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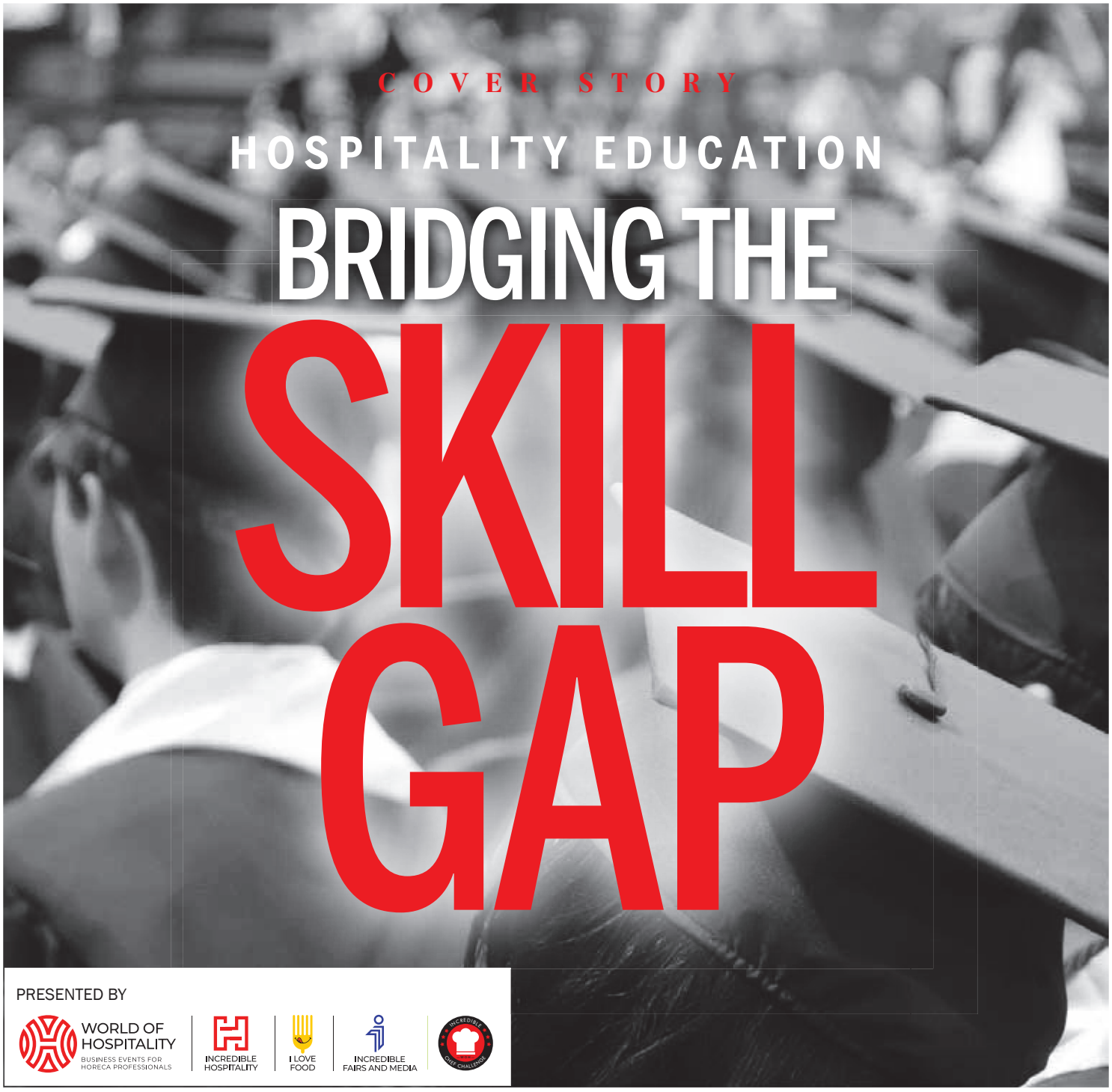

COVER STORY

HOSPITALITY EDUCATION

BRIDGING THE SKILL GAP

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The search for talent

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In a new Korn Ferry study that includes a sweeping country-by-country analysis, the biggest issue isn't that robots are taking all the jobs - it's that there aren't enough humans to take them! Indeed, the study finds that by 2030, there will be a global human talent shortage of more than 85 million people, or roughly equivalent to the population of Germany. Left unchecked, in 2030 that talent shortage could result in about $8.5 trillion in unrealised annual revenues.

At the recently concluded HICSA 2024, a three-year alliance was announced between Indian School of Hospitality (ISH) and Sommet Education, both leaders in hospitality education in collaboration with Accor for the Indian Talent Development Initiative.

Pride Hotels Group and Symbiosis Open-Source Society have also come together in a partnership forged at the Symbiosis Centre for Leadership Development (SCLD) for cultivating and honing leadership talent in the sector.

Initiatives such as these will definitely help to ease the talent crisis in the industry. On the one hand, there has been a declining trend in admissions to hospitality institutes year on year and on the other, there is lack of interest among hospitality graduates to pursue careers in the industry, given that the pandemic opened up other more remunerative avenues in retail and allied service sectors.

The smartest organisations will not only take up the onus of training talent themselves but will also take up upskilling of existing talent.

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There's a need for greater emphasis on soft skills

Atul A Gokhale | Director and Professor |Symbiosis School of Culinary Arts (Symbiosis International {Deemed University}, Pune)

Building the talent pool for the hospitality sector. Your thoughts on this.

A skilled workforce is the backbone of any thriving industry, and the hospitality sector is no exception. The entire hospitality and service industry sector relies heavily on competent professionals to deliver exceptional service and create memorable experiences for guests. However, several challenges persist:

1. *Perception and Awareness:* Hospitality careers are often perceived as low-paying and lacking in growth opportunities. Addressing these misconceptions and raising awareness about the diverse career paths and advancement prospects in the industry is essential to attract talent.
2. *High Attrition Rates:* The hospitality sector is notorious for its high employee turnover rates, which can hinder talent retention efforts and disrupt operations. Implementing effective retention strategies, such as career advancement opportunities, competitive compensation packages, and a positive work environment, is crucial for retaining skilled professionals.
3. *Quality of Training:* While various training programs exist, ensuring their quality and relevance to industry needs remains a challenge. Standardising training modules, accrediting institutions, and implementing rigorous evaluation mechanisms can help maintain the quality of training programs and produce skilled professionals.
4. *Infrastructure and Resources:* Access to modern training facilities, equipment, and resources is essential for delivering high-quality education and training in the hospitality sector. Investment in infrastructure development and resource allocation is necessary to support skill development initiatives effectively.

> **Embracing technology in training programs can enhance learning outcomes and prepare individuals for the digital advancements shaping the hospitality sector**

For years we have been talking about the industry curriculum mismatch. What's the reality check?

As someone deeply involved in the Indian hospitality industry for over 35 years and especially in the hospitality and service industry education for over 23 years, I can attest to the ongoing conversation regarding the need for alignment between industry needs and the curriculum taught at hotel schools in India.

One of the most glaring issues is the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical skills. Many hotel management graduates often lack hands-on experience in crucial areas such as customer service, kitchen operations, and front office management. While theoretical knowledge is essential, it must be complemented by practical training to ensure graduates are truly prepared for

the demands of the industry.

There is one more significant shortcoming which is attracting good pool of faculty to teach the students. In recent years, hospitality and culinary educational institutions have been grappling with a significant shortage of good quality teachers. This scarcity poses a considerable challenge to the effective training and development of future professionals in these industries.

Furthermore, there's a need for greater emphasis on soft skills such as communication, problem-solving, and adaptability. These skills are invaluable in a customer-facing industry like hospitality but are often overlooked in traditional curriculums.

Another aspect that needs addressing is the evolving nature of the hospitality industry. With advancements in technology and changing consumer preferences, there's a constant need for innovation and adaptability. However, the curriculum at many hotel schools in India may not be keeping pace with these changes, leaving graduates ill-prepared to tackle emerging trends and challenges.

Collaboration between industry stakeholders and educational institutions is crucial in bridging this gap. By involving industry professionals in curriculum design, providing opportunities for internships and practical training, and fostering a culture of lifelong learning, we can better equip graduates to succeed in the dynamic world of hospitality.

> The Skill India Digital platform can host online courses, webinars, and interactive modules tailored to the needs of the hospitality and service sectors

AI and Big Data are today's buzzwords. How can institutes streamline curriculums to adapt to new age technology?

AI and Big Data are today's buzzwords which is also being spoken at length in the hospitality and service industry. These indeed hold significant potential to revolutionise various aspects of the hospitality industry. The curriculums in the institutes will need to be streamlined and adapt to these technological advancements in the hospitality industry, and should consider integrating the following elements into teaching programmes:

1. *Data Analytics and Interpretation:* Offer courses on data analysis techniques, including predictive modelling, machine learning, and data visualization. Teach students how to extract insights from large datasets to inform decision-making in areas like revenue management and guest experience optimisation.
2. AI and Automation: Introduce students to AI technologies such as natural language processing (NLP), chatbots, and robotic process automation (RPA). Help them understand how these technologies can streamline operations and enhance customer service in the hospitality sector.
3. Ethical and Legal Considerations: Include modules on data privacy regulations, ethical implications of AI use, and responsible data management practices. Equip students with the knowledge and skills to navigate ethical dilemmas and ensure compliance with relevant laws and regulations.
4. Industry Collaboration and Case Studies: Foster partnerships with hospitality companies to provide students with real-world projects and internships focused on AI and Big Data applications. Incorporate case studies and guest lectures from industry experts to illustrate the practical implications of these technologies.

However, successful implementation requires careful consideration of factors such as data privacy, ethical concerns, and the unique needs of each hospitality business.

4. There is the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) and the govt also plans to roll out a Skill India Digital platform. What can the government do to specifically drive the upskilling agenda in the hospitality and service industries?

Here are some suggestions on how NSDC can make a significant contribution in upskilling of manpower in the hospitality and service sector:

1. *Tailored Training Programs:* Develop specialised training programs specifically designed for the hospitality and service industries. These programs should cover a wide range of skills, including customer service, communication, problem-solving, and technical skills relevant to different roles within these sectors.
2. *Industry Collaboration:* Collaborate closely with leading players in the hospitality and service industries to understand their skill requirements and develop training modules accordingly. Industry partnerships can ensure that the training provided is aligned with the needs of employers, thereby increasing the employability of trainees.
3. *Technology Integration:* Leverage digital platforms and technologies to deliver training

programs more efficiently and cost-effectively. The Skill India Digital platform can host online courses, webinars, and interactive modules tailored to the needs of the hospitality and service sectors. This approach can reach a larger audience and provide flexible learning options.

4. *Certification and Recognition:* Establish industry-recognised certification programs to validate the skills acquired through training. These certifications can enhance the credibility of individuals seeking employment in the hospitality and service industries and provide assurance to employers about their competencies.
5. *Soft Skills Development:* Emphasise the development of soft skills such as communication, teamwork, and interpersonal skills alongside technical skills. These skills are essential for success in the hospitality and service sectors, where interactions with customers play a crucial role in delivering quality service.
6. *Focus on Quality Standards:* Ensure that training programs adhere to high-quality standards and incorporate best practices from the industry. This includes providing practical hands-on experience, exposure to real-life scenarios, and continuous evaluation and feedback mechanisms to assess skill proficiency.
7. *Targeted Outreach Programs:* Reach out to marginalised communities, rural areas, and economically disadvantaged populations to ensure equitable access to upskilling opportunities in the hospitality and service sectors. Special initiatives such as targeted scholarships, outreach programs, and community partnerships can help bridge the skills gap in underserved areas.
8. *Continuous Learning and Upskilling:* Promote a culture of lifelong learning and continuous upskilling among workers in the hospitality and service industries. Encourage professionals to pursue further education, attend workshops, and stay updated on industry trends and advancements to remain competitive in the job market. ■