

## Exploratory Study of Soft Skills in Tourism and Hospitality Sector: Perspectives of Hotels and Travel Agencies Managers

Mariam Samy Zekry<sup>1</sup>

Mahmoud Ali Moussa<sup>2</sup>

Mahmoud Ahmed Salama<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Department of Tourism Studies, Faculty of Tourism and Hotels, Suez Canal University, Ismailia (41522), Egypt; Correspondent Author, Email:

[mariam\\_zekry@tourism.suez.edu.eg](mailto:mariam_zekry@tourism.suez.edu.eg)

<sup>2</sup> Educational Psychology department, Faculty of Education, Suez Canal University, Ismailia (41522), Egypt; Email: [mahmoud\\_muhanna@edu.suez.edu.eg](mailto:mahmoud_muhanna@edu.suez.edu.eg)

<sup>1</sup> Department of Hotel Management, Faculty of Tourism and Hotels, Suez Canal University, Ismailia (41522), Egypt; Email: [mahmoud.salama@tourism.suez.edu.eg](mailto:mahmoud.salama@tourism.suez.edu.eg)

### Abstract:

Tourism industry needs people with effective soft skills. These are basic skills to efficient performance across all types of jobs. Many stakeholders find a gap in the graduate's performance because of lack of soft skills. This research aims to determine the required soft Skills for staff in the Tourism and hospitality sector, evaluate the most important soft skills required in Tourism and hospitality sector in Egypt and determine the soft skills differences between tourism and Hospitality sector from hotels and travel agencies managers perspectives. A total of 295 questionnaires were distributed (190 hotel managers (general managers, human resources, and training managers) represented 64,4% from the total population and 105 travel agencies managers represented 35.6% from the total population). The participants are from Great Cairo and Sharm Elsheikh. Results indicated that the Core and Special skills were the same scores in weighted means. Soft skills differ from the perspectives of hotels and travel agencies managers in special and managerial soft skills scores, this means that hotels care about these skills during selecting and recruiting. The study recommends that educational institutions should focus on developing students with soft skills such as communication, planning, problem-solving, and leadership.

**Keywords:** Soft Skills, Recruitment, Hotels, Travel Agencies

### 1. Introduction:

Soft skills are the subject of ongoing interest in studies linking tourism, hotel services, and social psychology. For example, it is defined as a set of cognitive beliefs and essential, social, and practical knowledge that is dynamically activated and manifested in performance (Jardim et al., 2022). Soft skills are assistive skills that enhance communication and job performance (Boudreau et al., 2022). These are essential skills for recruitment processes (Mishra, 2014).

Magalhães et al. (2022) linked emotional intelligence and soft skills for hotel workers and identified many of these skills, including the relationships between personality, flexibility, and digital competencies. Moussa (2021) asserted that it is the employment of emotions in the workplace and focusing on them as a feature that serves the productive or promotional advantage of the place. Soft skills refer to organizing thoughts and focusing on behavior in the event of repair and management of emotion. Soft skills are adaptive skills in the workplace to achieve an organizational goal (Boudreau et al., 2022). Silva et al. (2022) describe it as a set of competencies that qualify to work in hospitality management.

## **2. Literature review and research motivation:**

Azizullah et al. (2014) revealed that taking responsibility is the minimum personal competency, high levels of self-esteem, social intelligence, and working effectively within a participatory work team are the most distinguished soft skills for tourism work, especially for new workers. Hospitality skills require creative decision-making, flexibility in solving problems, no matter how unexpected they are, finding positive ways to accommodate customers' problems, and offering management skills that include positive and strategic thinking, saber thinking, and emotional intelligence traits that seek to work with professional and ethical norms and traditions and achieves the best leadership skills. Unlike hard skills, they are tangible skills related to operating systems and language skills, which are learned skills (Shabeer & Sharma, 2019). Personal characteristics are the basis for motivation, leadership, and behaviors necessary for success in the hotel and tourism business. Hospitality managers need to possess these vital skills to develop performance and advance hotels and tourism businesses (Weber & Crawford, 2020).

Although higher education is highly regarded, it focuses on academic skills without the courses that enhance the graduate's competitiveness in obtaining soft skills. Therefore, it is expected that it is the responsibility of the graduate to acquire soft skills and go a long way in enhancing his chances of self-employment. Among the most important skills that improve job opportunities are verbal and non-verbal communication skills and managerial skills such as planning, organizing work, administrative creativity, and solving problems in innovative ways (Singh & Jaykumar, 2019). Soft skills are directly related to psychological resilience, prosperity, and employability, and vocational training which increases psychological capital, which is reflected in professional success according to the needs of tourism and hospitality industry (Rao, 2014). Soft skills improve productivity, tourism promotion, professionalism, and entrepreneurship (Fadel et al., 2021). Freiman et al. (2016) emphasized the integration of digital skills for workers to provide a kind of adaptation that depends on solving problems, changing policies, and linking to global databases to keep pace with the

changes of the times. Almeida and Buzady (2022); Sani (2019); Stek (2022) believe that it is a set of strategic thinking skills in the workplace to find flexible ways of management, improve psychological flexibility, find channels of communication between levels of workers, manage conflicts, and activate emotional intelligence as a trait.

### **Tourism and Hospitality Soft Skills:**

The study attempted to do a content analysis in relation to soft skills in the areas of management, trade, tourism studies, social sciences, and entrepreneurship. The study reached agreement on the description of the following skills

Table 1. Content analysis of soft skills according to previous studies

<b>Skills</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Authors</b>
<b>Communication</b>	It is a Personal and social skill used in achieving verbal channels of communication with customers or other non-verbal channels to deal with the management staff to improve the service provided in an unaware way to the customer.	Klein (2009)
<b>Flexibility</b>	It is a kind of negotiation skill in an atmosphere dominated by positive thinking between managers and employees to solve problems diplomatically and find ways to develop effectively. It includes ways of participatory decision-making in a way that suits the nature of work for all segments of workers in hospitality and tourism sector.	Vaari (2015)
<b>Commitment</b>	Commitment to work procedures and passion for the procedures of the profession, and achieving work rules that oblige everyone to preserve the uniqueness of the foundation and to show its characteristics well.	Stek (2022)
<b>Decision Making</b>	The ability to make decisions to achieve goals proactively, which increases work efficiency	Succi (2018)
<b>Leadership</b>	The ability to create a competitive environment to achieve goals and provide rewards for distinguished work methods and find patterns of obstetric and transformational leadership in order to achieve the competitive advantage of the organization and provide ways to stimulate career transformation for workers in the tourism sector to contribute effectively to achieving the goals.	Haselberger et al. (2012)
<b>Teamwork</b>	It is a kind of elaborate work that provides workers with the completion of the largest number of tasks efficiently and effectively, and it is a kind of unintentional mastery for new workers in the	Sharma & Singh (2020)

	tourism fields, as it is an indirect experience to acquire work skills, learn about the different roles of different jobs, and identify work problems.	
<b>Problem-Solving</b>	Problem-solving skills include defining the problem, proposing solutions, and implementing them, following up on solving the problem, evaluating the results, and ensuring customer satisfaction	Arensdorf (2009)
<b>Customer Service</b>	It requires management to provide people with high levels of emotional intelligence, dialogue ability, flexibility in problem-solving, perseverance, and psychological resilience. The nature of customer service requires patience and persuasion skills as one of the necessary marketing strategies for any organization to achieve customer satisfaction and loyalty.	Ali et al. (2018); Sani (2019)
<b>Organizational Skills</b>	It is a type of declared task and a binding job description for each category of workers to determine the minimum professional and personal competencies required for work to allow commitment to workloads, reduce job conflict and occupational pressures and carry out tasks in a positive and effective manner.	Anderson et al. (2008)
<b>Professional Ethics</b>	They are the reference frameworks and organizational rules that regulate acceptable behavior in the workplace and define standards of ethical commitment that allow positive cooperation behavior among employees to ensure job satisfaction and workmanship within institutions.	Vasanthakumari (2019)
<b>Time Management</b>	Time management refers to dividing your time between specific activities which enables you to work effectively so that you can achieve more in less time. The Failure to manage time causes stress and damage work effectiveness.	Vasanthakumari (2019)
<b>Creativity</b>	It is a process of finding alternative solutions for the problems and changing concepts and perceptions to think outside the box.	Henrickson et al. (2022)
<b>Conflict Resolution</b>	It is a kind of facilitating the peaceful ending of conflict between employees.	Vasanthakumari (2019)
<b>Negotiation Skills</b>	Negotiation skills require finding channels between employees and management to improve the work environment and other channels between managers and customers to improve the service provided and the image of the institution constantly. Negotiation skills require flexibility	Haselberger et al. (2012)

	and finding links between all opinions to achieve goals in a way that satisfies all parties.	
<b>Digital Skills</b>	One of the twenty-first-century skills needed to prepare leaders. It is one of the lifelong learning skills, using knowledge and navigating it to solve problems and improve work policies.	Freiman et al. (2016); Makri & Vlachopoulos (2019)
<b>Strategic Thinking</b>	It is a set of economic skills and successful management competencies that focus on improving the work environment and providing means of development. These skills are activated in the presence of available digital skills.	Almeida & Buzady (2022); Sani (2019); Vasilieva (2022)

### Statement of the problem:

Soft skills receive more attention as stakeholders often report that employees lack these skills. Educational institutions are often blamed for this lack of skills. Employees' withdrawal from work may be due to negative feedback from stakeholders, and they reflect poor soft skills when recruiting, selecting, and training practices (Hurrell, 2016). Today, many stakeholders find a gap in the graduate's performance as a result of theoretical preparation that does not qualify him to work in the tourism and hospitality sector due to his lack of soft skills (Shabir and sharma, 2019). Soft skills are essential skills for any individual to excel in the tourism and hospitality industry. This is one of the first studies that relied on the opinions of hotel and travel agencies managers in assessing the soft skills required for staff to improve hospitality and tourism sector performance.

### Research objectives:

1. Determine required soft Skills for staff in the tourism and hospitality sector.
2. Determine the Soft Skills differences between tourism and Hospitality sector from the perspectives of hotels and travel agencies managers.

### Methodology:

- 2.1. **Participants:** Hotels and travel agencies managers were selected randomly. A total of 295 questionnaires were distributed (190 hotel managers (general managers, human resources, and training managers) represented 64,4% from the total population and 105 travel agencies managers represented 35.6% from the total population). The participants are from Great Cairo and Sharm Elsheikh. Great Cairo

concluded 10 hotels and 15 travel agencies while Sharm Elsheikh concluded 25 hotels and 7 travel agencies.

2.2. **The social skills scale:** 27 items distributed on three components. Core soft skills (items 1 to 8) describe essential skills required to work in tourism and hospitality sector; special soft skills subscale (items from 9 to 16) confirms the ability to solve problems in workplace and to be flexible with colleagues. The managerial soft skills subscale (items from 17 to 27) refers to organizational and negotiation skills. The internal consistency calculated by Cronbach's alpha for all items was .929. alpha coefficients for subscales were .64, .65, and .94 respectively.

2.3. **Design:** Cross-sectional design was used in the study because of its suitability for research motivation.

2.4. **Procedures:** IBM SPSS v. 20 was used to analyze the descriptive statistics and test the significant differences in soft skills such as leadership, time management, and communication skills required for staff working in hotels and travel agencies. LISREL software 8.8 version was used to verify the CFA Three-model construct validation in Egyptian Society. The goodness of fit for good CFA model indices as RMSEA (value ranged from .05 to .08), GFI, NNFI, AGFI (upper than or equal to .90), SRMR (nearby zero value), and  $X^2$  (not significant value).

2.5. **Results:**

2.5.1. **Demographic data profile:** Demographic distribution of participants performed by frequency as the following:

Table 2. demographic analysis of participants.

Tourism sector	Frequencies	Percentage
<b>Hotels managers</b>	190	64.4%
General managers	23	7.8%
Human resources managers	100	33.8%
Training managers	67	22.6%
<b>Travel agencies managers</b>	105	35.6%
<b>Total</b>	295	100%

Table (2) demonstrates that 100 respondents representing 33.8% of research sample were human resources managers, 67 respondents representing 22.6% were training

managers, 23 respondents representing 7.8% were general managers, while 105 respondents representing 35.6% of research sample were travel agencies managers.

2.5.2. *Descriptive statistics*: descriptive indices performed to describe soft skills subscales, the results as the following:

Table 3. descriptive statistics of soft skills subscale.

Indices	Core skills	Special skills	Managerial skills	Soft skills
Mean	38.23	38.09	50.53	126.87
Weighted mean	4.78	4.76	4.59	4.69
Median	39	39	53	131
Variance	6.62	5.70	35.84	100.82
Skewness	-2.39	-1.72	-2.01	-1.95
Kurtosis	8.27	3.10	5.54	4.87

Table (3) indicates that the Core and Special skills were the same scores in weighted means, which means that they are significant and basic skills for selecting and recruiting candidates for working in hotels and travel agencies. Managerial skills are the highest in the mean value, which indicates that they are required skills for promotions and competitive advantage. Managerial skills had an upper variance, which means that there were inflated individual differences in organizational culture.

**Construct validity of soft skills scale:**

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) has been performed for the soft skills construct. The maximum likelihood method was selected, and the three-factor model was tested among the overall participants of hotels and travel agencies managers. The goodness of fit indices is as the following:

Table 4. soft skills construct goodness of fit.

Index	RMSEA	X <sup>2</sup>	GFI	NNFI	SRMR	AGFI
value	.22	4767.5*	.93	1	.011	.92

The results showed that the model has the best fitting among GFI, NNFI, SRMR, and AGFI. The factor item loadings are as the following:

Table 5. factor item loading for soft skills construct.

factor	Items	Item loadings	Std. error	t-value
Core soft skills	1. Commitment	-.007	.021	-.33
	2. Hospitality	.19	.020	9.50
	3. Customer focus	.32	.023	14.09
	4. Effective communication	.054	.020	2.79

	5. Teamwork	.69	.027	25.72
	6. Passion towards work	.65	.026	25.02
	7. Social responsibility	.80	.030	26.29
	8. Environment consciousness	.12	.020	6.28
Special soft skills	9. work performance during stress context	.61	.021	29.36
	10. Effective performance	.48	.020	24.17
	11. Problem-solving	.70	.021	33
	12. Psychological Flexibility with colleagues	.74	.021	34.96
	13. emotional intelligence	.45	.020	22.20
	14. learning skills	.68	.021	32.48
	15. Patience with fussy tourists	.48	.020	23.68
	16. Digital skills	.57	.020	27.70
Managerial soft skills	17. Decision making	.86	.022	38.84
	18. Employee motivation	.88	.021	42.67
	19. Team care	.76	.020	37.73
	20. Conflict management	.87	.020	42.36
	21. Time management	.68	.020	34.09
	22. Leadership	.81	.020	39.73
	23. Creativity	.77	.020	37.92
	24. Organizational skills	.66	.020	32.98
	25. Critical thinking	.71	.020	35.61
	26. Negotiation skills	.88	.021	42.62
	27. Strategic thinking	.87	.021	42.63

**Core skills:** the item factor loading of item no. 1 was shrunk because managers do not care about commitment during the interview because commitment is an acquired habit in workplace systems.

**Special skills:** it concluded psychological, digital, emotional, and behavioral practices. Item factor loadings ranged from .45 to .74. It was mild loadings and normal skills as required by competitiveness systems. The mild loadings of items reflect the importance of Psychological Flexibility with colleagues and problem solving skills in hotels and travel agencies.

**Managerial skills:** These contained organizational, leadership and Negotiation skills. The item factor loadings ranged from .66 and .88, which are moderate and high loadings. The higher loadings of items reflect that hotels and travel agencies require managerial skills such as strategic and critical thinking to have competitive consideration.

2.5.3. *Differences between hotels and travel agencies managers’ soft skills:*

An Independent sample t-test was used to test statistical differences between hotels and travel agencies managers’ soft skills. The results as the following:

Table 6. differences between hotels and travel agencies managers in soft skills subscales.

Components	Tourism sector	n	Mean	Std.	t	df	Sig.
Core skills	travel agencies	105	38.12	2.87	1.42	293	.157 No Sig.
	Hotels	190	28.50	1.69			
Special skills	travel agencies	105	37.97	2.65	4.14	293	.000 Sig.
	Hotels	190	38.77	1.44			
Managerial skills	travel agencies	105	50.06	6.50	2.52	293	.012 Sig.
	Hotels	190	51.66	4.38			
Soft skills overall	travel agencies	105	125.97	10.96	2.83	293	.005 Sig.
	Hotels	190	128.94	6.98			

There were statistically significant differences between hotels and travel agencies managers in special skills, Managerial, and soft skills overall scores in favor of hotels. The mean score for subscales as the following:

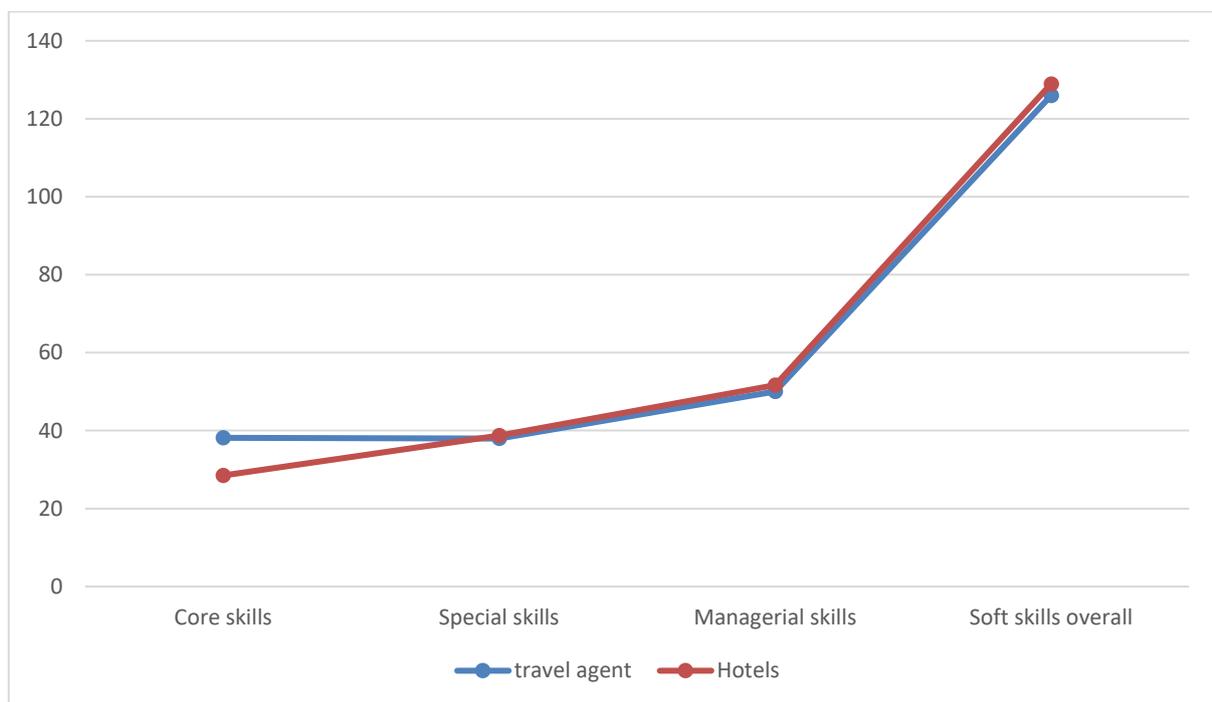


Figure 1. the diagram of soft skills subscales achieved.

The diagram shows that soft skills differ from the perspectives of hotels and travel agencies managers in special and managerial soft skills scores; this means that hotels care about these skills during selecting and recruiting

because of dealing with fussy customers and the multiple departments whose goal is to satisfy tourists, but travel agencies have small numbers of employees and limited departments. However, travel agencies care about core soft skills to encourage teamwork and effective communication between employees.

## 2.6. Discussion:

The results indicated that the core and special skills were the same scores in weighted means. The core subscale was more increasing variance than special skills. Soft skills differ from the perspectives of hotels and travel agencies managers in special and managerial soft skills scores, this means that hotels care about these skills during selecting and recruiting.

The study findings are consistent with Azizullah et al. (2014) who revealed that hospitality skills require creative decision-making, flexibility in solving problems, no matter how unexpected they are, finding positive ways to accommodate customers' problems, and offering management skills that include positive and strategic thinking, saber thinking, and emotional intelligence traits that seek to work with professional and ethical norms and traditions and achieves the best leadership skills. Also, Singh and Jaykumar (2019) asserted that the most important skills that improve job opportunities are verbal and non-verbal communication skills and managerial skills such as planning, organizing work, administrative creativity, and solving problems in innovative ways.

Moreover, the study results indicate that travel agencies care about core soft skills, this finding aligns with Majid et al. (2012) who indicated that employees such as tour leader , marketing manager and sales person who communicate with customers and stakeholders need more soft skills than the others in back office jobs like auditors and accountants.

Singh and Jaikumar (2019) noted that higher education is highly regarded but creates a gap in providing employment opportunities for graduates. Therefore, students are expected to develop soft skills that will help them enhance their employment opportunities. The research supported the importance of soft skills inclusion in the tourism and hospitality industry. Developing the personal skills is necessary for tourism and hospitality, improving the services provided, and studying the methods through which these skills can be developed. Educational institutions should focus on developing students with soft skills such as communication, planning, problem-solving, and leadership. Moreover, Hotels and Travel agencies

should provide soft skills training for the new and current employees to enhance the work environment and increase productivity.

**Credit author statement:** Mariam Samy contributed to the idea, reviewing, and data collection, Mahmoud Salama contributed to the literature review and methodology, and Mahmoud Moussa contributed to the conclusion and psychological perspective effects and data analysis.

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**Informed consent:** All procedures followed were following the ethical standards of the responsible committee on human experimentation (institutional and national) and the Helinski Declaration of 2013. Informed consent was obtained from all participants to doing included in the study orally.

**Data availability:** The raw data supporting the conclusion of this article will be available upon request to the corresponding author.

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**ORCID:**

Mahmoud Ahmed Salama (ORCID ID: 0000-0002-2570-0500)

Mahmoud Ali Moussa (ORCID ID: 0000-0002-5611-1792)

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## واقع المهارات الناعمة بالقطاع السياحي والفندقي من وجهة نظر المديرين: دراسة استكشافية

د. مريم سامي زكري	د. محمود على موسى	د. محمود أحمد سلامه
قسم الدراسات السياحية	قسم علم النفس التربوي	قسم إدارة الفنادق
كلية السياحة و الفنادق	كلية التربية	كلية السياحة و الفنادق
جامعة قناة السويس	جامعة قناة السويس	جامعة قناة السويس

### ملخص:

تعد المهارات الناعمة هي مهارات أساسية لتحقيق الأداء الفعال في جميع أنواع الوظائف. ويجد العديد من أصحاب العمل فجوة في أداء الخريجين نتيجة لنقص تلك المهارات. ويهدف البحث إلى تحديد المهارات الناعمة المطلوبه للعمل بقطاعي السياحة والضيافة في مصر وتقييم المهارات الأكثر أهمية. وتحديد الاختلافات بين المهارات الناعمة المطلوبه للقطاع السياحي والقطاع الفندقي من وجهة نظر مديري شركات السياحة ومديري الفنادق. تكونت عينه البحث من 295 فرد من مديري شركات السياحة ومديري الفنادق بالقاهرة الكبرى وشرم الشيخ، حيث بلغ عدد مديري الفنادق (190) وهو ما يمثل 64,4% من حجم العينه بينما بلغ عدد مديري شركات السياحة (105) وهو ما يمثل 35,6%. أشارت نتائج البحث إلى أن المهارات الناعمة تختلف بين القطاع السياحي والقطاع الفندقي فيما يتعلق بالمهارات الخاصة والمهارات الإدارية وذلك من وجهة نظر مديري شركات السياحة ومديري الفنادق. وهذا يعني أن الفنادق تهتم بهذه المهارات أثناء الاختيار والتعيين بينما تهتم شركات السياحة بالمهارات الأساسية لتشجيع العمل الجماعي والتواصل الفعال بين الموظفين. وتوصى الدراسة بضرورة اهتمام معاهد وكليات السياحة والفنادق بتزويد الطلاب بالمهارات الناعمة اللازمة للعمل في القطاع السياحي والفندقي مثل مهارات التواصل والتخطيط وحل المشكلات ومهارات القيادة

**الكلمات الدالة:** المهارات الناعمة؛ الفنادق؛ وكالات السياحة والسفر؛ المهارات الإدارية.