


Chapter 4

Talent Transformation: Upskilling the Hospitality Workforce for an AI Era

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ABSTRACT

The hospitality sector is undergoing a disruption like never before due to the coming together of Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies. Although automation and data analytics are beneficial to boost efficiency, personalization, and decision-making, they also transform workforce structures and competencies. The chapter is based on theories of human-AI symbiosis, learning organizations, and competency-based education, and it addresses the issue of the co-expansion of technology and human capital to maintain service excellence. Among the most important themes are the changing job description, skills gap, and workforce development pedagogy, institutional reactions, and policy frameworks to inclusive talent transformation. The chapter emphasizes that the future of hospitality does not consist of substituting the human workforce but rather in enhancing it- in which AI enables human creativity, empathy and strategic thinking.

INTRODUCTION

People have always characterized the hospitality industry. The ability to anticipate, empathize and surpass expectations is the characteristic feature of hospitality, whether it is the luxury resort or a quick-service restaurant, or even a boutique travel agency. However, the 21 st century has brought forth the influence of strong technology which is transforming not only the way services are offered in this human-centered

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industry but also the kinds of competencies that are needed to offer the services. The fourth industrial revolution that has occurred as a result of merging Artificial Intelligence (AI), robotics, the Internet of Things (IoT), big data, and immersive technologies has made hospitality a digitally enhanced service ecosystem. There is a blurring of the formerly distinct boundaries between the operation of the human service and the machine. Nowadays, AI systems are functioning as digital co-workers and enhance the potentials of human workers and redesign organizational structures and processes (Hussain et al., 2023). Chatbots, multilingual booking and guest requests 24/7; facial recognition, quicker check-in; predictive analytics in the inventory, staffing and pricing decisions, robotic helpers in housekeeping, room service and food preparation. These innovations make operations more efficient, lower costs and make guests happier because they allow them to be personalized on a large scale. Nevertheless, they are also problematic as they unleash messiness by pushing out normal work processes and requiring a re-conceptualization of human positioning. Algorithms and machines have replaced the tasks that could be done in the past only with physical presence or manual work, and the new positions have appeared, which focus on analytical, creative, and interpersonal aspects. These new horizons have meant that in the new landscape, hospitality employees must be able to interpret information, operate automated systems, and bring in the emotional intelligence that AI never has, and therefore, the central issue that hospitality organizations will encounter is not whether AI will transform the nature of work, but how it will be possible to prepare and empower employees to embrace the new environment and thrive. This problem is not only technical but very human and it needs to be changed not only on the education, leadership, and organizational culture level.

1.1 Strategic Imperative of Talent Transformation.

The main principle of this change is the idea of talent transformation- the strategic process of the matching of workforce abilities with technological, cultural and business shifts. The process of transforming talent does not just consist of retraining staff; talent transformation is a complete re-evaluation of the process of attracting, developing, and retaining people in the age of smart automation (Arora et al., 2024). It entails the incorporation of AI literacy, emotional intelligence, as well as adaptability into the DNA of the hospitality profession. This need has been heightened under the post-pandemic era. The COVID-19 is what drove the digital adoption across the hospitality industry with contactless technology, mobile ordering, and automated service protocols becoming a norm. With the struggle of businesses to reconstruct operations with labor shortages and increased guest demands, AI-driven solutions became one of the primary resilience enablers. A large number of workers were not digitally fluent to use new systems and many managers were not

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