



BEYOND RECOVERY: UNEXPECTED SHIFTS IN TRAVEL, HOSPITALITY AND LEISURE LEADERSHIP

Insights from Savannah Group's CEO,
Chair, Investor Lunch Discussion

At a recent Savannah Group lunch for CEOs and Chairs from across the travel, hospitality and leisure sectors, the conversation was as lively as the industry itself. The group represented a cross-section of leadership and ownership models, from FTSE-listed groups and private equity-backed businesses to founder-led brands and investors who have shaped the sector for decades.

What began as a relaxed lunch marking ten years of Savannah's travel, leisure and hospitality Boardroom Lunches turned into a candid discussion about resilience, reinvention and the realities of leading in uncertain times. The themes that emerged were not the usual ones about inflation, cost pressures or labour shortages. Instead, the afternoon revealed a different kind of energy in the room: optimism, curiosity and a willingness to reimagine what leadership looks like after disruption.



The Human Factor in the Age of AI

AI is transforming operations, yet leaders see it as a tool that enhances, not replaces, human potential. At his organisation, up to 90 percent of customer interactions were already handled by AI systems. The discussion centred on how technology can free teams to focus on empathy, creativity and care. AI is seen as a training ally and innovation partner, not a threat.

Private Equity's Contrarian Optimism

Investors described a challenging funding landscape. 'No one wants to invest and no one wants to lend (in the sector),' said the Managing Partner of a leading mid-market PE investor with a deep track record of successful investments across travel and hospitality. Despite the difficulties, several attendees agreed this is exactly when great investments are often made. Lower valuations create opportunities for those with conviction and vision. The group agreed agility, substance and authenticity now matter more than scale and polish.

The CEO UKI of a leading FTSE 20 digital organisation, reflected: 'I've just come back from MIT having my head scrambled by AI. But it's still all about people.'



Consumers Are Still Travelling, But Differently

The CEO of a leading international travel organisation shared that people are still travelling but adjusting their spending. 'They'll stay in a less expensive hotel or take a shorter trip, but they still go.' Confidence, not just income, shapes behaviour. Flexibility and responsiveness are the new competitive advantages.

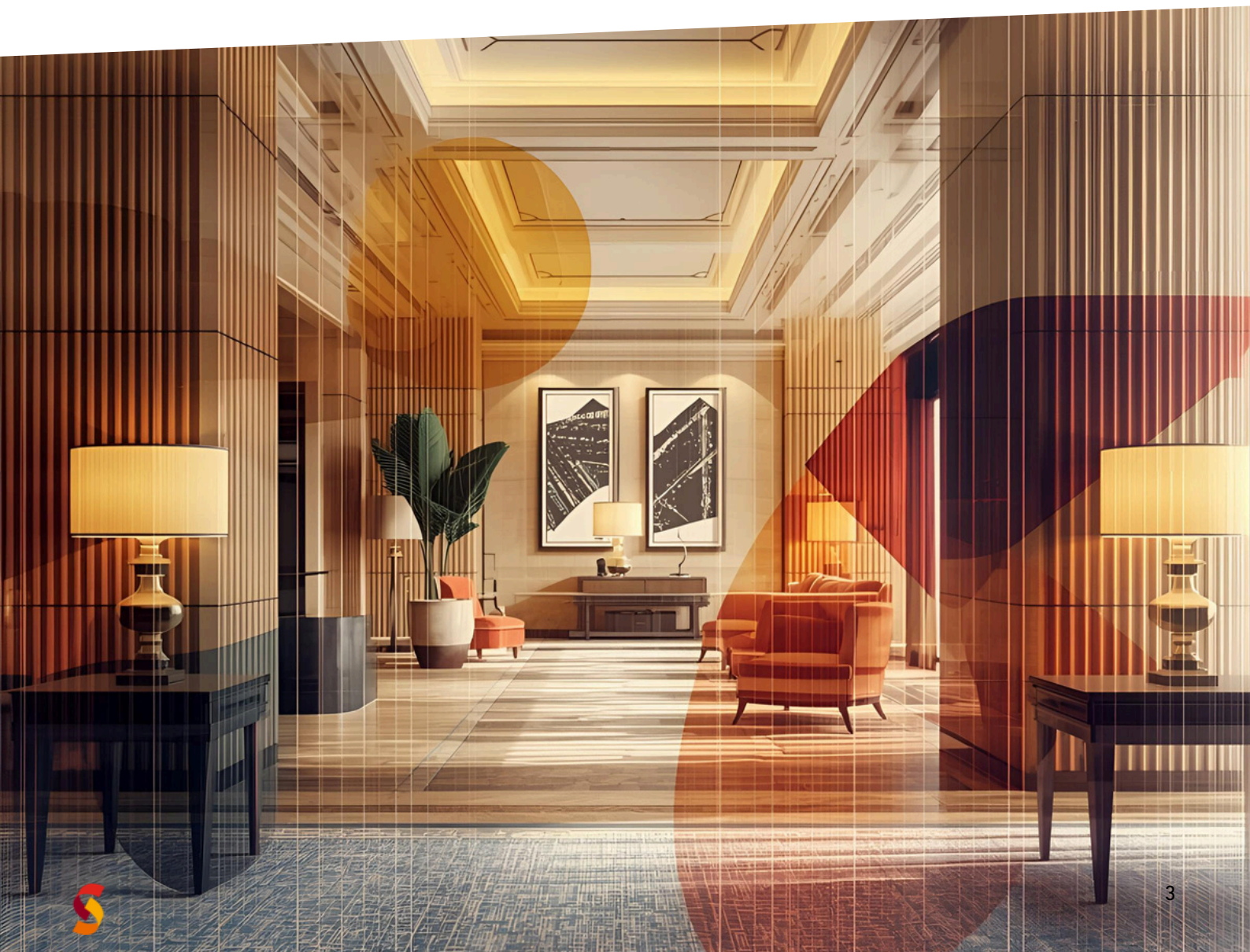
Reinvention Is the Only Constant

Leaders spoke about the sector's endless cycles of reinvention. From managed pubs to experiential venues, adaptability remains its lifeblood. The next wave of growth will come from those who blend creativity with disciplined operations.

Chairs are more hands-on, acting as mentors and guides for entrepreneurial founders.

Chairs Are Becoming Coaches

A serial Chair for SME scale-ups noted that the role of Chair has evolved. 'It depends what they (CEO/ExCO) need, what they want, and what they'll tolerate from you.' The best Chairs know when to step in and when to step back.





The Rise of Purposeful Growth

A serial investor/Chair from the hospitality sector, captured the shift in mindset: 'At this age, you do things that are more interesting than just trying to make money.' Leaders are choosing work that aligns with purpose, creativity and community.

The Unscripted Themes That Stood Out

Several unexpected reflections stood out: Private equity fatigue; optimism about AI; anxiety around retirement; empathy as the true marker of leadership; and humour as a quiet form of resilience.

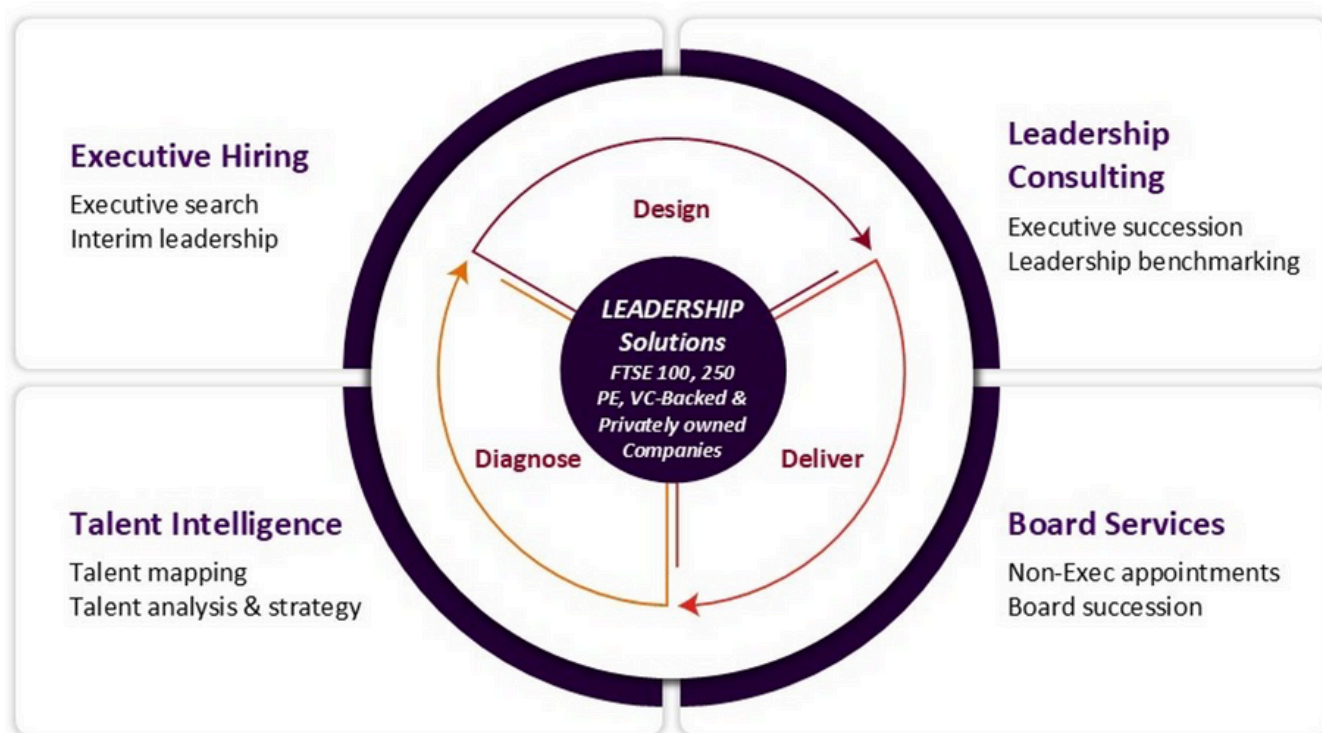
From Recovery to Reinvention

What came through most strongly in this discussion was not caution, but curiosity. The CEOs, Chairs and investors around the table are already building for the next chapter, rather than waiting for better conditions. They recognise that while challenges persist, those same pressures are driving smarter, more imaginative leadership.

For Savannah Group, these insights reaffirm what clients and candidates already know: the leaders who thrive will be those who combine commercial clarity with emotional intelligence, agility and optimism.

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Tim focuses on advising boards across Travel, Hospitality, Leisure, Gaming and the wider Consumer sectors, on building and shaping world-class teams for a range of public, private and PE-backed businesses. He works with clients to deliver solutions including executive search, talent intelligence, succession planning and interim leadership.

Tim's built an exceptional track record with a primary focus on senior management and board level appointments including Chairman, CEO, COO/ Managing Director and functional leaders across marketing, digital, sales, commercial, operations, service, customer experience, procurement and supply chain, both in the UK and internationally.

Savannah Group is a global executive search and leadership advisory firm. We help organisations diagnose leadership needs, design tailored talent strategies, and deliver high-impact results through executive search, interim management, and talent intelligence. Our next generation approach combines deep expertise with data, insight, and pace, powered by MapX, our proprietary AI-enabled leadership analytics platform.