

# LUX FORUM

## Decoding Culture: The Secret Ingredient in Human-Centric Innovation

 **Date**  
May 19<sup>th</sup> 2026

 **Time**  
8:30am – 2:00pm CT

 **JW Marriott Chicago**  
JW Marriott Chicago, 151 W Adams St, Chicago, IL 60603

Time (CT)	Session Description	Presenter(s)
8:30 am – 9:00 am	<b>Welcome &amp; Coffee Networking</b>	
9:00 am – 9:40 am	<p><b>Lux’s Approach to Innovation: Culture as the Hidden Human-Centric Innovation Engine</b></p> <p>How do we design innovations that feel meaningful and relevant when culture is changing faster than our ability to plan and predict?</p> <p>As cultural expectations evolve faster than product cycles, innovation and insight leaders face a growing risk: launching ideas that work technically but miss emotionally. In a world of fragmentation, shifting norms, and rising skepticism, success increasingly depends on understanding how people assign meaning — not just how they behave.</p> <p>This keynote positions culture as the foundation of human-centric innovation, the hidden operating system that shapes how people interpret change, negotiate identity, and decide what feels relevant, credible, and worth adopting. Drawing on ethnographic research and real-world examples, we’ll show why meaning comes before behavior and why decoding that meaning is now essential to building innovations that last.</p> <p>We’ll explore two cultural shifts reshaping expectations — from Diversity &amp; Inclusion to Cultural Fluency and Belonging, and from Sustainability to Resilience — to demonstrate how cultural insight helps organizations anticipate change rather than chase it.</p> <p>This session sets out the strategic foundation for the forum, aligning participants around why human-centric innovation must start with culture and preparing them to move next into practical frameworks, technology-enabled insight, and hands-on creation.</p>	<p><b>Alina Strugut, Ph.D.</b> Research Director</p> <p><b>Cheryl Auger</b> Senior Director</p>

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9:40 am – 10:20 am	<p><b>Getting Practical: Applying a Human-Centric Framework to Accelerate Innovation</b></p> <p>How do you translate cultural understanding into innovation decisions teams can actually act on? Building on the opening discussion of culture as the foundation of human-centric innovation, this session moves from why culture matters to how to operationalize it.</p> <p>Lux introduces its Human-Centric Innovation Framework — a structured, repeatable model that helps organizations move from insight to execution while keeping human meaning at the core. The framework guides teams through three practical phases:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Inspire:</b> Identify culturally grounded opportunities through digital ethnography and Jobs to Be Done analysis, surfacing early signals of momentum to inform ideation.</li><li>• <b>Illuminate:</b> Clarify when, where, and how to act using cultural maturity metrics and lead-consumer profiling to prioritize and position innovation effectively.</li><li>• <b>Ignite:</b> Apply cultural foresight and signals analysis to uncover barriers, adjacencies, and emerging demand spaces — enabling confident expansion into new markets.</li></ul> <p>Through examples from food, personal care, and entertainment, this session shows how a human-centric approach becomes actionable in practice.</p>	<p><b>Derek Gingrich</b> Product Manager</p> <p><b>Matthew Watton, Ph.D.</b> Analyst</p>
10:20 am – 10:50 am	<p><b>Networking Break</b></p>	

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**10:50 am –  
11:30 am**

#### **The Lux Innovation Helix: Permissible Indulgence**

Indulgence is no longer a simple trade-off between pleasure and restraint. Today's consumers still seek enjoyment from food, but those desires coexist with heightened expectations around health, self-control, and emotional well-being. Rather than abandoning treats, consumers are redefining how and when they indulge—giving rise to permissible indulgence: products that deliver pleasure while offering reassurance through portioning, ingredient narratives, functional benefits, or ethical cues.

This shift does not diminish indulgence; it reshapes the problems consumers are trying to solve. Guilt, justification, moderation, and long-term impact have become central tensions across categories such as snacks, confectionery, and frozen treats—exposing a growing disconnect between consumers' emotional needs and how indulgent products are currently designed.

This forum session introduces a Helix framework that identifies and prioritizes the most urgent unmet consumer needs related to permissible indulgence, and evaluates which technologies, ingredients, formats, and capabilities are best positioned to address them. By integrating consumer pain points with technical readiness, the Helix reveals high-potential innovation clusters where real consumer friction intersects with feasible, scalable solutions.

Designed for food and beverage manufacturers, ingredient suppliers, and foodservice leaders, this approach moves beyond assumptions of a universal

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	<p>shift toward “healthier” indulgence. Instead, it provides a structured way to determine where innovation will resonate, where it may backfire, and where investment is most likely to create meaningful consumer pull—both now and in the future.</p> <p>Consumers rely on products and services to make everyday routines easier—but efficiency alone is no longer enough. Today’s solutions must also deliver comfort, familiarity, and a sense of control.</p>	
<b>11:30 am – 11:40 am</b>	<p><b>Inside the Virtual Anthropologist: Bringing Culture to Life Through Data</b></p> <p>During this interactive session, we’ll take a live question from the audience and show, in real time, how we use the Virtual Anthropologist to explore cultural narratives, identify emerging opportunities, and turn human understanding into innovation strategy.</p> <p>The Virtual Anthropologist is our AI-powered platform that uses digital ethnography to uncover the cultural forces shaping consumer behavior. See how it translates millions of real-world conversations into clear, actionable insight — revealing what drives meaning, adoption, and growth.</p>	<p><b>Heather Stevens</b> Client Success Manager</p> <p><b>Tim Ferrone</b> Account Manager</p>
<b>11:40 am – 12:30 pm</b>	<p><b>Pitch Contest: Harnessing Culture to Craft Winning Product Concepts</b></p> <p>Put your creativity to the test in this hands-on innovation challenge.</p> <p>We’ll supply the business challenge, consumer insight,</p>	<p><b>Elena Gorachinova, Ph.D.</b> Analyst</p> <p><b>Pitch Judges TBA</b></p>

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and starter ideas — you'll collaborate in breakout groups to craft concepts that are both strategically sound and emotionally resonant.

The session concludes with a concept showcase, where each team will pitch their idea to our panel of judges — and one will be crowned the winner.

12:30 pm –  
2:00 pm

**Networking Lunch**