PANEL DISCUSSION

DEFY THE F&B ODDS

Ruthless pragmatism and the death of the romanticized kitchen.

24 JULY 2026

Bernard — Founder / JINJJA Chicken

James Leong — Master Franchisee / BingXue Singapore

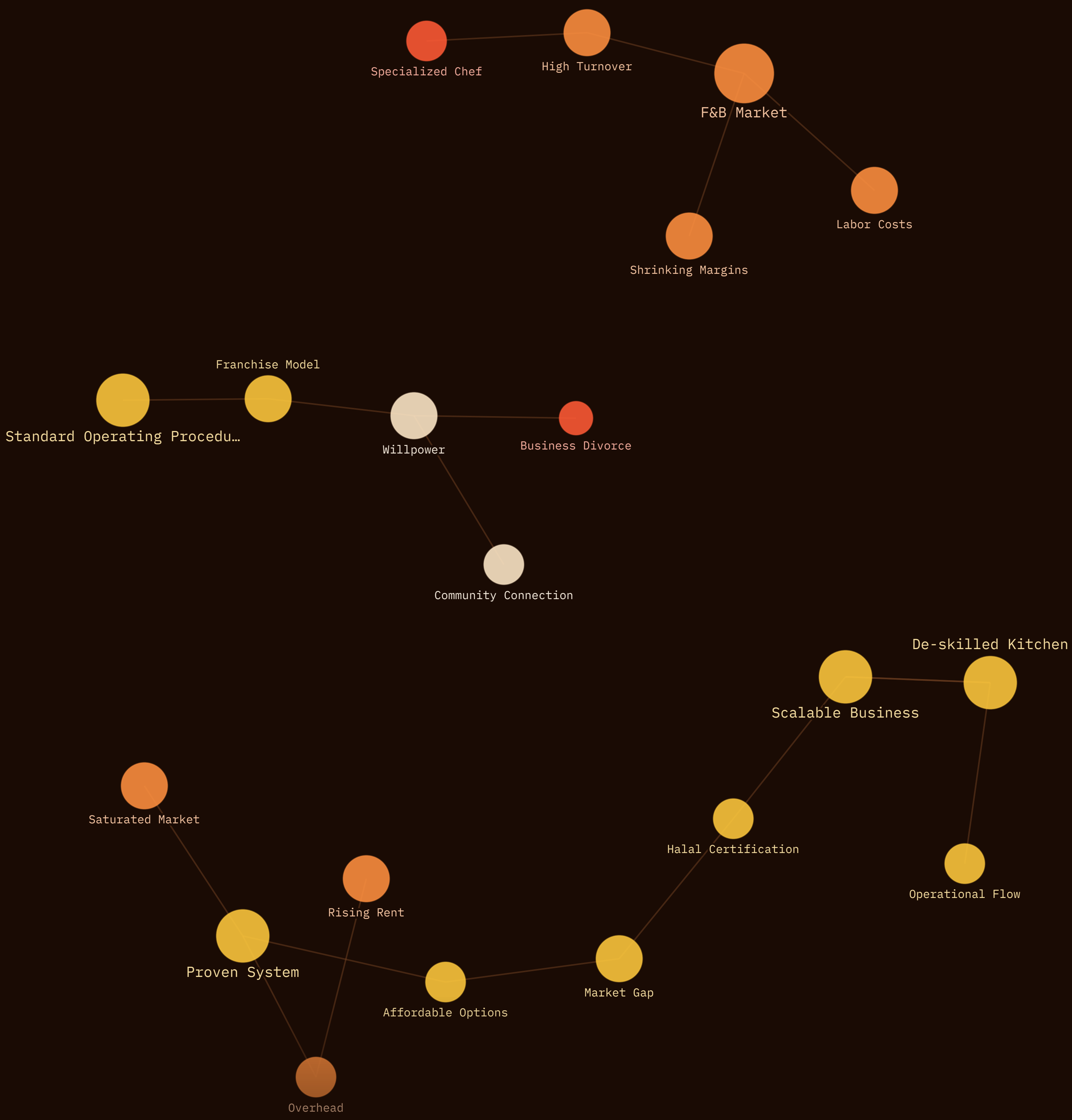
Edy Ongkowijaya — Founder / D'Penyetz

Aloysius — Host/MC

Credence @ UE Square

24 July 2026

CORTEXT BY EVOTIONS



20 CONCEPTS

18 CONNECTIONS

4 CLUSTERS

A conceptual map of how F&B founders strip away sentimentality to engineer scalable survival.

THE PROBLEM-FIRST BRAND RULE | THE OVERSEAS FRANCHISE IMPORT FILTER | THE FRANCHISE SCALING BASELINE

THE ROOM

In a remarkably candid gathering of homegrown F&B operators, the curtain was pulled back on exactly what it takes to build, survive, and scale in Singapore's brutal landscape.

Three founders shared their hard-won blueprints for navigating high turnover, shrinking margins, and the myth of the saturated market.

SPEAKERS

Bernard
Founder / JINJJA Chicken

James Leong
Master Franchisee / BingXue Singapore

Edy Ongkowijaya
Founder / D'Penyetz

Aloysius
Host/MC

THOUGHTS FROM THE ROOM

De-skill to survive

Scale requires surrendering the romance of the kitchen. If your business model relies on a specialized chef, you don't own a scalable business; you own a hostage situation.

Industrialize your survival

Willpower and community will keep you alive on your darkest day, but bulletproof Standard Operating Procedures are what actually build your empire.

Redefine the saturated market

A "saturated market" is usually just a market full of people doing the exact same inefficient things. Find the specific price-to-quality gap, and plug it with a proven system.

CHAPTER 01

Bernard

Founder / JINJJA Chicken

If you want to understand how Bernard built JINJJA Chicken into a formidable empire over the last decade, you have to start with a confession: for the first ten years, he hid.

He didn’t put his face on the brand. He knew the psychology of the Singaporean diner. "When you go to the US and walk into a Chinese restaurant, you expect a Chinese chef," Bernard explained. "If a Chinese chef comes out of a Western restaurant, people might think the brand isn't authentic enough." So, as a local founder slinging Korean fried chicken, he stayed in the shadows. He let the brand do the talking.

But Bernard didn't build JINJJA Chicken just because he liked cooking. He built it because he saw a glaring, unaddressed mathematical problem in the market. Eleven years ago, if you wanted Korean food in Singapore, you had to travel to the enclave in Tanjong Pagar. You had to sit down, and you had to pay a minimum of $25 to $30 a meal. Worse, an entire demographic was locked out: none of it was halal. Bernard didn't just see a cuisine; he saw a massive, underserved gap for affordable, halal-certified Korean fast casual.

> *“When you de-skill a kitchen, you aren't compromising on quality; you are buying invincibility.”*
>
> — BERNARD

But seeing the gap is only step one. Filling it at scale is where most founders bleed out. The traditional restaurant model relies heavily on specialized labor—the temperamental head chef, the trained line cooks. Bernard realized early on that if his expansion relied on hiring highly skilled culinary talent in a market where labor is famously scarce and expensive, he was dead in the water.

So, he ruthlessly de-skilled the kitchen.

This is the part you need to highlight and send to your stubborn business partner who insists everything must be done the artisanal way. Bernard systematically stripped the complexity out of the back-of-house. He engineered a menu and an operational flow that did not require culinary degrees. By utilizing techniques like sous-vide and simplifying the raw materials—focusing heavily on boneless chicken that requires zero intricate butchery or complex prep on-site—he created a plug-and-play kitchen.

When you de-skill a kitchen, you aren't compromising on quality; you are buying invincibility. You are immunizing your business against staff turnover. You are creating a system so standardized that it can be dropped into a new overseas franchise location and run flawlessly by entry-level workers. Combined with the strategic move to secure halal certification, Bernard didn't just open a restaurant. He built a highly scalable, efficiently engineered machine. And he did it by abandoning the myth of work-life balance, accepting that true scale requires total, unapologetic obsession.

BERNARD · CONTINUED

> THE TAKEAWAY
>
> Scale requires surrendering the romance of the kitchen. If your business model relies on a specialized chef, you don't own a scalable business; you own a hostage situation. De-skill to survive.

CHAPTER 02

James Leong

Master Franchisee / BingXue Singapore

When James Leong and his wife Joyce decided to bring BingXue Tea and Ice Cream to Singapore in the third quarter of 2024, the chorus of naysayers was deafening. Everyone told them the exact same thing: *The market is too saturated. It’s too competitive. Don't do it.*

The naysayers had the data to back up their dread. By 2025, the Singapore F&B scene was a bloodbath, with approximately 2,400 F&B outlets shutting their doors for good. The mortality rate is staggering: 63% of concepts do not survive past their fifth year. The twin reapers of this industry—rising rent and escalating labor costs—were swinging their scythes harder than ever.

> *“Nobody really owned the segment that is affordable and good”*
>
> — JAMES LEONG

But James looked past the graveyard and looked at the mechanics. Why were these places failing? Because they were fighting over the exact same crowded middle ground. James and his team saw a distinct, glaring vacuum. "Nobody really owned the segment that is affordable and good," he noted.

Instead of trying to reinvent the wheel in a high-cost environment, James imported a ruthlessly efficient, battle-tested system. BingXue wasn't a hopeful experiment; it was a proven juggernaut with 4,500 shops across China. James recognized that in a market suffocating from overhead, you don't win by being slightly more creative than the guy next door. You win by bringing in a commercial system that has already survived the crucible of a hyper-scale economy.

> THE TAKEAWAY
>
> A "saturated market" is usually just a market full of people doing the exact same inefficient things. Find the specific price-to-quality gap, and plug it with a proven system.

CHAPTER 03

Edy Ongkowijaya

Founder / D'Penyetz

Before you look at Edy Ongkowijaya's current empire—142 D'Penyetz outlets sprawled across seven different countries—you have to look at the wreckage he crawled out of to get there.

Edy has lived the darkest nightmares of the F&B industry. He didn't just fail; he flopped three separate times. He navigated the bitter sting of betrayal, endured being backstabbed, and went through a devastating business divorce that left him stripped down to the studs. He had to start over from absolute zero.

> *"The most important thing is your will. You can have the best product, but without the will to overcome your downfalls, it's useless."*
>
> — EDY ONGKOWIJAYA

At his lowest point, Edy was staring at a bank balance of exactly $600. The towel was in his hand; he was ready to throw it in. But then, something extraordinary happened—something that proves that while systems scale a business, profound community connection saves it. His regular customers, the people who had tasted his grit alongside his food, pulled together $40,000 to bail him out and help him start again.

That $40,000 was a lifeline, but it wasn't a business model. Edy knew that willpower and a good product had kept him alive, but they wouldn't build an empire. To ensure he never ended up with $600 in his bank account again, he had to industrialize his survival.

He turned his attention to franchising, which meant a relentless focus on Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs). He documented every single step of the Ayam Penyet process. He realized that to expand across borders, he had to provide more than just a brand name; he had to provide an airtight, foolproof support system for his franchisees. "The most important thing is your will," Edy reflected. "You can have the best product, but without the will to overcome your downfalls, it's useless."

> THE TAKEAWAY
>
> Willpower and community will keep you alive on your darkest day, but bulletproof Standard Operating Procedures are what actually build your empire.

SAVE THIS · FRAMEWORKS

The Problem-First Brand Rule

Bernard (JINJJA Chicken)

1. **Reject the Passion Trap**
   Do not start a brand simply because you know how to cook; start a brand to solve a specific market problem.
2. **Identify the Gap**
   Look for specific demographic or accessibility voids in the current market (e.g., a lack of affordable, halal options).
3. **Analyze the Incumbents**
   Evaluate where existing options are clustered and how they are priced (e.g., concentrated in Tanjong Pagar with a $25–$30 minimum spend).
4. **Solve the Equation**
   Build your concept specifically to undercut the incumbents' pricing and location constraints, making the product highly accessible.

USE IT WHEN — You need to align stubborn co-founders or chefs on abandoning a "passion project" mentality in favor of a pragmatic, scalable business model.

The Overseas Franchise Import Filter

James Leong (BingXue)

1. **Find the Local Void**
   Identify a specific segment in the local market that nobody currently owns (e.g., the intersection of "affordable" and "good").
2. **Verify the Overseas System**
   Ensure the concept relies on a heavily proven, massively scaled system in its home market (e.g., 4,500 shops in China) to mitigate operational risks.
3. **Layer Local Expertise**
   Combine the proven overseas operational system with your own local commercial experience to survive the primary local killers: rising rent and labor costs.

USE IT WHEN — Evaluating whether to bring an established foreign F&B brand into a hyper-competitive, high-cost market like Singapore.

SAVE THIS · FRAMEWORKS · CONTINUED

The Franchise Scaling Baseline

Edy Ongkowijaya (D'Penyetz)

1. **Prioritize Will over Product**
   Acknowledge that having the "best product" is useless without the founder's resilience to survive early failures, betrayals, and financial ruin.
2. **Standardize SOPs**
   Lock down standard operating procedures so the product and daily operations are entirely independent of the original founder or specialized chefs.
3. **Build the Support System**
   Establish proper, ongoing support mechanisms and infrastructure for incoming franchisees before expanding.

USE IT WHEN — Transitioning a surviving independent F&B concept into a standardized, multi-country franchise model.

PARTNERS AND SPONSORS

Bernard · James Leong · Edy Ongkowijaya · Aloysius

DEFY THE F&B ODDS

at Credence @ UE Square

Powered by Cortext — a system that makes panels and discussions visual and shareable, on site and post event.

POWERED BY CORTEXT