

# Reflecting on the Future Shaper Journey at CTICC

As Training & Development Manager at the Cape Town ICC, I embarked on the 2025 AIPC Future Shapers program alongside 13 other rising leaders from around the globe. Over seven months of expert-led masterclasses, ideation workshops, and mentorship (a program AIPC describes as an “accelerated leadership course” to propel emerging leaders), I connected with peers and mentors worldwide. In fact, AIPC notes that Future Shapers is an “interactive roadmap” where candidates “accelerate their leadership capabilities” and build a “new global network of peers” a promise I found completely true. By the time our cohort convened in Shenzhen in June 2025 for the final pitches, I had sharpened my skills in teamwork and strategic thinking and forged lasting friendships with industry colleagues on five continents.

## Designing the Synergy Platform

The heart of the program was the Industry Challenge: each small team defined an industry problem and developed a solution with a full business case and white paper. I joined Team *Synergy* with colleagues from Malaysia, Australia, and the United Kingdom, and we focused on solving staffing and communication challenges inside venues. In our **Synergy** platform (laid out in our white paper of the same name), we proposed an AI-driven, cross-functional training and onboarding hub for venue staff. As AIPC later summarised, Synergy is “a cross-functional training and onboarding solution to equip venue staff with diverse, adaptive skills and unlock international career mobility, while reducing staffing pressures and fostering collaboration”. In practice this meant our tool would help all departments share knowledge: for example, an administrator could quickly learn basics of audiovisual setup, or a server could see the sales process breaking down silos and fostering teamwork. We also integrated chat and analytics features so teams could communicate smoothly; as one industry post noted, our concept was “an AI-powered platform... to enhance communication within venue teams and break down departmental silos”.

Our hard work paid off. At the Shenzhen Annual Conference, we presented Synergy to AIPC’s global leadership audience, and it was voted the winning solution for 2025. AIPC’s announcement highlighted that Team Synergy’s idea “for transforming venue operations through cross-functional training and integration stood out for its depth, practicality, and long-term impact”. I am proud that our vision, born from collaborative design sessions and real-world venue experience, resonated so strongly. It demonstrated how inclusive innovation and practical planning can produce a solution that centres on people. In the weeks after, our Synergy white paper has been published for the AIPC community, contributing to a growing body of knowledge; past Future Shapers projects (from workforce platforms to communication tools) are already entering pilot phases, and I hope Synergy will be next.

## Collaboration, Sustainability, and Inclusive Innovation

Working on Synergy taught me that the best ideas emerge when diverse people collaborate. Our team included members from banqueting, AV, IT, training, and marketing. Each of us brought unique insights from our CTICC or partner venues. By co-designing this platform, we embodied the very principles of the solution: we cross-trained one another, learning how other departments saw common challenges. This collaborative design process fostered innovation

that is inclusive by nature, because it requires listening to different voices and adapting to many needs.

It also made me think about sustainability in a broader sense. In the Future Shapers cohort, one team's white paper (Greentrx) focused explicitly on environmental sustainability, helping planners "maximize sustainability and minimize carbon footprint" in events. Our Synergy solution may not be an eco-product, but it contributes to social and operational sustainability: by upskilling staff and encouraging career mobility, we help venues build a resilient workforce and retain talent. This means less turnover and a stronger institutional memory, which in turn enables more sustainable practices on every event. In other words, innovation in our industry must be sustainable both environmentally **and** socially. I am encouraged that AIPC's agenda (as reflected in the Future Shapers white papers) embraces both our work on inclusive staffing ties directly into the industry's wider push for smarter, greener events.

## Leadership Growth and Aspirations

Looking back, this experience has been transformative. I stepped out of my comfort zone again and again, pitching on a global stage, rallying a virtual team over months, and tackling complex challenges. The program's investment in my leadership has been clear: as AIPC predicted, I *have* "accelerate[d] [my] leadership capabilities" and built a global network of peers. I learned to lead by listening, to guide with questions, and to trust in the strength of collective effort. Most importantly, I gained confidence that I can help shape the future of our industry.

As I return to CTICC, I carry these lessons forward. We are already exploring how to pilot parts of our Synergy platform internally, turning concepts into concrete improvements. I remain committed to inclusive innovation, for example, applying cross-department workshops to make our daily operations more integrated, and to sustainability, both in our venue's carbon efforts and in nurturing our people. The Future Shapers journey has taught me that a single idea, crafted collaboratively and courageously, can become a blueprint for change. I look forward to continuing that work at CTICC and beyond, helping the business events industry grow stronger, more collaborative, and more sustainable.

### Key takeaways and next steps:

- **Global Collaboration Accelerates Leadership:** The program brought together 14 rising leaders from around the world. Working side-by-side with international peers did indeed sharpen my leadership skills and expand my perspective, as AIPC promised.
- **Inclusive Design Strengthens Teams:** Developing Synergy reinforced that breaking down silos and cross-training staff builds more resilient operations. We'll continue applying this inclusive approach at CTICC by encouraging departments to learn from each other.
- **Sustainability as a Guiding Principle:** Whether reducing an event's carbon footprint or building an empowered workforce, sustainable thinking must be embedded in innovation. I aspire to champion solutions that make both our venue and the wider industry more sustainable in every sense.

Ultimately, I am grateful for this opportunity to grow with my Future Shapers cohort and excited about what lies ahead. The friendships and skills I gained form a strong foundation, and with colleagues' support, we will keep "shaping" the future together.