IIP International Multidisciplinary Research Journal
IIPIMRJ

An Online Peer-Reviewed / Refereed Journal

Vol: 03 No. Issue I, (January-March) (2026)
Impact Factor: GSRD-IF: 5.001
ISSN: 3049-2734 (Online)

Changing Scenario of Soft Skills in the Hospitality Industry

Dr. Sumedha Naik

Associate Professor, S. K. Patil Sindhudurg Mahavidyalaya, Malvan, Dist. Sindhudurg

Article Info

Article History:
Received: 31st Dec 2025
Accepted: 15th Jan 2026
Published: 22nd Jan 2026

Keywords:

Soft skills, hospitality industry, skill gap, workforce development, service quality, employment

ABSTRACT

The hospitality industry is a highly service-intensive sector in which employee behaviour plays a decisive role in determining customer satisfaction and organisational performance. Traditionally, soft skills such as communication, courtesy, teamwork, and service orientation were considered sufficient for effective service delivery. However, rapid changes driven by digitalisation, globalisation, workforce diversity, and post-pandemic restructuring have significantly altered the nature and scope of soft skills required in the industry. This study analyses the changing scenario of soft skills in the hospitality industry using secondary data sourced from international organisations, skill councils, industry reports, and academic literature. Adopting a descriptive and analytical approach, the study examines emerging soft skill requirements and identifies major gaps between employer expectations and workforce preparedness. The findings reveal a clear redefinition of hospitality soft skills, with increasing emphasis on advanced behavioural and emotional competencies such as emotional intelligence, adaptability, cross-cultural communication, and stress management. The study concludes that addressing these evolving requirements through policy interventions, curriculum reforms, and industry-led training initiatives is essential for improving service quality and ensuring sustainable workforce development in the hospitality sector.

Copyright © 2026 The Author(s). This is an open access article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution License, (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/) which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

How to Cite: Naik, S. (2026). Changing Scenario of Soft Skills in the Hospitality Industry. *IIP: International Multidisciplinary Research Journal (IIPIMRJ)*, 3(1), 123–128.

Introduction

The hospitality industry plays a significant role in global economic development by generating employment, promoting tourism, and contributing to regional growth. As a service-oriented sector, hospitality relies heavily on direct interaction between employees and guests. Unlike manufacturing industries, where output quality is largely determined by technology and processes, service quality in hospitality is shaped primarily by human behaviour, emotional engagement, and interpersonal interaction. Consequently, soft skills have long been recognised as a foundational component of effective hospitality operations.

Traditionally, soft skills in hospitality were associated with polite communication, courteous behaviour, teamwork, and basic customer service abilities. These competencies were largely sufficient in relatively stable service environments characterised by standardised service procedures and predictable guest expectations. However, the contemporary hospitality industry has undergone substantial transformation due to globalisation, technological advancement, changing consumer preferences, and increasing workforce mobility. The COVID-19 pandemic further accelerated these changes by disrupting labour markets, intensifying employee stress, and reshaping service delivery models.

In the post-pandemic context, hospitality organisations increasingly face labour shortages, high employee turnover, and elevated guest expectations for personalised, responsive, and efficient service. As a result, employers now seek employees who are not only technically competent but also emotionally intelligent, adaptable, and capable of managing complex service interactions. The expansion of digital platforms, multicultural workplaces, and sustainability-oriented practices has further broadened the range of soft skills required in hospitality employment.

Against this background, the present study examines the evolving nature of soft skills in the hospitality industry through an analysis of secondary data. By synthesising insights from international labour organisations, industry reports, and skill gap studies, the paper aims to develop a comprehensive understanding of changing soft skill requirements and persistent workforce challenges.

2. Objectives

- To analyse changes in soft skill requirements in the hospitality industry using secondary data.
- To identify major soft skill gaps highlighted in industry and skill development reports.

3. Hypothesis

H_1: There has been a significant shift in soft skill requirements in the hospitality industry from traditional interpersonal skills to advanced behavioural and emotional competencies.

H_2: Secondary data consistently indicate the presence of substantial soft skill gaps between employer expectations and workforce preparedness in the hospitality industry.

4. Research Methodology

The study is descriptive and analytical in nature, focusing on identifying trends and patterns related to soft skill requirements in the hospitality industry. It relies exclusively on secondary data collected from authentic and reliable sources, including reports published by international organisations, national skill councils, industry bodies, and academic researchers.

The study covers secondary data published between 2019 and 2024, enabling a comparative assessment of pre- and post-pandemic changes in hospitality soft skill requirements. Content analysis and comparative analysis techniques are employed to identify recurring themes, examine shifts in skill demand, and interpret emerging workforce trends.

5. Literature Review

Mohanty and Mohanty (2018) examined employer expectations regarding soft skills among hotel management graduates and reported that communication ability, practical problem-solving, teamwork, and commitment were among the most valued competencies. Their findings highlight a persistent gap between academic preparation and industry expectations, suggesting the need for greater emphasis on soft skill development within hospitality education programmes.

White (2020) analysed recruiter perspectives on soft skills in the hospitality industry and emphasised the importance of non-technical competencies such as communication, teamwork, time management, emotional intelligence, and stress management. The study underscored the role of authentic, industry-aligned learning experiences in developing these competencies and recommended experiential pedagogies to enhance graduate employability.

Zekry, Moussa, and Salama (2023) explored managerial perceptions of essential soft skills in the tourism

and hospitality sector and found that, in addition to core interpersonal skills, employers increasingly value advanced behavioural competencies related to planning, leadership, and problem-solving. The study also revealed sectoral variation in skill prioritisation, with hotels placing greater emphasis on managerial and cognitive soft skills than travel agencies.

Bongalos and Saab (2025) investigated the relationship between employability, technological competence, and work performance among hospitality management graduates. Their findings indicate that while communication and interpersonal skills were generally adequate, adaptability, leadership, and technological competence were stronger predictors of job performance in contemporary hospitality workplaces.

Although existing studies underscore the importance of soft skills and document gaps between education and industry expectations, most are limited to specific regions or stakeholder groups. Moreover, relatively few studies adopt a secondary-data-based approach to examine changes in hospitality soft skill requirements over time. The present study addresses this gap by synthesising evidence from multiple sources to analyse the evolving nature of soft skills and persistent skill mismatches in the hospitality sector.

6. Discussion

6.1 Concept of Soft Skills in Hospitality

Soft skills refer to non-technical, behavioural, and interpersonal competencies that influence how individuals interact with others and perform their job roles effectively. In the hospitality industry, these skills are particularly critical due to frequent interaction with guests from diverse cultural, social, and linguistic backgrounds. Soft skills significantly shape customer satisfaction, service quality, and organisational reputation.

Traditionally, hospitality soft skills included verbal communication, courtesy, teamwork, time management, and service orientation. While these competencies remain relevant, contemporary hospitality operations increasingly require employees to manage emotional labour, respond to digital service interfaces, resolve complex complaints, and perform effectively under pressure. As a result, the concept of soft skills in hospitality has expanded from basic interpersonal abilities to more complex behavioural and emotional competencies.

6.2 Traditional Soft Skills

Before 2020, hospitality soft skills primarily included polite verbal communication, courtesy and professional behaviour, teamwork and cooperation, basic customer handling, and time management. These competencies were generally perceived as adequate in service environments characterised by standardised operating procedures, scripted guest interactions, and relatively predictable service expectations.

- **Polite verbal communication** involved sub-skills such as clear speech, appropriate tone, use of formal greetings, and basic listening abilities. This skill was mainly required in front office operations, reservations, concierge services, and restaurant service, where employees followed predefined communication scripts and standard phrases to ensure uniform guest interaction.
- **Courtesy and professional behaviour** comprised sub-skills such as grooming standards, respectful body language, adherence to etiquette norms, and compliance with organisational codes of conduct. These competencies were essential across front office, food and beverage service, housekeeping, and guest relations, as employee appearance and behaviour were closely linked to brand image and service consistency.
- **Teamwork and cooperation** included coordination, role clarity, compliance with hierarchy, and willingness to support colleagues during shift-based operations. This skill was particularly important in kitchen operations, housekeeping departments, banquets, and food and beverage outlets, where interdependent tasks and structured workflows required smooth coordination rather than autonomous decision-making.
- **Basic customer handling skills** involved responding to routine guest requests, addressing standard complaints, and providing information related to services and facilities using established protocols. These skills were predominantly required in front office desks, guest relations, restaurant service, and room service, where most guest interactions were repetitive and could be resolved through standard

operating procedures.

- **Time management** encompassed punctuality, adherence to duty rosters, task prioritisation, and timely service delivery. This competency was crucial in housekeeping schedules, restaurant service timing, kitchen production planning, and front office shift management, ensuring operational efficiency and service flow without significant service disruption.

Overall, pre-pandemic hospitality education curricula and employer feedback suggest that these traditional soft skills supported service uniformity and operational efficiency but placed limited emphasis on emotional intelligence, personalised service delivery, or adaptive problem-solving.

6.3 Emerging Soft Skills in the Hospitality Industry

Recent industry and labour market reports indicate a growing demand for advanced soft skills in the hospitality industry due to digitalisation, workforce diversity, and heightened guest expectations for personalised service. These emerging competencies extend beyond traditional interpersonal skills and are increasingly required across multiple hospitality functions.

1. **Emotional intelligence and empathy** include sub-skills such as self-awareness, emotional regulation, empathy toward guests and colleagues, and sensitivity to guest emotions and needs. These skills are particularly critical in front office operations, guest relations, food and beverage service, and customer care centres, where employees frequently handle emotionally charged interactions, service recovery situations, and personalised guest experiences.
2. **Adaptability and flexibility** involve the ability to adjust behaviour, multitask, respond to changing guest demands, and work across roles during staff shortages or peak periods. These competencies are essential in front office, housekeeping, food and beverage outlets, banquets, and event management, where service conditions often change rapidly and employees are expected to handle multiple responsibilities efficiently.
3. **Stress management and resilience** encompass coping with work pressure, maintaining composure during peak service hours, managing emotional labour, and sustaining performance under demanding conditions. These skills are especially required in kitchen operations, front office, food and beverage service, housekeeping, and event operations, where long working hours, high service intensity, and guest-facing stress are common.
4. **Cross-cultural communication** includes cultural awareness, sensitivity to diverse customs, multilingual interaction, and respectful communication with international guests and colleagues. This competency is crucial in front office, concierge services, international hotel chains, airlines, travel agencies, and tourist-facing service roles, particularly in destinations with a high volume of international visitors.
5. **Digital communication competence** involves using digital reservation systems, online guest feedback platforms, chat-based service tools, email communication, and social media interaction in a professional manner. These skills are increasingly required in reservations, front office, revenue management, marketing, customer support, and online guest engagement teams, as digital touchpoints have become integral to service delivery.
6. **Problem-solving and decision-making** include identifying service issues, evaluating alternatives, making timely decisions, and implementing effective solutions within organisational guidelines. These competencies are essential in front office management, guest relations, housekeeping supervision, food and beverage supervision, and operations management, particularly during service disruptions or

unexpected guest requests.

7. **Conflict and complaint handling** involve active listening, negotiation, emotional control, service recovery techniques, and resolution-oriented communication. These skills are especially important in guest relations, front office, food and beverage service, customer care departments, and call centres, where service failures and guest dissatisfaction must be addressed promptly to maintain brand reputation.

Overall, the increasing reliance on digital platforms, culturally diverse work environments, and personalised service expectations has made these emerging soft skills indispensable for hospitality employees. Their integration into education, training, and human resource practices is critical for sustaining service quality and competitiveness in the modern hospitality industry.

6.4 Transition in hospitality soft skill requirements in the Hospitality Industry

An examination of multiple international and industry-level reports suggests a discernible transition in hospitality soft skill requirements from basic interpersonal abilities to advanced behavioural and emotional competencies (OECD, 2024). Employer-focused studies highlight that communication and courtesy, while still important, are now supplemented by emotional intelligence, adaptability, and resilience due to dynamic service environments and increased guest expectations (White, 2020; LinkedIn Learning, 2024). Skill gap analyses further reveal that hospitality employers increasingly prioritise problem-solving, stress management, and cross-cultural sensitivity over routine service skills, reflecting changing operational realities (Tourism and Hospitality Skill Council [THSC], 2024). Empirical studies across hospitality and tourism contexts also demonstrate a growing emphasis on leadership-oriented and cognitive soft skills, particularly in managerial and guest-facing roles (Zekry et al., 2023). Collectively, these findings confirm that hospitality soft skill requirements have expanded in scope and depth, supporting the acceptance of the first research hypothesis.

6.5 Soft Skills Gap in the Hospitality Industry

Secondary data from hospitality skill gap studies consistently report a mismatch between employer expectations and the soft skill readiness of the available workforce, particularly at entry and supervisory levels (Tourism and Hospitality Skill Council [THSC], 2024). Employer surveys further indicate that while recruits often possess basic technical knowledge, they frequently lack competencies such as emotional intelligence, adaptability, problem-solving, and effective communication required for real-time service delivery (Mohanty & Mohanty, 2018; White, 2020). Labour market and industry reports corroborate these findings by linking high employee turnover, service inconsistencies, and guest dissatisfaction to deficiencies in behavioural and interpersonal skills (OECD, 2024; LinkedIn Learning, 2024). Comparative evidence across hospitality sub-sectors and regions suggests that these soft skill gaps persist despite the expansion of hospitality education and training programmes (Zekry et al., 2023). The convergence of evidence from skill councils, employer feedback, and labour market analyses supports the acceptance of the second research hypothesis.

6.6 Recommendations to bridge the Soft Skills Gap in the Hospitality Industry

The analysis highlights the need for coordinated efforts among policy makers, educational institutions, and industry stakeholders to address evolving soft skill requirements in the hospitality sector. The following recommendations are proposed to address identified soft skill gaps and to enhance workforce preparedness and service quality in the hospitality sector.

- **Recommendations for Policy Makers and Skill Development Authorities:** Skill development authorities should periodically revise hospitality occupational standards to incorporate emerging soft skills such as emotional intelligence, adaptability, and cross-cultural communication. Structured soft skill certification components should be mandated within hospitality training programmes to ensure uniform competency standards. Public–private partnerships should be strengthened to align hospitality education outcomes with evolving industry requirements.
- **Recommendations for Hospitality Education Institutions**: Hospitality curricula should integrate experiential and competency-based learning approaches, including simulations, role plays, and case studies. Assessment frameworks should evaluate behavioural competencies alongside technical

knowledge. Faculty development programmes should focus on industry-relevant soft skill pedagogy.

- **Recommendations for the Hospitality Industry:** Hospitality organisations should institutionalise continuous soft skill training through mentoring and coaching models. Recruitment and appraisal systems should place greater emphasis on behavioural competencies. Employee well-being initiatives focusing on stress management and emotional resilience should be strengthened to reduce attrition.

7. Conclusion

The hospitality industry is experiencing a fundamental transformation in workforce skill requirements. Secondary data analysis confirms a broadening of soft skill expectations from traditional interpersonal abilities to advanced behavioural, emotional, and adaptive competencies. Persistent gaps between employer expectations and workforce preparedness indicate structural challenges within hospitality education and training systems. Addressing these gaps through coordinated policy interventions, curriculum reforms, and industry-led initiatives is essential for enhancing service quality, workforce readiness, and the sustainable growth of the hospitality sector.

Future research may incorporate primary data from hospitality employers and employees to empirically validate emerging soft skill frameworks and contextual variations.

8. References

1. Bongalos, K. K. C., & Saab, R. D. (2025). Soft and technological skills of hospitality management graduates: Influence on their work performance. *International Journal of All Research Writings*. http://ijarw.com/PublishedPaper/IJARW2534.pdf
2. European Labour Authority. (2023). *Labour mobility and skills challenges in accommodation and food services*. ELA.
3. International Labour Organization. (2023). *Tourism, hotels and restaurants: Sectoral employment trends*. ILO.
4. LinkedIn Learning. (2024). *Workplace learning report 2024*. LinkedIn Corporation.
5. Mohanty, A., & Mohanty, S. (2018). Soft skills competency required of hotel management students: The employers' perspective. *Journal of Emerging Technologies and Innovative Research, 5*(5), 245–252. https://www.jetir.org/papers/JETIR1805640.pdf
6. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2024). *Tourism trends and policies 2024*. OECD Publishing.
7. Tourism and Hospitality Skill Council. (2024). *Sub-sector demand and skill gap study in tourism and hospitality*. Government of India.
8. UNESCO. (2023). *Skills development for a sustainable tourism workforce*. UNESCO Publishing.
9. White, K. (2020). *Soft skills for the hospitality industry: Perspectives of industry recruiters* (Master's thesis). California State University. https://scholarworks.calstate.edu/downloads/m039k991d
10. World Tourism Organization. (2022). *Tourism employment and skills development*. UNWTO.
11. Zekry, M. S., Moussa, M. A., & Salama, M. A. (2023). Exploratory study of soft skills in the tourism and hospitality sector: Perspectives of hotel and travel agency managers. *Journal of the Faculty of Tourism and Hotels, University of Sadat City, 7*(1), 40–53.