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Step 2: Designing change in your accommodation (Materials)

This chapter explains the tensions between resource use and ‘unrestricted’ hospitality experiences. (I say unrestricted because most hospitality providers do not limit the facilities and amenities offered.) It shows how to reconcile seemingly opposing forces – like guest conserving versus guest satisfaction – and create transformational new approaches.

Some key points:

- **Integrated thinking** can transform your approach to problem solving. It is how to get the most out of your audits.
- **Be guest-centred.** Step away from one-size-fits-all approaches to hospitality and really try to put yourself in your guests’ shoes. It is ultimately people who use resources, not buildings.
- **Call on altruistic values.** People want to help. They also want to see the benefits for themselves. Where possible, design experiences that make green benefits immediate and clear.
- **Look at the big picture.** Think holistically and embrace the complexities when they appear. It is an intimidating task, but the best solutions come when problems aren’t isolated from one another.
- **Iterate, iterate, iterate.** There is no shame in not getting it perfect first time. Any plan worth its salt has a strong feedback loop, allowing you to refine designs over time.

The focus here is on Materials, because they consume the highest proportion of energy. The following chapters concentrate on Skills and the Meaning we have for social practices in hospitality.

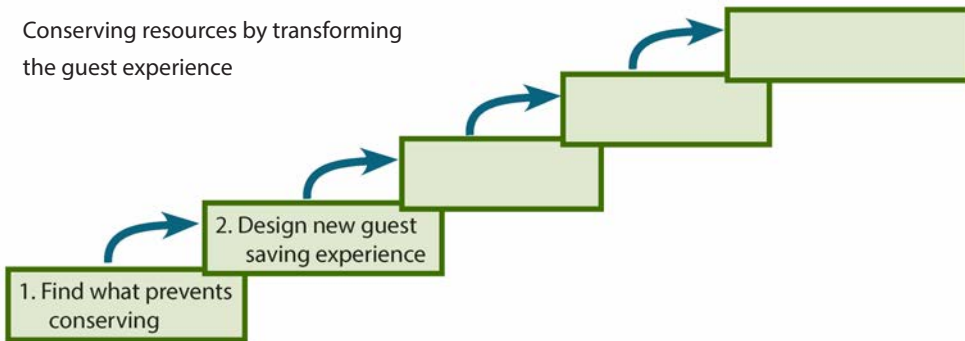


Figure 6.1: The 5-Step Method to create transformational guest engagement

Avoiding conflict

So far you may have been asking yourself questions like: How can you build a leaner more effective business that wastes less whilst offering guests a more satisfactory experience? How can you create a new accommodation concept that feels lavish to guests, yet is low carbon? How should you renovate bathrooms that use minimal hot water but are still enticing? How can you minimise peak rate energy use in summer when you have to offer guests a greater sense of cool comfort?

These questions bring up the conflict between taking responsibility for your hospitality's footprint and providing a guest experience that exceeds expectations. At first sight, they do appear to conflict, particularly if you wish to maintain a standard hospitality approach to service delivery. It can lead owners and managers to feel they must choose: either achieve a lower carbon footprint by sacrificing service, or keep things as they are and only make superficial carbon reduction. Choosing the 'or' option does not solve the problem – it still leaves your business vulnerable to future risks and legislative change. Choosing 'or' leaves the conflict unresolved.

Embracing conflict

Many good solutions come from the tension of opposites. The acclaimed business strategist Roger Martin calls resolving such tension 'Integrated Thinking' (Martin, 2007). As an example, he cites the creation of the Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts. He explains the blending of what was then the regular accommodation model of either a small scale motel or a large convention hotel. Instead of either/or, the strategy was to offer accommodation with both a personal touch and all the amenities a guest could want (Martin, 2009).

Martin's research found that integrated thinking was a natural skill applied by many highly successful business people. They do not choose 'either/or' options, or create a compromise between the two. They resolve the conflict by identifying innovative alternatives launched by the dynamics of opposing ideas.

Integrated thinking is one of the underlying themes of this book. Integrated thinking teaches us to create superior solutions using the tensions between opposing ideas and constraints. Martin believes that integrative thinkers relish business complexities because that is where valuable solutions come from. In other words, we should not avoid the knotty problems of making hospitality more sustainable, we should relish them. They are how we steer our businesses to greater success.

Is there a conflict between technology and the human touch?

An example of a conflict in hospitality is the divergence between technology used for building automation, check-in services, 'contactless' engagement, and relationship management verses the desire many guests have for human connection with a property and personal recognition delivered by hotel staff.

On the one hand, technologies that offer guests chatbots, voice controlled apps, and the personalisation of room amenities using the Internet of Things are described by Benoit-Etienne Domenget, CEO of the hospitality institution, Sommet Education, as transformational for hotels (Sommet Education, 2019).

On the other side, Mari-France Derderian of Glion Institute acknowledges human to human customer relationships are still key. "Human interaction remains core to the hospitality industry. In the luxury industry, this human service is vital for brands to deliver a bespoke experience, in which guests can feel both at ease and pleasantly surprised by service that surpasses expectations...these shared moments of personal service may turn out to be the real luxury that guests most value." (Sommet Education, 2019). The Covid-19 crisis created a surge in contactless technologies and strong commitments (Lane, 2021), but one wonders how long it will be before personalised service actually becomes a competitive advantage. It is Accor's *raison d'être* to become more sustainable (Accor, 2016).

Rapidly evolving technology has led many service firms to see only two models: embracing technology to optimise service, or focusing on a highly trained staff experience. Again, these either/or options do not have to be the case in sustainable hospitality, where we need both systematisation and ability for staff and guests to enact sustainability goals (Baker & Schaltegger, 2015).