

# How will robots redefine leadership in hotel management? A Delphi approach

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Application of service robots in the hospitality industry is on the rise, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Service robots are able to initiate interactions with customers and provide added-value services while conforming to safety standards for human–robot interaction, and companies can expect significantly high returns and business value from investments in robotic technologies. This research focuses on how HR experts perceive service robots and their impact on leadership and HR management in the hotel industry.

The researchers conducted a three-stage Delphi study with hotel industry human resource experts. It involved speaking to hotel HR experts to identify the key trends and major challenges that will emerge in the next ten years and how leaders should deal with the challenges brought about by service robot technologies.

They found that hotel HR experts anticipated improvements in workforce efficiency and productivity afforded by various service robot applications. Under the context of COVID-19, robotic interaction in hotels could facilitate more socially distanced models of operation to enable a safer and faster reopening and recovery of some hotels.

However, the team also noted that the technology may pose challenges such as high costs, skill deficits and significant changes to the organizational structure and culture of hotels. While service robots may be welcomed by hotel leadership to reduce costs and to gain competitive advantage, there is evidence that current employees will not readily accept this new technology.

Therefore, the research team anticipated that applications and integration of robotic technology would require leaders of the future to carefully consider the balance between the roles of service robots and human employees in the guest experience and to nurture a work environment that embraces open-mindedness and change.



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