PERCEPTIONS, COMFORT AND ACCEPTANCE OF THE DIGITALLY-ASSISTED MANAGER IN ORGANIZATIONS

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Abstract
The digital environment is increasingly imposing itself within the organizational framework, and digital tools such as artificial intelligence are becoming a habit and no longer remain the idea of something new; as a consequence, contemporary managers are changing, and with this change, confusion, reluctance, and even preferences may arise among employees. They might not only face difficulties in adapting to a digitally assisted manager, but could also question the efficiency of the digitally-assisted decisions made by them. Therefore, this paper pursues and is based on one main objective, namely, to show what employees' perceptions are of this „modern manager". The chosen study methodology is quantitative, built around a questionnaire whose purpose was to collect people's perceptions regarding the comparative perspective between the traditional and digitally assisted manager, their comfort with this new type of manager and also their willingness to accept it. The research results will determine elements such as the role of empathy, efficiency, the importance of human relationships, the willingness to work and accept the modern manager, as well as the perception of empathy and efficiency among the two types of managers. Hence, the study attempts to make a significant contribution to understanding not only current perspectives in the contemporary organizational framework, but also to highlight possible future directions. As a result, the main statistical contributions of the paper manage to put into perspective very relevant issues, such as the fact that those who perceive the traditional manager as efficient do not reject the idea of a digitally assisted manager or that those who consider human relationships important do not reject the digitally assisted manager.

Keywords
Manager, digitally assisted decisions, efficiency, organizations, artificial intelligence.

JEL Classification
D20, D91, M10, M12, M54, O32

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Introduction

The way organizations are managed has undergone major changes over the past few years, especially during and after the pandemic period, when many teams moved "online", to what is known today as remote work (Al-Habaibeh et al., 2021). Through this transition, managers began to be increasingly familiar with the digital environment and the tools it brought, which led them to move from making decisions in the classic way to adopting them with the support of digital technologies (Stoica and Rugiubei, 2025). Consequently, even though for many organizations, remote work was temporary and teams had to return to the office, for managers, digital tools have become a habit, and their use has not been limited to managing teams from a distance. Thus, today, whether it is about organizations that still promote working from home or those that carry out their activities in the classic way, as far as managers are concerned, various questions and uncertainties have arisen regarding these modern practices through which they integrate the digital environment into the decision-making process. In this sense, it must be noted that, although the specialized literature often touches on the subject of AI acceptability in organizations, very little research analyses employees' comparative perception of the traditional and digitally assisted manager.

Consequently, the paper addresses this exact issue, namely that of the comparative perception that people have of the traditional and modern manager, more precisely, the digitally assisted one. Thus, the purpose of the study focuses heavily on the comparative analysis of the two, from perspectives such as their efficiency, empathy and objectivity, but also on people's willingness to accept the decisions made by the modern manager as well as their openness to working with him. Therefore, to obtain the desired results, the paper will have a well-founded structure in three general parts, namely the one where the most relevant specialized literature for the present study is reviewed, the research methodology part where the chosen research method will be explained, namely the questionnaire and how it was constructed, as well as the last part of the results and discussions where the findings of the paper will be put into perspective. Hence, it can be noted that the research results aim to make a significant contribution to the research field, but also to provide a vision of how the digitally assisted manager is perceived.

1. Review of the scientific literature

Classical management, as it was perceived several years ago, has undergone drastic but necessary changes. Therefore, if before the Covid-19 period, the literature noted that managerial practices had a new, modern approach, promoting both the delegation of decision-making and the idea of self-management (Strielkowski, Shishkin and Galanov, 2016), today, this idea may have a different nuance, precisely thanks to digital tools and their use. In this sense, one can understand the profound contribution of tools such as artificial intelligence in promoting these approaches, as it has the capacity to manage large data sets, being built to solve tasks that are useful for the decision-making process, which makes it possible to delegate certain responsibilities and, at the same time, it is extremely useful for self-managing (Steyvers and Kumar, 2024). The success of such modern practices is largely due to the perceptions that employees may have regarding the integration of digitalization into the decision-making process and their openness to digitally assisted decisions (Wang et al., 2024).

However, in the literature, various problems have been identified regarding the acceptance of decisions assisted by digital tools such as artificial intelligence (AI), with much attention being paid to reluctance towards the use of AI, precisely due to a lack of trust in its use (Booyse and Scheepers, 2024). Additionally, trust is often considered an essential element of AI-enabled decisions, being placed on an equal footing with the technology itself, meaning that employees' perceptions of digitally assisted decision-making are equally as important as the impact of digitalization on the process itself (Vereschak et al., 2024). Employees' perception of the digitally assisted manager is strongly correlated with the burdens they feel when it comes to artificial intelligence, and in a study focused on human resource management, 6 types of such pressures were identified, namely: "mental, emotional, social, manipulation, bias and privacy" (Park et al., 2021). However, it must be taken into account that mental or emotional pressure felt by employees can strongly and negatively influence the way they respond to organizational changes, precisely because the work-life balance will also be disturbed. Moreover, this balance must be seen as extremely important for employees' career growth and for acquiring the necessary skills (Stăncioiu and Szentesi, 2025), which helps in developing their capabilities to adapt to AI-assisted decisions, and that also positively influences their perception of the digitally assisted manager.
Therefore, analyzing how people perceive modern managerial practices is essential to understanding their openness and willingness to work with or even accept decisions made by a digitally assisted manager, especially since their perceptions greatly influence their attitude towards their work and also play a fundamental role in shaping career behaviours (Presbitero and Teng-Calleja, 2023).

2. Research methodology

The article presents an empirical study based on a questionnaire developed and distributed among the general population of Romania. Data collection employed a hybrid sampling approach, combinig convenience and snowball sampling technique with no specific demographic or professional characheristics required, as the research aimed for a broad and diverse perspective. The data collection lasted for about a month and a half and had a relatively high response rate. With that in mind, it can be said that the relevance and role of this data collection tool for the present research is based on the fact that it collected people's perceptions regarding the two categories of managers encountered in the current organizational context, namely the traditional manager and the digitally assisted manager. The questionnaire was based on three general constructs, namely: perceptions of the traditional manager, perceptions of the digitally assisted manager and respondents' openness to the decisions and coordination of a digitally assisted manager. Each section of the data collection tool had 3 items, the structure of which was intended to gradually introduce the respondent to the issue of comparing opinions regarding the two types of managers; moreover, they were constructed so that there was also a comparative report between the sections, with each item being constructed on a Likert scale. The survey questions were subsequently coded to allow for easier statistical interpretation, and the codifications are as follows:

- **HumanRe:** How important do you consider human relationships to be in managing a team by a traditional manager?

- **EmpathyTrad:** How often do you consider empathy to matter in managerial decision-making?
- **StyleTrad:** How do you rate the leadership style of the traditional manager?
- **RelAI:** To what extent do you think a manager assisted by artificial intelligence can maintain a good relationship with the team?
- **ObjAI:** To what extent do you consider a manager assisted by artificial intelligence to be less empathetic, but more objective in decision-making, compared to a traditional manager?
- **EffAI:** To what extent do you believe that a digitally assisted manager will manage managerial activity more efficiently than a traditional manager?
- **ComfortAI:** How comfortable do you feel with the idea of managerial decisions being assisted by artificial intelligence?
- **WorkAI:** How comfortable would you be working under the guidance of a digitally assisted manager?
- **AcceptAI:** How willing are you to accept decisions made by a manager assisted by artificial intelligence?

Thus, through this construction, the research will be able to cover both the aspects related to the comparison of the two managers, but also those related to the respondents' availability to work with a modern manager. Regarding the questionnaire sample, it amounts to a total number of 322 people, who gave their explicit consent to participate in it, being informed in advance about the data being collected anonymously and exclusively for research purposes. Regarding the distribution of respondents by demographic criteria, the following structure is presented (see Table no. 1).

Table no. 1. Demographic characteristics of respondents

Sex	**%**
Feminine	61,49%
Masculine	38,51%
Age group	**%**
18-24	28,26%
25-34	38,20%
35-44	14,60%
45-54	12,42%
55-64	4,66%
65 and above	1,86%
Education level	**%**
Doctorate/PhD	7,76%
High School	18,32%
Post-secondary/Post high school	5,59%
Bachelor's degree	37,58%
Master's degree	30,75%
Professional experience	**%**
Between 1-3 years	25,78%
Between 4-7 years	21,43%

Between 8 and 15 years	15,22%
Over 15 years	22,67%
Under 1 year	14,91%

Source: Own processing

The demographic distribution of the sample is balanced and highly relevant to the chosen research topic. Thus, the research results will be able to present a reality of the contemporary era and to place the perception of the digitally assisted manager in a current context. In this way, the general objective of the work can be achieved, specifically by determining people's openness towards the modern manager.

3. Results and discussion

The research results, divided into several categories, will highlight the real perceptions of employees regarding the two categories of managers, but also regarding their comparison, starting with the individual analysis of the traditional manager, followed by that of the digitally assisted one. Then, various comparative analyses will be carried out between them.

1. Correlations among traditional managerial perception variables

To study this correlation, the HumanRE, EmpathyTrad and StyleTrad variables were used, all of which reflect the perception related to the traditional manager. This analysis will help understand the importance given to the traditional manager and determine whether this perception is a unitary construct or not (see Table no. 2).

Table no. 2. Correlation of traditional managerial variables

Spearman's Correlations

			Spearman's rho		p
HumanRe	-	EmpathyTrad	0.216	***	< .001
HumanRe	-	StyleTrad	0.184	***	< .001
EmpathyTrad	-	StyleTrad	0.291	***	< .001

* p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001

Source: Own processing

The hypotheses are as follows:

H_0: There are no correlations between the importance given to human relationships, empathy in decision-making and the evaluation of the traditional manager's management style, as they are independent.

H_1: There is an association between the variables of the traditional manager. This means that people who perceive human relations as important in managing a team are more likely to consider that empathy plays an important role in traditional managerial decision-making, but also evaluate the leadership style of the traditional manager more positively. Also, those who consider that empathy plays an important role believe that the traditional manager is effective.

Based on the results from Table no. 2, the null hypothesis is rejected, and H_1 is accepted. The rho coefficient and the p-value show a weak but significant positive correlation between HumanRe and EmpathyTrad; a similar one between HumanRe and StyleTrad; and a moderate but significant positive correlation between EmpathyTrad and StyleTrad, thus indicating that those who consider that empathy matters quite often in managerial decision-making, better evaluate the leadership style of the traditional manager. These associations can be better observed within a heatmap (see Figure 1).

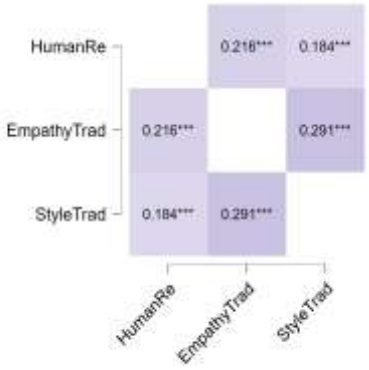

Figure no. 1. Heatmap for traditional manager variables
Source: Own processing

It must be noted that research in the literature has identified empathy as an important element of organizational culture (Muss, Tüxen, D. and Fürstenau, 2025), which makes the analysis of this variable even more relevant in the context of both the traditional and the digitally assisted manager. In the literature, there is an opinion that the manager of the future will either be empathetic and resilient or will have no empathy at all, with this being attributed to the fact that empathy and resilience are related to emotional intelligence (Gabarret and Schweitzer, 2022). Or, in a parallel situation, the AI-assisted manager could mean exactly the opposite, due to the fact that it no longer relies on emotional intelligence but on artificial one. Essentially, the results of this section consider the importance that employees attach to the human characteristics that a traditional manager has.

2. Correlations among digitally assisted managerial perception variables
For this correlation, the variables ComfortAI, EffAI, AcceptAI and ObjAI were used, with RelAI and WorkAI not included as they do not reflect direct perceptions of the digitally assisted manager. This study could help determine the consistency of perceptions and association patterns (see Table no. 3).

Table no. 3. Correlation of digitally assisted manager variables

Spearman's Correlations

			Spearman's rho		p
ComfortAI	-	EffAI	0.543	***	< .001
ComfortAI	-	AcceptAI	0.728	***	< .001
ComfortAI	-	ObjAI	0.103		.064
EffAI	-	AcceptAI	0.530	***	< .001
EffAI	-	ObjAI	0.252	***	< .001
AcceptAI	-	ObjAI	0.049		.379

* p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001

Source: Own processing

The hypotheses are as follows:

H_0: There are no correlations between comfort with AI assisted decisions, perceived efficiency, willingness to accept decisions and perceived objectivity of the digitally assisted manager, as these variables are independent.

H_1: There is an association between respondents' comfort with AI-assisted decisions, perceived efficiency, willingness to accept decisions and perceived objectivity of the digitally assisted manager.

According to Table 3, the null hypothesis and H_1 are partially rejected and accepted, as between comfort with AI-assisted decisions, both strong associations (ComfortAI and AcceptAI), moderate associations (ComfortAI and EffAI) and very weak, insignificant associations (ComfortAI and ObjAI) are identified. This means that people who feel more comfortable with decisions made with the help of AI consider those decisions to be more effective. However, the perception of objectivity is not influenced by respondents' comfort with AI-assisted decisions. Nevertheless, these aspects could largely be due to transparency, which plays a fundamental role in employee acceptance of AI (Holmström and Hällgren, 2022), meaning that in the context of lack of transparency, they perceive digitally assisted decisions as similar to traditional ones and in the context of high transparency, they notice much better whether empathy and objectivity are affected by AI.

In the case of the association of perceived effectiveness, both a moderate correlation (EffAI and AcceptAI) and a low one (EffAI and ObjAI) are identified, indicating once again that for the perception of objectivity there is no significant association between the variables, the same is true for the link between acceptance of digitally assisted decisions and perception of objectivity, where there is no statistically significant association. A heatmap was also generated for this study (see Figure no. 2).

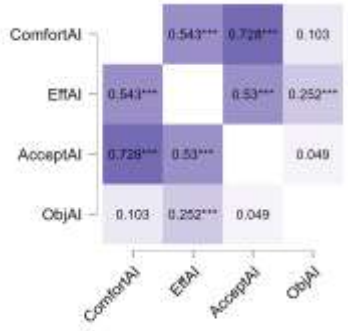

Figure no. 2. Heatmap for digitally assisted manager variables
Source: Own processing

Overall, the results of this section indicate a complex relationship, suggesting that employees' trust in digitally assisted managers is multi-faceted.

3. Comparative Perceptions: Traditional vs. Digitally Assisted Manager
In order to identify the existence or not of a negative association between perceptions towards the traditional manager and those towards the digitally assisted manager, a comparative analysis of them will be carried out in this section. First, it will be analysed whether respondents who strongly value the importance of human relationships in management will show a lower level of acceptance of the digitally assisted manager (see Table no. 4).

Table no. 4. Human relationships, importance, and acceptance of AI-assisted decisions

Spearman's Correlations

			Spearman's rho	p
HumanRe	-	AcceptAI	-0.071	.205

Source: Own processing

In accordance with Table no. 4., H_0 is not rejected. Although rho indicates a negative value, p is not statistically significant, which means that people who perceive human relationships as important in managerial decisions do not have a high reluctance towards decisions assisted by artificial intelligence. Furthermore, the following part focuses on the idea that if empathy matters in traditional managerial decision-making, then respondents will tend to believe that the digitally assisted manager cannot maintain good relations with the team (see Table no. 5).

Table no. 5. Empathy importance and digitally assisted managerial relationships

Spearman's Correlations

			Spearman's rho	p
EmpathyTrad	-	RelAI	0.048	.390

Source: Own processing

Table no. 5. indicates once more that H_0 cannot be rejected, as people who see empathy as an important part of classic managerial decisions do not believe that an AI-assisted manager could have a good relationship with the team (there is no negative correlation). Next, the third analysis aims to identify whether those who consider the traditional manager's leadership style to be effective will be reluctant to accept the decisions made with the help of AI (see Table no. 6).

Table no. 6. The efficiency of classical decisions and the acceptance of those assisted by AI

Spearman's Correlations

			Spearman's rho	p
StyleTrad	-	AcceptAI	-0.003	.962

Source: Own processing

The null hypothesis is once again accepted, since according to Table 5, those who perceive the traditional manager as efficient do not reject the idea of accepting AI-assisted decisions. This is an important finding, as the literature often highlights employee reluctance towards AI implementation in organizational context (Lichtenthaler, 2020).

The last examination of this section is whether there is a positive correlation between those who consider a digitally assisted manager to be more objective and the fact that he is more effective than a classic one (see Table no. 7).

Table no 7. The objectivity of the digitally assisted manager and his efficiency

Spearman's Correlations

			Spearman's rho	p
ObjAI	-	EffAI	0.252	< .001

Source: Own processing

The null hypothesis is rejected, as there is a moderately positive association between the two variables, meaning that those respondents who perceive the digitally assisted manager as more objective also consider it to be more efficient than a traditional one.

4. Willingness and acceptance of the digitally assisted manager

This part of the study focuses on identifying the willingness to work with and accept the digitally assisted manager, being extremely relevant to the research due to the insights it offers regarding employees' perceptions of a possible organizational future. The first analysis aims to determine the association between the degree of comfort of respondents with digitally assisted managerial decisions and their willingness to work under a digitally assisted manager (see Table no. 8).

Table no. 8. Comfort with digitally assisted decisions and acceptance of a digitally assisted manager

Spearman's Correlations

			Spearman's rho	p
ComfortAI	-	WorkAI	0.800	< .001

Source: Own processing

H_0 is rejected, and H_1 is accepted, the data in Table no. 8 indicating that the degree of comfort with digitally assisted decisions is a strong predictor of respondents' willingness to work under a digitally assisted manager. This means that those who feel more comfortable with such decisions are more open to accepting a modern manager. The second analysis is related to determining the relationship between the comfort level with AI-assisted decisions, but this time with respondents' willingness to accept such decisions (see Table no. 9).

Table no. 9. Comfort with and acceptance of digitally assisted decisions

Spearman's Correlations

			Spearman's rho	p
ComfortAI	-	AcceptAI	0.728	< .001

Source: Own processing

H1 is accepted, which means that the degree of comfort with AI-assisted decisions is once again a strong predictor, this time for acceptance of these decisions. More precisely, those who are comfortable with AI-assisted decisions are also more prone to accept them. The last examination of this section is given by the identification of the positive correlation between the perception that respondents have of the efficiency of the digitally assisted manager and the acceptance of the decisions made by him (see Table no. 10).

Table no. 10. Perceived efficiency of the digitally assisted manager and acceptance of his decisions

Spearman's Correlations

			Spearman's rho	p
EffAI	-	AcceptAI	0.530	< .001

Source: Own processing

Even though rho is not as high as in the case of the other 2 correlations in this section (being a moderate one), the null hypothesis is still rejected, with Table no. 10 demonstrating that the perception that respondents have regarding the efficiency of the modern manager is a determinant of the acceptance of the decisions made by him.

5. Comparison of paired items

Within this last section, two analyses of paired items will be carried out, aiming not to identify correlations but to establish the differences. Thus, the differences between the perceptions of the two types of managers will be evaluated. First, the difference in perceptions between the empathy rating attributed to the traditional manager and that attributed to the digitally assisted manager will be examined (see Table no. 11).

Table no. 11. Empathy evaluations of traditional vs. digitally assisted managers

Paired Samples T-Test

Measure 1		Measure 2	t	df	p
EmpathyTrad	-	ObjAI	9.294	321	< .001

Note. Student's t-test.

Source: Own processing

The first analysis applied was a paired sample t-test, which proved that respondents consider the traditional manager to be more empathetic and perceive the digitally assisted one as more objective, instead of empathetic. Additionally, a descriptive analysis was applied in order to understand in more detail the difference between these perceptions (see Table no. 12).

Table no. 12. Descriptive analysis of empathy and objective perceptions

Descriptives

	N	Mean	SD	SE	Coefficient of variation
EmpathyTrad	322	4.093	0.870	0.049	0.213
ObjAI	322	3.425	0.990	0.055	0.289

Source: Own processing

By interpreting Table no. 12, it can be understood that, even if respondents see the traditional manager as more empathetic and the modern manager as more objective, the results in the case of the latter manager are much more variable, which could indicate a change in this perception in the near future. The last analysis of the paper is that of identifying the differences between perceptions of the efficiency of the digitally assisted manager and those of the classical manager (see Table no. 13).

Table no. 13. Efficiency comparative evaluation

Paired Samples T-Test

Measure 1		Measure 2	t	df	p
StyleTrad	-	EffAI	8.846	321	< .001

Note. Student's t-test.

Source: Own processing

The results show that although the digitally assisted manager was previously considered more objective, this aspect does not make it seem more efficient compared to the traditional one, with respondents favouring the classic manager in terms of efficiency. Along with these data, a descriptive analysis was also carried out (see Table no. 14).

Table no. 14. Descriptive analysis of efficiency perceptions

Descriptives

	N	Mean	SD	SE	Coefficient of variation
StyleTrad	322	3.873	0.808	0.045	0.209
EffAI	322	3.289	0.927	0.052	0.282

Source: Own processing

Thus, if the favourable perception of the efficiency of the traditional manager is homogeneous, for the digitally assisted one, the responses indicate the same situation as in the previous analysis and show a greater dispersion.

Conclusions

The research results provide a broader perspective on how the digitally assisted manager is perceived. In a first discovery, we can talk about the fact that in the case of the traditional manager, a more positive perception of him is correlated to a certain extent with the empathy that he would have. The second issue identified is that in the case of the digitally assisted manager, the opinion regarding his empathy and objectivity does not seem to be very relevant. Moreover, on the side of comparative perceptions, it was identified that those who consider the human relationship to be important in managing a team do not oppose the idea of the digitally assisted manager and those who perceive

empathy as an important feature of the classic manager do not consider that the modern one would have a weaker relationship with the team.
An important discovery is also given by the fact that respondents who consider the traditional manager to be efficient are not opposed to the idea of accepting an AI-assisted manager. Thus, even if the sample shows that there is no opposition to modern managerial practices, it nevertheless highlights the fact that those who are more comfortable with AI-assisted decisions will have a greater tendency to accept them and work with them. It is also taken into account that those who see it as more efficient are much more open to it.
However, overall, respondents perceive the traditional manager as more efficient, but do not oppose the idea of a digitally assisted manager. Which presents a favourable direction in organizational management, where managerial practices will increasingly migrate towards the digital environment. That is why today's organizations should pay increased attention to cultivating a healthy relationship between employees and modern digital tools, supporting the development of an organizational culture open to digitalized decisions.

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