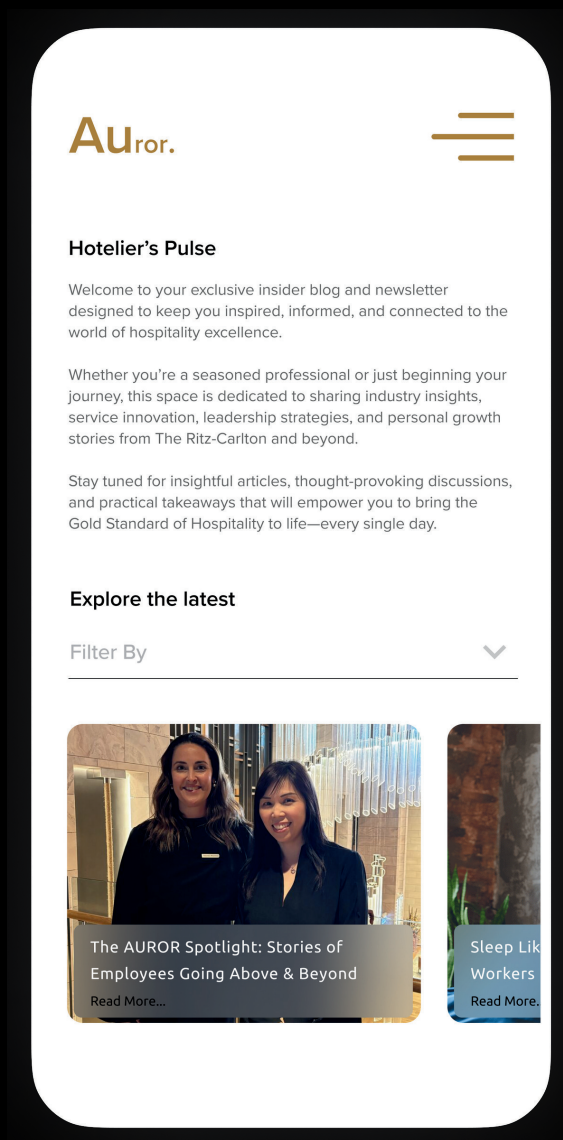## Hotelier's Pulse

Welcome to your exclusive insider blog and newsletter designed to keep you inspired, informed, and connected to the world of hospitality excellence.

Whether you're a seasoned professional or just beginning your journey, this space is dedicated to sharing industry insights, service innovation, leadership strategies, and personal growth stories from The Ritz-Carlton and beyond.

Stay tuned for insightful articles, thought-provoking discussions, and practical takeaways that will empower you to bring the Gold Standard of Hospitality to life—every single day.

Explore the latest

Filter By ⌄

The AUROR Spotlight: Stories of Employees Going Above & Beyond
Read More...

Sleep Lik Workers
Read More.

Auror.

≡

Contact us

Your Voice, Your Experience, Your Growth

At Ritz Carlton, we value your feedback, ideas, and aspirations. Whether you have insights to share, suggestions for improvement, or are looking for mentorship, we're here to listen. This form is designed to give you a safe and open space to share your thoughts. Your responses will help us enhance the AUROR experience, improve our training programs, and better support your professional journey.

Alternatively, if you prefer to speak with us by phone, please contact us on **321.270.8888**.

What would you like to share

What area does it relate to? ⌄

Would you like to see any specific improvements or initiatives?

Would you like to request a follow-up?

SUBMIT

Figure 5.2.4: (left to right) Insider blog and contact form ensuring two way communication persists

5.3 Moving Forward

At its core, AUROR is designed as more than an employee engagement initiative—it is a concept proposed to align personal fulfillment with professional excellence. Built upon the principles of human-centered technology and service-driven leadership, AUROR ensures that employees experience a deep sense of Ikigai —the Japanese concept that translates to "reason for being."

Ikigai is found at the intersection of what you love, what you are good at, what the world needs, and what you can be rewarded for, creating a foundation for both personal and professional satisfaction. Originating from Okinawan culture—renowned for its longevity and deep life purpose—Ikigai serves as a guiding principle for finding meaning and joy in work, making it especially relevant in hospitality, where emotional connection and service excellence are at the heart of every guest interaction. AUROR leverages technology to support employees in their pursuit of Ikigai by creating personalized pathways for learning, career development, and workplace well-being.

Real-time service feedback loops ensure that employees not only receive structured support but also experience a work environment that adapts to their evolving needs and aspirations. By integrating data-driven insights with emotional intelligence, AUROR ensures that employees can track their growth, receive personalized recognition, and continuously refine their skills, reinforcing the idea that hospitality is not just a job, but a fulfilling and evolving career journey.

Strategically, AUROR aligns with The Ritz-Carlton's commitment to service excellence by fostering a culture where employees feel a deep connection between their daily work and their larger purpose. When employees see how their role directly contributes to the happiness of guests, the success of their team, and their own personal growth, they are more likely to stay engaged, take ownership of their roles, and strive for continuous improvement.

This intrinsic motivation, rooted in the pursuit of Ikigai, leads to higher job satisfaction, lower turnover rates, and a more emotionally intelligent workforce, ultimately elevating the guest experience and driving long-term business success. Unlike extrinsic motivation—where employees work for bonuses, promotions, or external recognition—intrinsic motivation fuels long-term engagement, creativity, and resilience. By embedding these elements into the employee experience, AUROR ensures that every team member feels personally invested in their growth, engaged in their work, and aligned with the company's culture of excellence. This self-sustaining motivation not only enhances the employee experience but also translates into unforgettable guest interactions, stronger team collaboration, and a long-lasting, service-driven workforce.

Employees who are intrinsically motivated take pride in their craft, find joy in problem-solving, and naturally seek out ways to elevate their performance, even without direct incentives. In hospitality, this means a concierge who anticipates guest needs, a chef who crafts dishes with artistry and care, or a housekeeper who takes satisfaction in creating a welcoming space for guests.

What the world needs

What you can be paid for

What you love

Vocation

What you are good at

Mission

Profession

Passion

Ikigai

Figure 5.3.1: The Ikigai concept reimagines in a quatrefoil model to represent a more organic blooming process for impact

The figure titled "Figure 5.3.2 presents a structured analysis of market segmentation, visually represented using a concentric circle diagram. This framework categorizes the market into four hierarchical levels: Total Addressable Market (TAM), Serviceable Available Market (SAM), Serviceable Obtainable Market (SOM), and Minimum Viable Segment (MVS). Understanding these distinctions was crucial when developing a business model, as it helps in defining the potential reach of a product or service and in making strategic decisions regarding market entry, resource allocation, and investment.

The Total Addressable Market (TAM) represents the overall market demand for corporate training across all industries in the U.S., estimated to be valued at $165 billion in 2023. This broad scope provides insight into the scale of opportunity and the overall market value for training services (Training Industry Report, 2023). Within TAM, the Serviceable Available Market (SAM) narrows the focus to the hospitality industry, which employs 17 million workers in the U.S., many of whom require ongoing training and professional development to maintain service quality and operational efficiency (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023). This segmentation indicates the relevance of specialized training programs designed for the unique needs of hospitality employees.

A further refinement of the market, the Serviceable Obtainable Market (SOM), targets the luxury hotel industry, which is a key subset of the broader hospitality sector. The luxury hotel market in the U.S. is valued at approximately $15 billion annually and employs around 1.7 million workers (STR Global, 2023; American Hotel & Lodging Association, 2023). Within this segment, there is a clear and measurable demand for high-quality training services, as luxury hotels prioritize service excellence and employee development. This stepwise segmentation helps businesses gauge realistic service penetration by identifying industries where structured training programs are essential.

Finally, the Minimum Viable Segment (MVS) identifies the most immediately accessible and targeted market, focusing on a specific brand within the luxury hospitality sector. The Ritz-Carlton, which employs 10,000-15,000 workers in the U.S., represents a tangible and viable training market. The company is known for its strong emphasis on employee development, with a training budget that includes investments in initiatives like the $2,000 empowerment rule (Forbes, 2023; Harvard Business Review, 2023). If approximately 3,000-5,000 front-stage employees require training, this would translate to an annual investment of $10-20 million in training programs. Understanding the MVS allows businesses to establish a foothold in a defined niche before expanding into broader market segments.

The correlation between these demonstrates how market opportunity is progressively refined from a broad industry-wide perspective to a highly specific and accessible customer base. Moreover, this approach would help in crafting tailored marketing strategies, competitive positioning, and long-term sustainability plans that align with market demand; to systematically scale from a niche focus to a larger market presence, ensuring a solid foundation for sustained success.
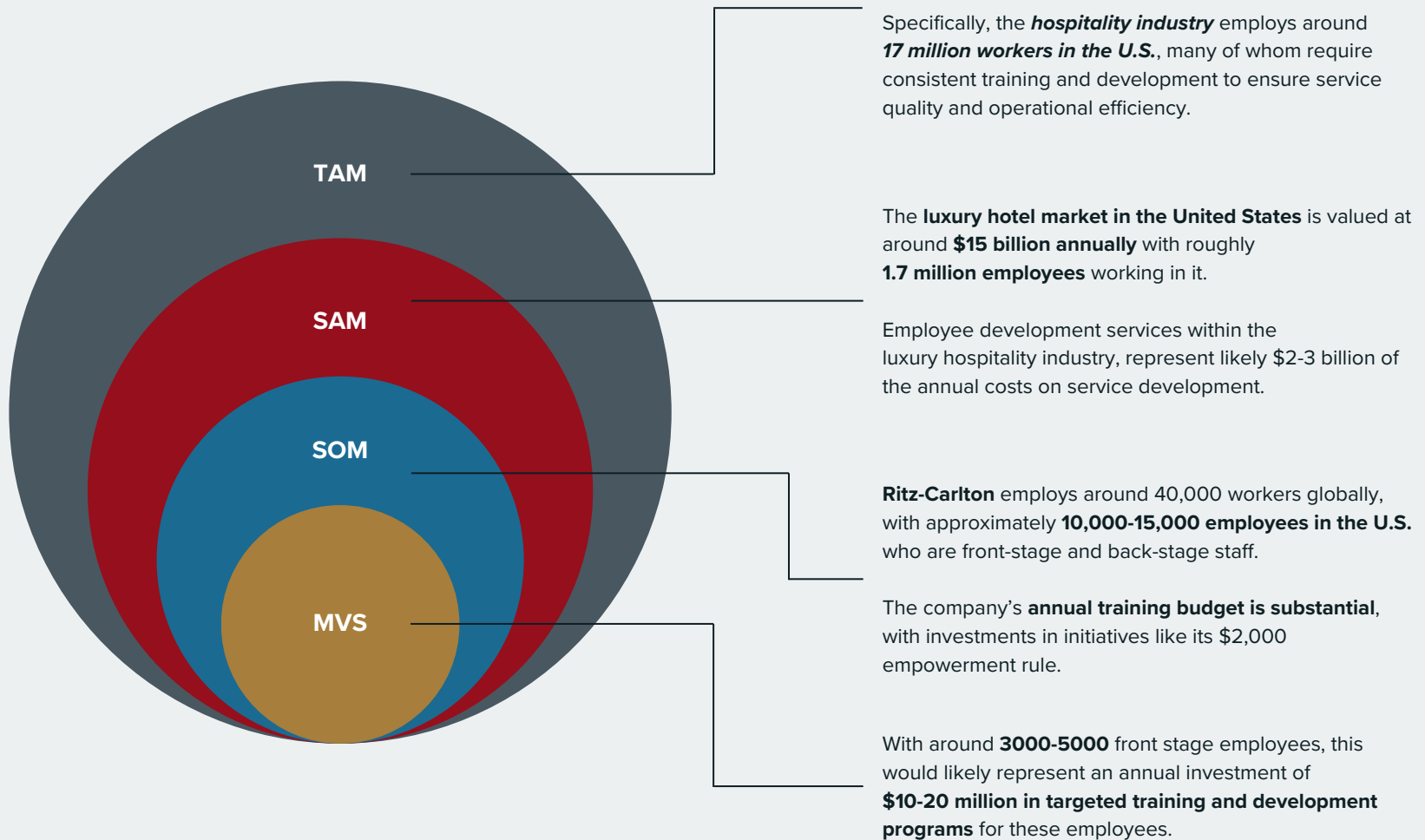
The **corporate training market** in the U.S. was valued at approximately **$165 billion** in 2023, and this includes training programs across all sectors.

Specifically, the **hospitality industry** employs around **17 million workers in the U.S.**, many of whom require consistent training and development to ensure service quality and operational efficiency.

The **luxury hotel market in the United States** is valued at around **$15 billion annually** with roughly **1.7 million employees** working in it.

Employee development services within the luxury hospitality industry, represent likely $2-3 billion of the annual costs on service development.

Ritz-Carlton employs around 40,000 workers globally, with approximately **10,000-15,000 employees in the U.S.** who are front-stage and back-stage staff.

The company's **annual training budget is substantial**, with investments in initiatives like its $2,000 empowerment rule.

With around **3000-5000** front stage employees, this would likely represent an annual investment of **$10-20 million in targeted training and development programs** for these employees.

Figure 5.3.2: The market opportunity context for the future of the proposed concept (sources mentioned in description)

06
Closing In

It's important to express gratitude to all who contributed valuable insights to this research. In relation to this, referencing is carried out to ensure the ethical integrity and depth of analysis of this academic project.

6.1 Acknowledgements

The completion of this project would not have been possible without the support, guidance, and inspiration of so many people, directly and indirectly. First and foremost, I would extend my heartfelt gratitude to SCAD, the institution and my mentors, who have shaped my learning and given me the opportunity to explore new realms of design with confidence.

The transition from product design to service design has been an incredible journey of growth and discovery for me, made possible by my professors. Their insights helped me recognize the power of designing experiences that go beyond tangible products to encompass systems, interactions, and human emotions. For their patience, encouragement, and belief in me, I am profoundly grateful.

Innovation is the cornerstone of progress, and in the realm of service design, it holds the transformative power to create meaningful and lasting impact. I am grateful to my guide, Professor Matthias Hillner, whose unwavering dedication to these principles has been a guiding force throughout this journey.

I am sincerely thankful to all the staff members of the hospitality industry as well who generously shared their experiences and time with me during my research. You openness and dedication provided invaluable context and inspiration, helping me shape this project.

A special thanks to my classmates for fostering a learning environment that nurtured creativity, critical thinking, and collaboration. It has been a wonderful journey.

To my family- thank you for your patience, understanding and constant support. My brother, for his unwavering enthusiam and encouragement; my father, for instilling in me the value of hard work, dedication and extensive reading; and my mother, for gladly offering me her silent presence to gather myself. Your belief has aways been my greatest strength.

I would also like to thank my best friend, A, for being my eyes and ears into the industry. Your encouragement and motivation have been my guiding light, and this project is as much a tribute to your dedication to the industry as it is a step toward innovation.

To everyone who has been part of this journey, thank you once again for being my source of strength, inspiration and growth. This project is a reflection of all that I have learned and all the support I have received along the way.

About My Guide

Matthias Hillner is a senior professor of Service Design at Savannah College of Art and Design. A visionary educator and expert in design innovation, he is known for his ability to bridge creative disciplines, fostering a holistic approach to design and working in cross-disciplinary teams on impactful projects. His professional journey reflects his deep commitment to advancing the design field; for fe holds three postgraduate degrees from the Royal College of Art, including a PhD in Innovation Management at the Department for Service Design.

Beyond teaching he is also an accomplished author, with publications such as "Intellectual Property, Design Innovation, and Entrepreneurship" and "Virtual Typography", which are significant resources for design professionals and academics alike. His enthusiasm continues to push him to influence the global design community through thought leadership and collaboration.

He has an incredibly extensive creative background and level of expertise. However, what truly sets him apart as a designer, is that he listens, asks the right inquisitive questions and understands the unique needs of every individual, to deliver exceptional results.

His impact extends beyond the classroom, as he mentors the next generation of designers to shape critical, sustainable, and future ready solutions that create lasting value.

About Me

Hello, I am Hitasha Mehta, a master's student of Service Design at Savanah College of Art and Design. My journey into the world of design began with a bachelor's desgree in Product Design in India, where I spent four transformative years honing my creative skills, navigating the challenges of a global pandemic, and uncovering the profound joy that thoughtful, intuitive solutions can bring to everyday life.
During my undergraduate studies, I immersed myself in the interplay of art, culture, human behaviour, and emerging technologies, realising the power of translating interdisciplinary knowledge into maningful innovations. From there on began my journey, and at SCAD, the paassion fueled into a mission.

Here, I've had the opportunity to work on exceptional projects that required empathy, collaboration, and the ability to balance diverse stakeholder perspectives while considering environmental, cultural, and economic impacts. This learning process has strengthened my ability to see the bigger picture, think systemically, and develop solutions that align with the needs of both people and the planet.

Now, as I work on my graduation project- a culmination of everything I've learned during my journey- I await ardently the transition into the professional world. I am eager to contribute to creating services that enhance lives, solve complex problems and drive innovation in today's dynamic design landscape.

About SCAD

The Savannah College of Art and Design, lovingly known as SCAD, is a globally renowned institution dedicated to fostering creativity, innovation, and excellence across diverse disciplines. Established in 1978, SCAD offers cutting edge undergraduate and graduate programs through its campuses in Savannah and Atlants, Georgia, its unique location in Lacoste, France, and its flexible SCADnow online platform. SCAD has students from over 100 countries and it helps blend global perspectives with emerging technologies, preparing each individual for leadership roles in dynamic industries. Its state-of-the-art facilities, extensive industry partnerships, and a commitment to career readiness, empowers students to transform their passions into meaningful professional success- it guides you to fulfil your dreams!

Graduate level service design is one of the 40 pograms offered at SCAD. It is distinctive because it lies at the intersection of design, business, and human experience. This program equips students with the skills to envision, create, and optimize complex systems and services. Beyond technical knowledge, it fosters a holistic mindset, enabling students to think systemically, empathize deeply with user needs, and innovate solutions that deliver exceptional value.

All in all, it not only teaches practical methodologies but empowers individuals too create meaningful impact, and emerge as adaptable, forward thinking professionals.
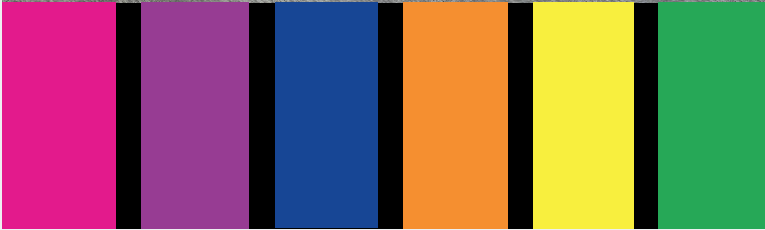
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Professor Dimitrios Buhalis: A leading academic in the field of tourism and hospitality management, Professor Buhalis has authored numerous publications that explore strategic management and marketing in the tourism industry. His work is instrumental in understanding the integration of technology and innovative practices in hospitality.

The Ritz-Carlton Leadership Center: Renowned for its exceptional customer service, The Ritz-Carlton Leadership Center offers insights into creating outstanding employee experiences and fostering a culture of excellence. Their methodologies serve as a benchmark for service quality in the hospitality sector.

World Tourism Organization (UNWTO): As a specialized agency of the United Nations, UNWTO provides comprehensive data and analysis on global tourism trends, employment, and sustainable development. Their publications are invaluable for understanding the macroeconomic impacts and policy frameworks influencing the hospitality industry.

Dr. Michael Esposito & Dr. Terence Tse – Academics specializing in circular economy transformation and its impact on business models, particularly within service industries. Their Harvard Business Review and California Management Review contributions have been pivotal in defining sustainable workforce strategies.

Professor Khaled Soufani – A leading economist and thought leader in circular HR and sustainable workforce retention, whose research at the University of Cambridge has been influential in shaping economic policies around talent sustainability.

Kate Raworth – The author of Doughnut Economics, which, while not strictly hospitality-focused, offers innovative perspectives on how regenerative economic principles apply to workforce engagement and talent sustainability.

Dr. Sandra Pereira (International Labour Organization - ILO) – A policy expert on decent work and the future of employment, contributing to ILO's research on sustainable job creation in circular economies.

Christopher J. Nassetta: Serving as Hilton's President and Chief Executive Officer since 2007, Nassetta has been pivotal in transforming the company through strategic initiatives, including adopting an asset-light model and expanding Hilton's global presence. His leadership emphasizes a purpose-driven culture and operational excellence.

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