

• HOSPITALITY · GUIDE

The skills matrix *for* *hospitality teams*

Hospitality is two houses under one roof: a front of house that wins the guest, and a back of house that delivers safely. A great service depends on both being capable, on every shift, with food safety and allergen handling never left to chance. A skills matrix shows where a team is strong, where it falls short of what the service needs, and where the risks sit.



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Reading time 12 min · **Method** Upleashed 0 to 5 capability framework · **Updated** May 2026

THE SHORT ANSWER

A hospitality skills matrix maps staff against the capabilities a service depends on across front of house (greeting, table service, bar, guest recovery) and back of house (food prep, food safety, allergen handling), with a level in each cell. Read as a team profile against the levels each area requires, it shows where the venue is strong, where it falls short, and which safety-critical areas need attention first. In short: **it shows your service capability against what good service requires, so gaps, especially in food safety and allergens, surface before a guest does.**

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- **Two houses, one service.** Front of house wins the guest; back of house delivers safely. The matrix maps both, because a service needs both.
- **Food safety and allergens are non-negotiable.** These are safety-critical and regulated, so shortfalls here are the most urgent of all.
- **Multi-skilling keeps service moving.** Staff who can flex across sections absorb the rushes and the no-shows that define hospitality.
- **Profile against the target.** The useful reading is current capability versus what each area requires, so the gaps are obvious.
- **Still read coverage.** A team profile can look healthy on average while a section rests on one person; check both.

— START HERE

Two houses that must *both be capable*

Hospitality divides cleanly into two worlds, front of house and back of house, and a great guest experience needs both to be capable at once. A skills matrix is how you see whether they are, mapping the service-facing and the kitchen capabilities a venue runs on, and measuring them against what good service actually requires.

Front of house and back of house

Front of house is everything the guest sees: **greeting and hosting, table service, the bar, upselling and guest recovery** when something goes wrong. Back of house is everything that makes it possible: **food preparation, station execution, food safety and allergen control**. The two need different skills, but they share a matrix, because a brilliant front of house cannot rescue an unsafe kitchen, and a flawless kitchen cannot rescue a chaotic floor. Mapping both is how a venue sees its whole service capability in one place.

Food safety and allergens are non-negotiable

Most hospitality skills are about quality; a few are about safety, and they are not optional. **Food safety and allergen handling** protect guests from genuine harm and the business from serious legal consequence, so a shortfall here is not a quality niggle but a risk. Kitchen staff typically need a higher level of food safety competence, and all food-handling staff need

allergen awareness. On a hospitality matrix these areas carry the highest required levels, and a gap against them is the first thing to fix.

Multi-skilling is how service survives the rush

Hospitality is defined by its peaks and its unpredictability: a sudden rush, a no-show, a party of twelve at eight o'clock. The teams that cope are the **multi-skilled** ones, where a host can run a section, a server can cover the bar, a chef de partie can hold another station. The aim, as the trade puts it, is to run shifts the same way every day no matter who is working. A matrix shows where that flexibility is real and where the service is one absence from struggling.

— WHY IT MATTERS NOW

A capability gap reaches the *guest fast*

In hospitality, a skills gap is felt within minutes: a slow section, a mishandled allergy, a bar nobody can run at the rush. Mapping capability against what the service requires is how a venue catches those gaps before a guest, or an inspector, does.

8%

GARTNER, 2024

of organisations have reliable workforce skills data, so most venues run on the manager's sense of who can do what.

39%

WEF, 2025

of workers' core skills are expected to change by 2030, as menus, formats and guest expectations keep evolving.

63%

WEF, 2025

of employers call skills gaps the biggest barrier to change; in hospitality they show up as a service that falters.

Two things make a skills matrix unusually valuable in hospitality. First, the work is **immediate and visible**: there is no buffer between a capability gap and the guest who experiences it, so a thin bar or a shaky grasp of allergens has consequences the same evening. Second, the stakes include **safety and compliance**, where food safety and allergen failures carry legal and reputational weight far beyond a poor review. A matrix that maps the team's capability against what each area requires turns both into something a

manager can see and act on, raising the weak areas deliberately rather than discovering them at service.

— WHAT IT MAPS

Four capability areas a hospitality matrix covers

A hospitality matrix brings four distinct kinds of capability into one view. Each matters to the service, and each carries a different risk if it is thin.

AREA 01

Front-of-house service

Greeting and hosting, table service, pace and order accuracy, upselling. The capabilities that shape how the guest experiences the visit, from welcome to farewell.

AREA 02

Back-of-house kitchen

Food preparation, station execution, ticket flow and timing. The capabilities that decide whether the food arrives right, hot and on time, shift after shift.

AREA 03

Food safety & allergens

Hygiene, safe handling, cross-contamination control and allergen accuracy. Safety-critical and regulated, so these carry the highest required levels on the matrix.

AREA 04

Flex & guest recovery

The bar, multi-section cover, and putting things right when they go wrong. The capabilities that keep a service moving through rushes and recover a guest when it slips.

Reading these together is what makes the matrix powerful. A venue can be wonderful on the floor yet exposed in the kitchen, or technically excellent but unable to recover a guest when a dish is wrong. The matrix shows the **whole shape of a team's capability** across all four areas at once, so a manager can see not just whether the team is good, but whether it is good at the things this service most depends on, and where the safety-critical gaps are hiding.

— THE SCALE BEHIND THE SCORES

The 0 to 5 capability framework

A hospitality matrix needs a clear scale so a rating means the same across the team and over time. This framework, developed by Dr Alex J.

Martin-Smith, provides it. Level 3, works a section unsupervised to standard, is the line at which someone genuinely carries a part of the service.

-
- 0** **Not required for the role** **EXCLUDED**
- The skill is not part of this person's role, for example cellar management for a daytime host. Excluded from their score, not counted as a gap.
-
- 1** **In training / New starter** **WEIGHTING 25%**
- Learning the task under supervision. Up to 75% trained and does not yet fully understand the standard, for example shadowing a section rather than running it.
-
- 2** **Developing** **WEIGHTING 50%**
- More than 75% trained. Can do the task in normal conditions, but is not yet consistent under pressure, so a busy service may still need support.
-
- 3** **Capable** **WEIGHTING 75% · RUNS A SECTION**
- Fully trained, consistent and works unsupervised, runs a section or station to standard through a full service. The level most areas require, and the floor for safety-critical ones.
-
- 4** **Expert / Trainer** **WEIGHTING 100%**
- Prolonged expertise; runs the busiest sections to a high standard, handles escalations and trains others. Where your section leads and senior chefs de partie sit.
-
- 5** **Strategic ownership / Lead** **WEIGHTING 100%**
- Sets standards and method for the service, the head chef or restaurant manager who defines how it is run. The purple flag marks your service leaders.

From individual scores to a team profile

Score each person 0 to 5 on each skill, and the weightings, Level 1 = 25%, 2 = 50%, 3 = 75%, 4 and 5 = 100%, with 0 excluded, give a capability figure. Averaging across the team for each area gives the team's capability in that area, which you can then compare against the level the area requires. For safety-critical areas like allergen handling, set a high required level and read coverage too, not just the average.

A worked example. The team's allergen-handling capability against a high required level:

Allergen handling team capability **55%** vs required **90%**
gap = **35 points** below target on a safety-critical,
regulated area
the biggest, most urgent gap on the profile – train here
first.

— SEE IT AS A PROFILE

The team's capability, *against the target*

Here is a venue team's capability plotted against what the service requires, across the six areas a hospitality matrix maps. The dashed line is the required profile; the filled shape is the team today. Where the filled shape pulls inside the dashed line, the team is short, and the biggest dents are exactly where to focus.



35

point gap on allergen handling, the biggest and most safety-critical dent 2
areas comfortably above target (host and greeting, table service)

Illustrative team profile on the Upleashed 0 to 5 framework, shown as percentages. Position is the team's average capability per area against the required level.

WHAT THE PROFILE SHOWS

- **Front of house is a strength.** Host and greeting (80 vs 75) and table service (85 vs 80) both sit outside the target line. The guest-facing welcome and service are in good shape.
- **Allergen handling is the urgent gap.** At 55 against a required 90, it is the biggest dent and a safety-critical, regulated area. This is the first place to train, without question.
- **Food safety and bar are below target too.** Food safety (70 vs 90) is the second safety-critical shortfall; bar (50 vs 75) is a service gap that will bite at a busy rush.
- **Read coverage as well as the profile.** An average can look healthy while an area rests on one person. Where a section is thin, check how many staff are actually at Level 3+, not just the team average.

Example skills to map by hospitality area

The columns of a hospitality matrix should reflect what your service actually depends on. Here are ready-to-adapt skill lists for the common areas, a starting point to tailor to your venue and menu.

Area	Example skills to map (the columns)	Watch out for
Front-of-house service	Greeting and hosting, table service, pace, order accuracy, upselling	Assuming a good server can also host or run a section unaided
Bar	Drinks and cocktails, wine service, cellar, responsible alcohol service	Leaving the bar single-covered, no one to run it at the rush
Host & reservations	Bookings, seating plan, flow management, phone and guest handling	Treating hosting as anyone's job rather than a real skill
Kitchen / back of house	Prep, each station, ticket flow, timing, cleaning and close-down	Mapping "the kitchen" as one skill when each station differs
Food safety & compliance	Food hygiene, allergen control, cross-contamination, due diligence	Tracking that training happened once, not whether it is current

Take the areas your venue runs, trim each to the vital few skills, and add anything specific to your offer, a particular cuisine, a cocktail programme, a regulated process. Set the safety-critical items, food safety and allergens, at a high required level and keep them current, since an out-of-date food-hygiene or allergen briefing is a gap even when the person is otherwise capable. As always, map enough to be useful and few enough that it stays current through a busy week.

Six mistakes on a hospitality matrix

MISTAKE 01

Mapping only the floor

A matrix that ignores the kitchen sees half the service. Map back of house as carefully as front of house.

MISTAKE 02

Under-rating food safety

Food safety and allergens are safety-critical. Set a high required level and never let a shortfall there sit unaddressed.

MISTAKE 03

Trusting the average alone

A healthy team average can hide a section resting on one person. Read coverage as well as the profile.

MISTAKE 04

One person on the bar

A single-cover bar stalls the moment that person is off. Cross-train so the bar can always be run at the rush.

MISTAKE 05

Letting compliance lapse

An expired food-hygiene or allergen briefing is a gap. Track refresh dates, not just whether training once happened.

MISTAKE 06

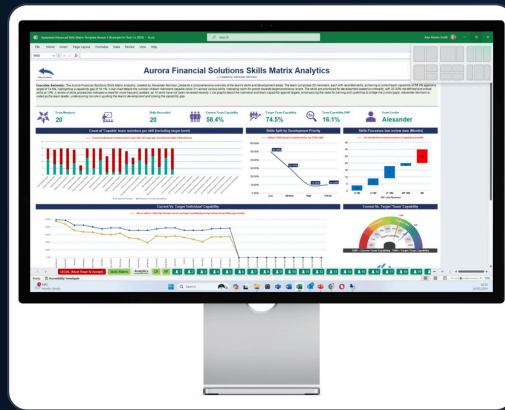
One "kitchen" column

Each station is its own skill. Lumping them together hides exactly the gaps that slow a service down.

— FROM A MANAGER'S HUNCH TO A CLEAR PROFILE

The method is free. A ready-made matrix just makes the *gaps obvious*.

Everything here works in a blank spreadsheet, and that is a fine place to start. A purpose-built template just makes the hospitality view effortless: score staff on the 0 to 5 scale, set the required level for each area, and the matrix shows the team's capability against target and the coverage behind it, so the safety-critical gaps in food safety and allergens, and the thin sections, stand out before a service exposes them.



The Advanced Excel Skills Matrix shows capability against the required level and the coverage behind it, so safety-critical gaps and thin sections are obvious, all on the same 0 to 5 framework used throughout this guide.

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Quick *answers*

Q What is a skills matrix for hospitality?

It is a grid mapping staff against the capabilities a service depends on, across front of house (greeting, table service, bar, guest recovery) and back of house (prep, stations, food safety, allergens), with a level in each cell. Read as a team profile against the levels each area requires, it shows strengths, gaps and risks.

Q Why map both front and back of house?

Because a service needs both. Front of house shapes the guest experience; back of house delivers the food safely and on time. A brilliant floor cannot rescue an unsafe kitchen, and vice versa, so mapping both gives the whole picture of a venue's service capability rather than half of it.

Q How does the matrix handle food safety and allergens?

It treats them as safety-critical. These areas carry the highest required levels on the matrix, kitchen staff typically need a higher food-safety level, and all food handlers need allergen awareness. A shortfall against them is the most urgent gap to close, and the matrix makes it impossible to overlook.

Q What is the capability profile, and what are its limits?

It plots the team's average capability in each area against the level that area requires, so gaps show as the team shape pulling inside the target. Its limit is that an average can hide a single point of failure, an area that looks fine on average but rests on one person, so always read coverage alongside it.

Q What skills should a hospitality matrix include?

The ones your service depends on: front-of-house service, the bar, hosting and reservations, the kitchen stations, and food safety and compliance. Map the vital few per area, set safety-critical items at a high required level, keep them current, and add anything specific to your cuisine or offer.

Q Do I need software for a hospitality skills matrix?

No. A well-built spreadsheet that scores capability and tracks the safety-critical refreshers works well, and is where most venues should start. Software helps when you want a live view across sections or sites, with compliance reminders and a profile that updates automatically as staff train and move on.

— ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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Alex is the creator of the Upleashed capability framework that powers Skills Matrix Template, the award-winning Excel skills matrix. A Chartered Manager with an MBA, an LLM and a doctorate in business administration, he has spent more than two decades helping operations, HR and quality teams turn capability from a gut feel into something they can measure, manage and prove.

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Serve it *right, every shift.*

You now have the hospitality method. The quickest way to start is to list your service areas this week, set the level each one requires, and score the team honestly. The dents in your capability profile, especially in food safety and allergens, are exactly where to train before the next service finds them for you.

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