

MANAGER-EMPLOYEE INTERACTION IN THE AGE OF DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

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Abstract: *The increasing integration of digital technologies within organizations has inevitably brought changes in the interactions between managers and employees, thus modifying the classic ways in which they interacted within the framework of employment relationships and beyond. Therefore, in the context of these transformations, a series of questions arise, assumptions appear and a comparative line is created between the two methods of interacting, respectively the classic and the digital one. Precisely for this reason and in light of these considerations, this paper aims to identify the implications of these new ways of collaborating and to determine how they are perceived among employees in Romania. Thus, in order to consolidate the study and as a chosen research methodology, the paper focuses on the use of a questionnaire as a tool for collecting relevant data, which is also necessary to validate the hypotheses proposed by the paper, namely the high dimension of the digitalization of manager-employee interactions and the advantage it brings; completing the specialized literature with a topical approach. The research results thus bring a significant contribution to the field, both for the general area and for studies focused on Romania, while also marking the importance of the attention dedicated to this field of research and its significance in practice.*

Key words: *decision making, digital, manager, employee, interaction*

JEL: M0, M1, O0, O3

Introduction

The way in which interactions and communications take place in the workplace is changing every day; the innovations brought by the digital age are reshaping the way in which employees and managers relate within the framework of employment relationships, thus emerging new ways of communicating, of transposing decisions, as well as new blockages or new risks. Therefore, due to the degree of novelty that digitalization still implies for many organizations, this area remains an unexplored one that offers relevant research opportunities for both literature and practitioners. Hence, an important aspect that deserves to be analyzed is how the interaction between managers and employees is presented in the context of these organizational transformations. This perspective not only allows an analysis that helps determine the existence of such interactions, but also extends to a research of their specific characteristics, distinct elements such as the sphere in which the greatest digital interaction takes place and its frequency.

In this sense, the present paper aims to analyze the manager-employee interaction in the era of digital transformation, in order to determine where it is found in the context of the organization and, at the same time, what is the perception of employees regarding its usefulness. Furthermore, in order to achieve the proposed objective, the study focuses on a quantitative research methodology, namely on the use of the questionnaire as a tool for collecting data relevant to the chosen research topic. Through the chosen study approach, the research will bring a significant contribution to the subject, exposing the current situation of digital interaction between employees and managers within organizations in Romania; thus consolidating the scientific literature and being able to be used as a guide for practitioners.

1. Literature review

The digital era has brought with it a series of changes to the classic interactions between employees and managers and one of the most important questions that should arise in this context is closely related to how employees cope with this change or whether they accept this way of digital communication; in the literature, some authors have highlighted this aspect and have taken into account the fact that a lot of attention is paid to the expectations of adapting to technological changes, but less consideration is given to the acceptance of these changes (Tkalac Verčič et al., 2025). There is practically an unwritten rule that employees must be open to new methods of interaction, but there is little concern about their willingness to accept them. Also from a similar perspective, in a study conducted using a survey, the emphasis was placed on the possible effects of the digitalization of labor relations, and among the most significant concerns of the respondents are discrimination as a consequence of weaker digital skills and benefits that appear only in favor of employers (Gurova et al., 2020). Other authors note that digital changes in the workplace also imply a relearning of interactions, noting that these changes not only come with benefits but also with obstacles in terms of collaboration and not only (Högberg and Willermark, 2024).

Additionally, in terms of negative aspects, some research have also analyzed the work-life balance, thus determining that by its extensive nature, the digitalization of interactions between employees and managers could lead to divergences between private and work life, as digital technologies allow work to find its place in life outside the office (Wright et al., 2014), (Obushenkova et al., 2018). A relevant approach in the literature is also given by the fact that regarding the relationships between employees and managers, there is a discrepancy between the way the latter understand and behave in the context of these changes, which may have an effect on the way employees value trust in the workplace (Mackenzie, 2010). Moreover, the very broad frontiers of digital technologies impact interactions within organizations also through the phenomenon of social media surveillance, with some authors believing that through the possibilities offered by the digital environment, managerial control can be extended outside the workplace, but also that this aspect can be reciprocal, the activity through which employees also monitor their managers (Taylor and Dobbins, 2021), considerations that can have a strong effect on employment relationships.

Regarding the positive aspects of the digitalization of labor relations, there are also a number of advantages; among these are the benefits that digital communication brings in terms of work performance, precisely because it is easier for employees to ask for and receive help through digital communication (Karhapää et al., 2023), practically when it comes to interactions necessary to perform work tasks, a digital interaction is much more useful and facilitates the resolution of work. Another advantage brought by digital interaction is also found in situations related to employee medical problems, some managers being of the opinion that a digital communication with employees who have health problems facilitates the organization in such situations (Sondell et al., 2025), in practical terms, not only can they learn about the situation much more quickly, but they can also prevent those situations in which the organization's activity is affected by the unexpected absence of an employee.

With the advent of changes imposed by digitalization, the prerogative of digital leadership also appeared within organizations (Sağbaşı and Erdoğan, 2022), or a management focused on digitalization also has its implications in the interactions that managers have with employees and among the benefits brought by this organizational change is also the much more active involvement of employees (Li et al., 2024). Additionally, in the context of digital leadership, the literature also highlights the positive effects it has on commitment to the organization (Qiao et al., 2024).

2. Research methodology.

The research methodology used for this study focuses on the analysis of quantitative data collected through a questionnaire. The collection instrument was disseminated among the active population in Romania, namely people who are currently employed and who have expressly given their consent to

complete it (198 people). In terms of structure, it was built on 5 questions whose configuration was divided into 3 sections, of which 2 questions are binary and 3 are built on a Likert scale. In this regard, question no. 1 from the first section aims to determine whether employees interact digitally with managers when performing their work tasks and the second question determines the size of this interaction. In the case of the second section, the structure is similar, the difference being that in this case the element pursued is not that of work tasks but of interactions related to absences, vacations and leave. The last section and the last question is a concise one and analyzes the quality of both interactions in the perception of the respondents, respectively whether it is seen as effective or not. Through statistical interpretation of the data, the aim is to validate a series of theories, namely, the existence of these digital interactions, the high frequency of their use and the positive perception of employees towards the use of the digital environment in interacting with managers.

3. Results and discussion

Initially, the statistical analysis focused on interpreting the data collected from the two binary questions, namely the first question from section 1 and the one from section 2. Therefore, regarding whether employees use the digital environment both for completing work tasks and for taking leave, a Chi-Square Test analysis was applied to determine if there is a strong association between the two questions (see Table 1).

Table 1. Chi-square test for binary question association

<i>Chi-Squared Test</i>			
	Value	df	p
X ²	17.018	1	< .001
N	199		

Source: Authors' own research

H₀: The null hypothesis is rejected, as the p-value is less than 0.05.

H₁: According to the test, there is a significant association between the two questions, with the p-value indicating a strong link between the use of the digital environment for work tasks and its use for taking leave. Next, in order to determine the correlation between the use of the digital environment for completing work tasks and the frequency of use, a cross-tabulation was used in combination with a Chi-square test (see Table 2).

Table 2. Chi-square test for Section 1

<i>Chi-Squared Tests</i>			
	Value	df	p
X ²	83.297	4	< .001
N	198		

Source: Authors' own research

The results of the analysis thus confirm the validity of the study; the null hypothesis (H₀) is rejected, and H₁ is accepted, indicating that the responses to the two questions in section 1 are correlated, with a significant relationship between the use of the digital environment for work-related tasks and the frequency of its use.

The same analysis was then applied to the second section (see Table 3).

Table 3. Chi-square test for Section 2

<i>Chi-Squared Tests</i>			
	Value	df	p
X ²	102.740	4	< .001
N	198		

Source: Authors' own research

The null hypothesis is also rejected in this case, with the high X² value indicating a large degree of deviation and the p-value indicating a strong association between the two variables analyzed. Therefore, in the case of the second section it can be concluded that there is a strong relationship between the use of the digital environment for interactions related to leaves, vacations, and absences and the frequency with which it is used.

Furthermore, the distribution of responses to the two binary questions was examined to determine where is the higher concentration of digital environment use; specifically for work tasks or for leave (see Table 4).

Table 4. Prevalence of the digital environment – binary questions

<i>Descriptive Statistics</i>		
	Labor relations	Time off
Valid	198	198
Missing	1	1
Mean	4.162	3.596
Std. Deviation	0.926	1.242
Minimum	1.000	1.000
Maximum	5.000	5.000

Source: Authors' own research

The main trend according to the analysis is the more frequent use of the digital environment in interactions related to completing work tasks than in those related to leave requests; the much smaller standard deviation of the first section confirms the homogeneity of the responses.

Regarding the frequency of using the digital environment for both sections, a Paired Samples T-test was applied to determine whether there is a significant difference between the two contexts (see Table 5).

Table 5. Paired Samples test

Paired Samples T-Test

Measure 1	Measure 2	t	df	p	Cohen's d	SE Cohen's d
Labor relations	- Time off	7.133	196	< .001	0.508	0.074

Note. Student's t-test.

Source: Authors' own research

Thus, the null hypothesis, which assumes that the frequency of digital environment usage is equal in both contexts, is rejected and the hypothesis stating that there is a difference between the two is accepted, though it is a moderate one and that is in accordance with the average effect given by Cohen's *d*, which is 0.508.

As a final analysis, a hypothesis was tested to determine whether more frequent use of the digital environment in both contexts leads to a more positive or negative perception of using the digital environment in interactions in general. Therefore, a Spearman correlation was applied (see Table 6).

Table 6. Frequency and satisfaction correlation

Spearman's Correlations

Variable		Labor relations		Time off		Satisfaction
1. Labor relations	Spearman's rho	—				
	p-value	—				
2. Time off	Spearman's rho	0.568	***	—		
	p-value	< .001		—		
3. Satisfaction	Spearman's rho	0.507	***	0.438	***	—
	p-value	< .001		< .001		—

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

Source: Authors' own research

The resulting data confirms that the more frequently the digital environment is used in work-related interactions, the more it will also be used for leave requests. Regarding the strength of correlations with satisfaction/opinion about using the digital environment, there is a moderate connection, which is higher for the use of the digital environment in work-related interactions. However, overall the relationship is positive, indicating that regarding employees' satisfaction with the use of the digital environment in interactions with managers, there may be other factors influencing it.

Conclusions

The research findings highlight the high importance placed on the use of digital technologies within organizations, particularly regarding interactions between employees and managers. It is emphasized that these technologies are used not only for work-related tasks but also for leave requests. Regarding the frequency of these interactions, it is noted that it is higher for work tasks and lower for leave requests, as such interactions are generally less frequent in practice.

Concerning respondents' perceptions of the effectiveness of these technologies, the study's findings indicate that the level of usage has a moderately significant impact on it, but not exclusively. This suggests that not only frequent use of the digital environment but also other factors contribute to increasing employee satisfaction with digital interactions with managers. In conclusion, the study presents both the growing trend of digital technology integration within organizations (through high levels of digital interaction) and an overall picture of this trend for the research field, particularly in Romania.

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