Leadership skills of directors of agricultural divisions and departments and their role in supporting sustainable rural development in Nineveh Governorate

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Abstract

The research aimed to determine the level of leadership skills among the directors of agricultural divisions and departments in Nineveh Governorate, and to identify the role of these skills in supporting sustainable rural development, as well as to determine the ranking of the areas of leadership skills according to their levels, and to arrange the items of each area according to their importance, and to reveal the nature of the relationship between the level of leadership skills and some personal and functional variables of the respondents, represented by age, sex, academic qualification, years of job service, along with training courses. To achieve the research objectives, a questionnaire has been used to collect data. It consisted of two parts: the first part measured the personal and functional variables of the respondents, while the second part comprised 75 items to assess their leadership skills, distributed across five domains with 15 items per domain: interpersonal skills, self-personal skills, managerial skills, intellectual skills, and technical skills. After verifying the apparent and content validity of the instrument, its reliability coefficient was calculated using Cronbach's alpha, yielding a value of 0.96, which reflects a high level of internal consistency. The research population consisted of employees of the Nineveh Agriculture Directorate and its affiliated agricultural departments, totaling (430) employees (males/females). A simple random sample of (132) employees (males/females), representing (32%) of the research population, was selected. The data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), employing certain statistical tests appropriate to achieving the research objectives. The results showed that the overall level of leadership skills among directors of agricultural divisions and departments in Nineveh Governorate was average, tending towards low, while managerial skills ranked first among the leadership skill areas. The outcomes also demonstrated significant correlations between the level of leadership skills and age, years of service, and training courses, while no significant correlation was observed between the level of leadership skills and either sex or educational qualification. The research's outcomes indicate the importance of leadership skills in enhancing the ability of agricultural management to perform its developmental functions, particularly in serving the rural community and supporting its needs. This makes developing leadership capabilities among managers of agricultural divisions and departments one of the important approaches to supporting sustainable rural development. In this context, we recommend that higher agricultural and extension administrations should adopt continuous and specialized training programs targeting those directors to include various areas of leadership skills, with a focus on aspects that demand more development to contribute in raising competence of administrative and leadership performance, and enhancing the ability of agricultural institutions to contribute to supporting sustainable rural development in Nineveh Governorate.

Keywords: Leadership skills, agricultural management, sustainable rural development, Nineveh Governorate

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Introduction

Leadership is a social and organizational phenomenon of great importance in various societies and institutions, given its fundamental role in guiding human behavior, coordinating efforts, and motivating employees towards achieving common goals. The importance of leadership is particularly evident in agricultural institutions, due to the nature of their tasks and the challenges they face related to economic, social, environmental, and technological changes, as well as the growing need to achieve sustainable rural development. It was established that effective leadership in the agricultural sector can contribute to fostering agricultural innovation, improving natural resource management, and encouraging the participation of rural communities in decision-making processes [1]. Societies vary in their ability to achieve their goals and develop their systems depending on the leadership they possess, leadership capable of coordinating collective human efforts, motivating individuals, and directing their energies toward achieving the desired objectives. In all societies, there are groups that receive orders and directives from leaders who possess the ability to influence others and guide their behavior in service of common goals [2]. In this context, leadership has become a fundamental axis upon which various activities within public and private organizations are based, especially in light of the constant change in the work environment. This makes the presence of conscious leadership, capable of guiding individual behavior, mobilizing capabilities, coordinating efforts, and directing them toward achieving goals, essential [3,4]. The contemporary administrative environment is characterized by constant change due to rapid technological, economic, and social developments. This demands that administrative leaders address an escalating range of challenges and opportunities, and utilize available resources efficiently and effectively [5]. Furthermore, changes related to climate changes, food security, and the sustainability of natural resources expand the demand for agricultural leaders with the capabilities and skills to manage change and adapt to emerging variables, thus participating to the achievement of sustainable rural development goals [6]. In this regard, leadership skills are a fundamental component of a leader's efficacy and ability to perform assigned tasks efficiently and accurately. They also play a pivotal role in developing employee's performance and improving overall organizational performance [7,8]. The importance of these skills extends beyond a leader's ability to accomplish administrative tasks, it also involve their capacity to communicate with and motivate employees, manage resources, make decisions, address problems, and guide collective efforts toward achieving organizational goals. Besides, leadership skills can contribute to reinforcing the efficiency of extension and agricultural institutions and strengthening their ability to encourage farmers to adopt sustainable agricultural practices, thus positively affecting the economic and social aspects of rural communities [9]. Organizations currently face a range of opportunities and threats in their external environment, alongside their internal strengths and weaknesses, which necessitates their continuous preparedness to address these changes [10]. Leaders are among the most influential elements in an organization's ability to confront these challenges and achieve its goals efficiently and effectively. The success of administrative activity is largely dependent on the extent to which leaders possess the skills

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appropriate to the nature of the roles and responsibilities they undertake at different organizational levels [11]. Leadership skills are growingly significance in agricultural institutions due to the diverse roles played by leaders and staff, their need to interact with employees, farmers, and other stakeholders, and their ability to make sound decisions and direct available resources toward development priorities. An effective leader's role extends beyond exercising formal authority; it involves harnessing the potential of employees, motivating them, fostering collaboration, and building an organizational environment based on participation, learning, and continuous development. This requires possessing a comprehensive set of leadership skills that integrate interpersonal, personal, administrative, intellectual, and technical aspects, and applying these skills practically in task performance and interpersonal interactions [12]. Accordingly, developing leadership skills has become a necessity imposed by the nature of contemporary administrative work. It is no longer sufficient for a leader to rely solely on formal authority to direct employees; rather, they are now required to possess a set of capabilities that enable them to affect others, manage changes, solve problems, make decisions, and build effective teams. For this reason, organizations have focused on training programs aimed at developing the leadership skills of their employees and preparing them to assume administrative and leadership responsibilities efficiently. The importance of leadership stems from its pivotal role in the administrative process, contributing to making management more effective and dynamic in achieving its goals [13,14]. Leadership is known as a process of mutual impact between the leader and individuals to conduct a common goal. This process is linked to the nature of human relationships and the interaction among group members, taking into account their differing characteristics and needs [15]. Therefore, a leader needs knowledge and skills that help them build trust with employees and motivate them to cooperate and exert collective effort to achieve organizational and developmental goals [16]. The leader's principle tasks also include raising awareness, forming work teams, developing strategies, and enhancing individuals' ability to perform their tasks more independently and effectively [17]. Leadership skills including a set of abilities that enable managers to perform their administrative functions and tasks efficiently and effectively. These skills empower leaders to influence and guide others toward achieving organizational goals and fulfilling their responsibilities. A skilled leader needs intellectual abilities and behavioral skills to handle diverse situations, make appropriate decisions, and coordinate the efforts of their team [18]. Furthermore, leadership skills are not developed in isolation but rather through the interaction of theoretical knowledge, practical application, experience, and training, which makes their development a continuous process linked to organizational learning and development [19]. In the agricultural sector, leadership skills acquired a particular importance because agricultural leaders, whether managers, administrators, or extension workers, play multiple roles in guiding workers and farmers, transferring modern agricultural knowledge and technologies, encouraging the adoption of sustainable practices, and contributing to addressing the challenges facing agricultural production. They also contribute to transferring the outcomes of agricultural research into practical application and raising farmers' awareness of integrated crop management methods and the conservation of natural resources to ensure their sustainability for current and future generations [20]. The significance of these roles is particularly

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evident in Nineveh Governorate, given its great agricultural potential and resources, and the significant economic and social importance of agricultural activity to its rural communities. Therefore, the efficiency of administrative leaders in agricultural institutions and their ability to utilize their leadership skills can be a crucial factor to improve agricultural and extension performance, promoting the adoption of innovative and sustainable agricultural practices, and responding to the needs of rural communities. In this regard, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) assured the urgency of innovation, capacity building, and effective governance in supporting the transformation of agricultural and food systems towards greater sustainability and resilience, thereby strengthening pathways to sustainable rural development [21,22]. Accordingly, studying the leadership skills of directors of agricultural divisions and departments in Nineveh Governorate is crucial, as they represent an administrative level with a direct role in implementing agricultural policies and programs and interacting with workers and rural communities. Additionally, identifying their leadership skills and pinpointing their strengths and weaknesses can provide a scientific basis for developing leadership training and development programs, thereby enhancing the efficiency of agricultural management and supporting its ability to contribute to sustainable rural development.

The research Problem

Leadership is a fundamental administrative function that plays a pivotal role in guiding employees, coordinating their efforts, and motivating them to achieve organizational goals, particularly in agricultural and extension institutions whose work is inherently linked to serving farmers and rural communities. Leadership is not limited to issuing orders and directives; rather, it encompasses the leader's ability to influence employee behavior, coordinate their efforts, foster a spirit of cooperation, and channel their energies toward achieving goals efficiently and effectively [23]. The success of leadership in a rural environment is linked to leaders' ability to address the specific characteristics and needs of rural communities and to direct resources and efforts in a way that contributes to solving problems and achieving development goals [24]. In this context, the role of professional or official leaders in agricultural institutions becomes prominent. These are the employees who occupy administrative and leadership positions by virtue of their official jobs, including directors of agricultural divisions and departments. This category has a particular importance as it represents an administrative level accountable for implementing agricultural programs and policies, supervising employees, and interacting with farmers and rural communities. Therefore, the level of leadership skills possessed by its members is a crucial factor in their performance and ability to carry out their assigned tasks. Consequently, the effectiveness of agricultural and extension institutions is largely dependent on the ability of their leaders to utilize their administrative, interpersonal, intellectual, technical, and personal skills in various situations. These skills are becoming increasingly important given the transformations underway in the agricultural sector and the associated challenges related to food security, climate change, natural resource management, and the adoption of modern agricultural technologies. International literature emphasizes the importance of investing in rural infrastructure, agricultural research, extension services, and technology transfer to enhance agricultural productivity and achieve sustainable rural development.

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Recent Iraqi experience also underscores the importance of building the capacity of agricultural extension workers and developing their communication skills with farmers, as well as disseminating climate-smart agricultural practices to support sustainable rural livelihoods and resilience to climate change. Previous literature and studies indicate that leadership skills are not fixed abilities, but rather can be developed and enhanced through experience, practice, training, and qualification programs. Some Arab and Iraqi studies have shown that the levels of leadership skills among agricultural and extension workers are medium, tending towards lower. The study conducted by Al-Ajili indicated that the level of leadership skills among field agricultural extension agents in the central governorates of Iraq was medium and tending towards lower [18]. Also, Al-Shadaideh found a similar level among agricultural extension agents in Jordan, although there were variations in the levels of different areas of leadership skills [25]. Similarly, Al-Kindi found that the level of leadership skills among agricultural extension agents in Kirkuk Governorate was medium, tending towards lower [26]. These results may indicate a need for greater attention to developing leadership skills among employees in agricultural and extension institutions. Despite the importance of these skills, the nature of the required leadership skills varies depending on the job, administrative level, and responsibilities of the leader, where the skills needed by managers of agricultural divisions and departments may differ in importance from those required in other administrative positions. Therefore, identifying the level of leadership skills and pinpointing areas for development can provide a scientific basis for building training programs more tailored to the needs of agricultural leaders. Also, possessing the appropriate skills reinforce a leader's ability to manage workers, make decisions, solve problems, adapt to changes, and guide efforts toward achieving agricultural and developmental goals. Particularly, this is evident in Nineveh Governorate, given the economic and social importance of its agricultural sector and the fact that a significant portion of rural activity is linked to agricultural production and natural resources. Supporting rural communities requires agricultural institutions capable of fulfilling their roles efficiently, and leaders with the ability to manage human resources, improve performance, encourage agricultural innovation, and strengthen communication with farmers. The sustainable rural development is related with a range of economic, social, and environmental dimensions, including improving agricultural production and food security, enhancing livelihoods, and conserving natural resources. This aligns with the Sustainable Development Goals, especially 2nd Goal that related with ending hunger and promoting sustainable agriculture, along with 15th Goal on protecting and sustainably managing ecosystems.

This highlights the need to study the leadership skills of directors of agricultural divisions and departments in Nineveh Governorate in order to: determine their current level of leadership, identify areas of strength or areas requiring further development, and understand the relationships between these skills and various personal and professional variables. The results of the current study can provide scientific indicators to assist competent administrative authorities in identifying the training needs of agricultural leaders and designing more suitable programs to develop their leadership capabilities. This, in turn, will enhance the efficiency of agricultural management and its ability to contribute to sustainable rural development.

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Therefore, the research problem is defined as the need to identify the level of leadership skills among the directors of agricultural divisions and departments in Nineveh Governorate, and the extent to which the necessary skills are available to perform their administrative and developmental roles, as well as identifying its relationship to some personal and functional characteristics, by answering the following questions:

1. What is the overall level of leadership skills among directors of agricultural divisions and departments in Nineveh Governorate?
2. How are the leadership skills areas ranked among directors of agricultural divisions and departments in Nineveh Governorate according to their levels?
3. How are the items within each leadership skills area ranked according to their level of availability among directors of agricultural divisions and departments?
4. Is there a significant correlation between the level of leadership skills among directors of agricultural divisions and departments and certain personal and professional variables, namely: age, sex, educational qualification, years of service, and training courses?
5. What areas can be focused on in developing the leadership skills of directors of agricultural divisions and departments to enhance the efficiency of agricultural management and support its contribution to sustainable rural development?

The research significance

The importance of our research stems from the crucial role of leadership in enhancing the efficiency of agricultural institutions, and the impact of leadership skills on improving the performance of managers and employees, directing efforts towards achieving agricultural and developmental goals. Furthermore, the research findings can provide relevant authorities with scientific indicators regarding the level of leadership skills among managers of agricultural divisions and departments, enabling them to identify training needs and design leadership development and qualification programs. This study is particularly significant in Nineveh Governorate, given the importance of agricultural activity in rural communities and the need to develop institutions and personnel capable of supporting agricultural production, improving rural livelihoods, and promoting sustainable resource management. This approach aligns with international efforts to promote sustainable agriculture, extension services, and local capacities to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

The research objectives

1. To identify the leadership skills of directors of agricultural divisions and departments and their role in supporting sustainable rural development in Nineveh Governorate in general.
2. To ranking the leadership skills domains of directors of agricultural divisions and departments in Nineveh Governorate according to their importance in supporting sustainable rural development.
3. To ranking the items within each area of leadership skills among directors of agricultural divisions and departments in Nineveh Governorate according to their importance in supporting sustainable rural development.
4. To determine the correlation between the level of leadership skills and each of the following variables: (sex, educational qualification, years of service, and training courses).

The research hypothesis

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The study assumes that there is a significant correlation between the overall level of leadership skills and each of the following variables: (gender, academic qualification, years of employment, training courses).

Methodology

The study Population and Sampling

The research population included all agricultural employees working at Nineveh Agriculture Directorate and its affiliated agricultural divisions, totaling (430) employees (males/females). After excluding (20) employees (males/females) for reliability purposes, the number of employees became (410). A simple random sample of (32%) was then selected, comprising (132) employees (males/females).

The study tool

For collecting data, a two-part questionnaire has been designated. The first one collected personal and functional information from agricultural employees, including sex, educational qualifications, years of service, and training courses. The second part consisted of a scale measuring leadership skills among directors of agricultural divisions and departments in Nineveh Governorate. This scale comprised 75 items distributed across five domains: interpersonal skills (15 items), personal skills (15 items), managerial skills (15 items), intellectual skills (15 items), and technical skills (15 items).

Scale design

The leadership skills scale for managers of agricultural divisions and departments in Nineveh Governorate has been developed after reviewing previous research and studies on leadership skills. After completing the initial version of the questionnaire, it was reviewed by a group of experts to ensure the face and content validity of the scale items. To verify the scale's reliability, Cronbach's alpha was used to calculate the reliability coefficient, which was 0.96. This is a very good value, indicating high reliability of the scale.

The answer alternatives for the leadership skills scale for directors of agricultural divisions and departments in Nineveh Governorate were set up, which are: (I practice it to a very great extent, I practice it to a great extent, I practice it to a moderate extent, I practice it to a weak extent, I practice it to a very weak extent), where numerical values were given for these alternatives (1, 2, 3, 4, 5) respectively. Among the most important statistical methods used in the research are frequencies, percentages, and arithmetic means. The SPSS software has been applied to analyze research data.

Results and Discussion

First: Identification the level of leadership skills among directors of agricultural divisions and departments and their role in supporting sustainable rural development in Nineveh Governorate

The results demonstrated that the highest numerical value obtained by the respondents, which reflects the level of leadership skills, was (246), while the lowest one was (163). The range and class interval length has been utilized, as presented in (Table 1).

Table 1. Level of leadership skills among directors of agricultural divisions and departments

Levels of leadership skills	No.	%
Low (163-190)	34	25.76
Medium (191-218)	82	62.12
High (219-246)	16	12.12
Total	132	100

Based on the results exhibited in Table (1), the highest percentage of respondents, 62.1%, fall within the medium category, followed by 25.8% in the low category, while 12.1% fall within the high category. These results indicate that the overall level of leadership skills among directors of agricultural divisions and departments in Nineveh Governorate is medium, tending towards low. This may reflect the need for these leaders to receive further training and development in various areas of leadership skills, thereby enhancing their ability to perform their administrative and developmental roles effectively and supporting the contribution of agricultural institutions to sustainable rural development.

Second: Ranking the leadership skills of the directors of agricultural divisions and departments in Nineveh Governorate

To achieve this goal, the arithmetic mean for each of the leadership skills domains has been calculated, and then the domains were ranked in descending order according to their arithmetic means, as shown in Table (2).

Table 2. Level of leadership skills domains among directors of agricultural divisions and departments

Domains of leadership skills	Arithmetic means	Order
Interpersonal skills	82.333	4
Self-personal skills	84.909	2
Managerial skills	86.500	1
Intellectual skills	81.409	5
Technical skills	84.242	3

According to the results in Table (2), the domain of managerial skills ranked first among the leadership skills domains, with a mean score of (86.500). This may be attributed to the nature of the administrative tasks and responsibilities undertaken by managers of agricultural divisions and departments, which require

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planning, organizing, directing, monitoring, and coordinating among employees, as well as making work-related decisions and following up on the implementation of assigned tasks. Furthermore, the nature of the administrative positions held by the sample members may require them to continuously employ managerial skills in organizing work, coordinating employee efforts, and directing them towards achieving institutional goals.

Meanwhile, the domain of intellectual skills ranked last, with a mean score of (81.409). This result may indicate a demand more attention to developing the intellectual capabilities of managers of agricultural divisions and departments, particularly regarding analysis, systematic thinking, problem-solving, decision-making, and dealing with situations and variables that confront agricultural work. Enhancing these skills may participate to increasing the ability of agricultural leaders to address work challenges and improve their administrative performance, thus boosting the engagement of agricultural institutions to sustainable rural development.

Third: Arranging the items of each domain of leadership skills areas for the directors of agricultural divisions and departments in Nineveh Governorate according to their priorities in supporting sustainable rural development

To achieve this goal, the arithmetic mean of each item in the leadership skills domains was used, and they were ranked according to their arithmetic means, as shown in Table (3).

Table 3. Ranking of items in the leadership skills domains among managers of agricultural divisions and departments

No.	Paragraphs	Arithmetic means	Rank
First: Interpersonal Skills Domain			
1	Increases employee effectiveness in working as a team	6.287	1
2	Builds positive relationships among employees within the organization	4.878	12
3	Helps reduce workplace conflict	5.954	4
4	Encourages cooperation and fosters positive relationships among employees.	5.590	9
5	Promotes team spirit and collaborative work among staff.	5.712	6
6	Allows employees to express their opinions and suggestions for improving performance	6.075	2
7	Always strives to distribute workload fairly among employees in a way that satisfies them	5.696	7
8	Allows communication with all employees without exception.	5.681	8
9	Takes into employees' work assignments based on their	5.136	11

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	abilities and capabilities		
10	Gives employees the opportunity to participate in some decision-making processes	4.787	13
11	Inspires and motivates employees	5.469	10
12	Maintains employee cohesion	6	3
13	Praises competent employees in front of colleagues	4.681	14
14	Fosters a sense of satisfaction and belonging in the workplace among employees	5.742	5
15	Treats all employees in a friendly manner.	4.636	15
Second: Personal Skills Domain			
1	Listens attentively to all viewpoints when discussing a particular work process.	5.575	10
2	Understands employee behavior and motivations.	5.939	6
3	Endures significant effort to complete tasks on time.	5.848	8
4	Maintains energy and enthusiasm throughout the workday.	5.5	11
5	Treats all employees with flexibility and humility.	5.242	14
6	Possesses quick of Mind	6.166	3
7	Receptive to and adopts all new ideas from employees	5.560	12
8	Has the skill to persuade employees of a particular viewpoint	6.151	4
9	Has the ability to influence employees to make a decision	6.242	2
10	Able to find innovative ways to address anticipated situations	6.287	1
11	Remains calm in the face of crises	5.893	7
12	Has the ability to express his negative feelings to others.	5.454	13
13	Excels at controlling his emotions when criticized by others.	4.787	15
14	Balances firmness and gentleness in his dealings with others.	5.803	9
15	Possesses skill in setting goals and motivating employees to complete their assigned tasks.	6.045	5
Third: Managerial Skills Domain			
1	Increases the speed of completing managerial tasks.	6.333	1
2	Motivates employees to engage with their work and participate in decision-making	5.469	10
3	Enhances innovative thinking in solving managerial problems.	5.878	5
4	Sets specific deadlines for employees to complete managerial tasks	5.752	8

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5	Develops skills in using information for decision-making	6.227	3
6	Distributes all committee assignments fairly among employees	5.772	6
7	Adheres to regulations, laws, and instructions issued by higher authorities	5.712	9
8	Continuously monitors the records of managerial departments, each according to their assigned duties	4.651	15
9	Develops a work plan for the managerial unit in which they work	5.363	12
10	Accepts responsibility for the consequences of all decisions made, regardless of their nature	5.393	11
11	Encourages employee motivation to improve performance	4.727	14
12	Works to implement the annual plan with employee participation	6.272	2
13	Able to determine the timeframe and duration for completing assigned tasks and achieving objectives	6.045	4
14	Contributes to maintaining the provision of all services for the building under their responsibility	5.757	7
15	Distributes workloads among team members in a balanced manner	5.257	13
Fourth: Intellectual skills domain			
1	Distributes work fairly among employees within the organization	5.166	12
2	Identifies the information required to make a specific decision for a given task	4.606	13
3	Dedicates efforts to distinguishing between important and unimportant information about a task	5.318	10
4	Develops appropriate solutions to problems facing the work	4.439	15
5	Contributes to developing plans and making them acceptable to employees to improve performance	5.848	5
6	Simplifies methods and procedures for completing tasks	6.075	2
7	Possesses creative thinking skills to accomplish specific tasks	6.015	2
8	Continuously monitors work progress and goal achievement	5.545	7
9	Engages employees in finding appropriate solutions, reflecting professional values	5.510	8
10	Possesses the ability to persuade them of the need to improve their job performance and enhance their work efficiency	6.151	1
11	Holds meetings at appropriate times	5.393	9
12	Explains the overall objectives of meetings when they are held	5.257	11
13	Focuses on qualitative performance in addition to quantitative performance in light of total quality	4.530	14

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	management standards.		
14	Provides continuous feedback	5.590	6
15	Issues orders efficiently and clearly to all employees equally	5.969	4
Fifth: Technical skills domain			
1	Committed to developing technical work methods	5.712	7
2	Takes responsibility for the decisions he makes in performing his duties	5.575	9
3	Encourages employees to take responsibility for all the work they do	5.787	6
4	Contributes to providing the organization with modern equipment and tools to perform tasks creatively	5.621	8
5	Possesses the skill to use modern tools at work, such as computers and other devices	6.136	1
6	Stays informed about the latest developments in the field	5.439	12
7	Continuously develops his skills to broaden his knowledge	5.454	11
8	Possesses the ability to contribute his personal experience to the work	5.969	2.5
9	Has a forward-looking vision for achieving work goals	5.333	14
10	Identifies any successes or failures in completing tasks, along with proposed solutions	5.151	13
11	Possesses the ability to determine the relative importance of each employee's job role	4.772	15
12	Maintains open communication with employees during work hours	5.954	4
13	Encourages the exchange of expertise among employees in completing tasks	5.878	5
14	Prioritizes achieving work goals.	5.484	10
15	Uses assertiveness when necessary	5.969	2.5

The results exhibited in Table (3) demonstrate the following outcomes:

First: Interpersonal skills:

The item "Increases employee effectiveness in working as a team" ranked first with a mean score of (6.287). This may reflect the importance of teamwork and team spirit in promoting cooperation and coordination among employees, and the leader's role in guiding their efforts towards achieving work goals. Meanwhile, the item "Treats all employees in a friendly manner" ranked last with a mean score of (4.636). This result may indicate the importance of enhancing the leader's communication and interpersonal skills to contribute to a work environment based on cooperation and mutual respect.

Second: Personal skills:

The item "Able to find innovative ways to address anticipated situations" ranked first with a mean score of (6.287). This may

reflect the importance of a leader's ability to handle different situations and find suitable alternatives to address problems and challenges that may arise at work. Meanwhile, the item "Excels at controlling his emotions when criticized by others" ranked last with a mean score of (4.787). This result may indicate the importance of enhancing a leader's ability to control his emotions and accept the opinions and observations of others, which contributes to improving professional relationships and dealing with work situations more effectively.

Third: Managerial Skills:

The item "Increases the speed of completing managerial tasks." ranked first with a mean score of (6.333). This may reflect the importance of speed in completing managerial tasks to improve performance efficiency, especially since the nature of the work of agricultural division and department managers requires them to follow up on numerous tasks and duties and complete them within specified timeframes. Meanwhile, the item "Continuously monitors the records of managerial departments, each according to their assigned duties" ranked last with a mean score of (4.651). This result may indicate the importance of enhancing administrative monitoring and documentation skills among agricultural leaders, given their role in organizing work and monitoring the level of achievement.

Fourth: Intellectual Skills:

The statement "Possesses the ability to persuade them of the need to improve their job performance and enhance their work efficiency" ranked first with a mean score of (6.151). This may reflect the importance of a leader's ability to convince employees of the importance of developing their performance and raising their efficiency, and to encourage them to improve their work methods in a way that contributes to achieving goals. Meanwhile, the statement "Develops appropriate solutions to problems facing the work" ranked last with a mean score of (4.439). This result may indicate the importance of enhancing the intellectual and analytical abilities of agricultural leaders, particularly in the areas of diagnosing and analyzing problems and selecting appropriate solutions and alternatives to address them.

Fifth: Technical Skills:

The statement "Possesses the skill to use modern tools at work, such as computers and other devices" ranked first with a mean score of (6.136). This may reflect the importance of using modern tools and technologies at work, given the capabilities they provide to facilitate task completion and improve performance efficiency. Meanwhile, the statement "Possesses the ability to determine the relative importance of each employee's job role" ranked last with a mean score of (4.772). This result may indicate the importance of enhancing the leader's ability to define job roles and responsibilities for employees and distribute tasks according to their abilities and specializations, thus contributing to work organization and improved performance efficiency.

Fourth: To determine a correlation between the level of leadership skills among managers of agricultural divisions and departments and certain personal and professional variables in Nineveh Governorate

To achieve this goal, appropriate statistical correlation coefficients were used for the nature of the variables to reveal the relationship between the level of leadership skills of the managers of agricultural divisions and departments and some personal and functional variables, namely (sex, age, academic qualification,

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years of service, and training courses), as illustrated in Table (4).

Table 4. Correlation between the level of leadership skills among directors of agricultural divisions and departments and some personal and functional variables

Variables	No.	%	Spearman's correlation coefficient	Level of significance
1-Sex				
Male	107	81.060	0.021	Non-Significant
Female	25	18.939		
Total	132	99,999		
Variables	**No.**	**%**	**Spearman's correlation coefficient**	**Level of significance**
2-Age				
34-23 years	16	12.121	0.177 *	Significant
46-35 years	103	78.030		
≥ 47 years	13	9.848		
Total	132	99,999		
Variables	**No.**	**%**	**Spearman's correlation coefficient**	**Level of significance**
3- Academic qualification				
Agricultural Institute	23	17.424	0.132	Non-Significant
Bachelor of Agriculture	39	29.545		
Diploma	19	14.393		
Master's	33	25		
Doctorate	18	13.636		
Other	0	0		
Total	132	100		
Variables	**No.**	**%**	**Spearman's correlation coefficient**	**Level of significance**
4-Years of job service				
14 - 6 years	15	11.363		

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23 - 15 years	21	15.909	0.312 **	Significant
32 - 24 years	96	72.727		
Total	132	99,999		
Variables	**No.**	**%**	**Spearman's correlation coefficient**	**Level of significance**
5-training courses				
Trainee	123	93.181	0.174*	Significant
Non-trainee	9	6.818		
Total	132	99.999		
Variables	**No.**	**%**	**Spearman's correlation coefficient**	**Level of significance**
Number of training courses for trainees				
One course	36	27.272	0.383 *	Significant
Two courses	45	34.090		
Three or more courses	51	38.636		
Total	132	99.999		

(*) Significant at the 0.05 level, (**) Significant at the 0.01 level

The data shown in Table (4) reveal the following outcomes:

1- Sex:

The results showed no statistically significant correlation between the level of leadership skills among directors of agricultural divisions and departments in Nineveh Governorate and sex, with a correlation coefficient of (0.021), which is not statistically significant. This result indicates that the level of leadership skills among the sample does not differ statistically based on sex. This may suggest that the acquisition of leadership skills depends more on experience, job practice, and training, factors that can enhance the ability of directors to perform their roles in agricultural institutions and support sustainable rural development efforts, regardless of sex.

2- Age:

The results showed a significant correlation between the level of leadership skills among managers of agricultural divisions and departments and their age, with a correlation coefficient of 0.177, which is significant at the 0.05 level. This may be related to the accumulation of experience, knowledge, and skills resulting from professional practice and dealing with different situations as individuals age. This may enhance managers' ability to perform their leadership tasks and handle the demands of agricultural work, thus supporting the role of agricultural institutions in serving rural communities

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and achieving the requirements of sustainable rural development.

3- Educational Qualification:

The results showed no statistically significant correlation between the level of leadership skills among agricultural division and department managers and their educational qualifications. The correlation coefficient was (0.132), which is not statistically significant. This result indicates that differences in educational qualifications among the sample members were not statistically significant in relation to their level of leadership skills. This suggests that developing leadership skills does not depend solely on academic qualifications, but is also linked to practical experience, job practice, and training—all important factors in enhancing the efficiency of agricultural leaders and their ability to support sustainable rural development.

4-Years of job Service:

The results showed a significant correlation between the level of leadership skills among managers of agricultural divisions and departments and their years of service. The correlation coefficient was (0.312)**, which is highly significant at (0.01) level. This result indicates a positive correlation between years of service and the level of leadership skills. This may be attributed to the fact that longer years of service provide greater opportunities to gain practical experience and deal with different problems and situations, which may contribute to developing leadership capabilities and improving job performance. This, in turn, enhances the ability of agricultural institutions to fulfill their roles in serving rural communities and supporting sustainable rural development.

5-Training Courses:

The results showed a significant correlation between the level of leadership skills among managers of agricultural divisions and departments and training courses, with a correlation coefficient of 0.174, which is significant at the 0.05 level. This may be related to the knowledge and skills provided by training courses, which help managers develop their abilities in management, communication, decision-making, and problem-solving. This, in turn, can enhance their leadership performance and their ability to handle the demands of agricultural work and contribute to supporting sustainable rural development. The results also showed a significant correlation between the level of leadership skills and the number of training courses attended by the trainees, with a correlation coefficient of 0.383, which is significant at the 0.05 level. This result indicates a positive correlation between the number of training courses and the level of leadership skills. This may be attributed to the fact that the diversity and variety of training opportunities contribute to expanding the knowledge of agricultural leaders and developing their professional and managerial skills, which can enhance their ability to perform their duties efficiently and contribute to supporting agricultural institutions and sustainable rural development.

Conclusion

1. The research results showed that the overall level of leadership skills among the directors of agricultural divisions and departments in Nineveh Governorate was medium and tended to be low, indicating a need for more attention to developing these skills, especially through continuous training and professional qualification, which enhances the efficiency of agricultural leaders in performing their job duties

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and supports the role of agricultural institutions in sustainable rural development.

2. The results showed that domain of managerial skills ranked first among leadership skills, followed by domain of personal skills, then technical skills, and interpersonal skills, while intellectual skills came in last. This result indicates the importance of managerial skills in the performance of managers of agricultural divisions and departments, as they include abilities related to planning, organizing, directing, monitoring, and decision-making. These are essential skills for improving institutional performance and enhancing the ability of agricultural institutions to serve rural communities.
3. The results of ranking the leadership skills categories revealed the importance of several skills for managers of agricultural divisions and departments. These include enhancing employee effectiveness in teamwork, developing innovative approaches to address anticipated situations, expediting managerial tasks, persuading employees of the need to improve their job performance and efficiency, and utilizing modern work methods. The importance of these skills is highlighted in strengthening managerial and professional efficiency and improving the ability of agricultural leaders to meet work demands and challenges, thereby supporting their contribution to sustainable rural development.
4. The statistical analysis revealed a significant correlation between leadership skills and both age, years of service, and training courses. However, no significant correlation was found between leadership skills and either gender or academic qualifications. These results indicate the importance of professional experience and continuous training in developing leadership skills among managers of agricultural divisions and departments. This, in turn, can enhance their ability to perform their leadership roles and contribute to supporting agricultural institutions and sustainable rural development.

Recommendations and suggestions

1. Emphasizing the importance of establishing specialized and continuous training programs for the directors of agricultural divisions and departments in Nineveh Governorate, covering various areas of leadership skills, especially managerial, intellectual, personal, interpersonal and technical skills, in order to contribute to developing their leadership performance and enhancing the efficiency of agricultural institutions in supporting sustainable rural development.
2. Encouraging the directors of agricultural divisions and departments to participate in seminars, conferences, training workshops, and scientific and exploratory visits related to administrative, agricultural and developmental fields, with the aim of exchanging experiences, learning about modern experiences and practices and employing them in developing job performance.
3. Enhancing the leadership skills that the research results showed to be important among the sample members, and in particular:
   - Developing the ability to think creatively and find suitable alternatives to work-related situations and problems.
   - Enhancing the ability to utilize and direct employees' energies through teamwork.
   - Developing the ability to convince employees of the importance of improving their job performance and raising their efficiency.

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- Promoting the use of modern methods and technologies in performing managerial and agricultural tasks.
- Focusing on communication and interpersonal skills to foster a positive work environment.

4. Establishing an administrative and incentive system within agricultural institutions that contributes to motivating administrative leaders to develop their leadership skills, through incentive programs, appreciation and continuous performance evaluation, and linking professional development to actual work needs.
5. Paying attention to agricultural leaders with practical experience and employing their expertise in transferring knowledge and skills to less experienced leaders and employees, thereby enhancing the utilization of accumulated expertise within agricultural institutions and contributing to the development of institutional performance.
6. Adopting continuous training as a cornerstone of agricultural leadership development, particularly given the significant correlation between leadership skills and the number and quality of training courses, while ensuring that training programs are aligned with the actual needs of agricultural division and department managers.
7. Conducting follow-up studies to address the obstacles hindering the development of leadership skills among agricultural division and department managers in Nineveh Governorate, and proposing practical programs and methods to overcome these obstacles and enhance leadership capabilities.
8. Conducting future studies to explore the relationship between leadership skills and the performance of agricultural institutions in supporting sustainable rural development, with the potential to examine the impact of leadership skills on specific rural development indicators, such as improving agricultural services, adopting sustainable agricultural practices, and supporting agricultural innovation.

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