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The New Managerial Mandate: A Systematic Review of the Role Transformations from Traditional to Post-COVID Contexts

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Abstract

This review paper focuses on management theory's evolution, from classical control paradigms to agile and human-centric approaches, emphasizing the post-pandemic manager's role as coach, facilitator, and resilience architect. The COVID-19 calamity expedited trends toward digital fluency, distributed leadership, and psychological safety, revealing gaps in traditional models. The in-depth literature review in this paper discloses an essential shift from hierarchy to trust-based management systems, emphasizing hybrid work arrangements, regenerative and transformational leadership, and AI integration. Therefore, practical implications demand adaptive metrics and redesigned training, while theoretical implications are suggestive of gaps in existing literature which call for integrative frameworks for balancing stability with agility. Future research should explore non-Western models and contexts, such as Pakistan, trauma-informed leadership, and human-AI integration and collaboration.

Introduction

The role of a manager has undergone profound transformations since its formal conceptualization in the early 20th century, reflecting broader shifts in organizational structures, technological advancements, and societal expectations (Kaehler & Grundei, 2018). From the rigid, control-oriented supervisors of the

industrial era to today's adaptive, empathy-driven facilitators of hybrid work, the definition of a manager has continually evolved to meet the demands of an ever-changing business landscape (Kniffin et al., 2021). The managerial role of monitoring and controlling work, enforcing procedures, and mediating top-down instruction has become less and less suited to the needs of modern work. Individuals and organizations alike are recognizing that the traditional managerial archetype which has been based on industrial-era hierarchies is no longer relevant in the complex, human-centered and rapidly changing environments within which work is now done. This redefinition is not ideological in nature, it is a pragmatic, necessary, and urgent adaptation. The core of this redefinition is the increasingly strong urge to re-conceptualize managers as facilitators of trust, autonomy and learning as opposed to agents of efficiency. Modern organizations are faced with unprecedented pressures: to become nimble to changes wrought by technology, fair to pressure of social movements, and adaptable to the uncertainty of global events. In this context, the manager is not only considered as a middle stratum of bureaucracy; he/she is more likely to become a culture creator, well-being promoter, ethical decision-maker, and strategical partner.

This process of role redefinition gained speed in the COVID-19 pandemic, which was at once a stress test and a catalyst of change. This sudden change to distance work destroyed most of the environmental frameworks that managers had depended on to exercise power and to track performance. Their absence caused the intangible aspects of management, including the quality of communication, emotional intelligence, psychological safety, and adaptability to come to the fore. The crisis made the deeply human aspect of management, which had frequently been overlooked, visible. In the post-pandemic world, organizations had to face the basic questions: It is a new challenge as it is not easy to maintain cohesion in an organization without physical presence. The uncertainty is also a complication to leadership effectiveness. This means that the role of the manager has to evolve as one that should be maintained (as in the case previously) to one that should be redefined: one that is now able to provide the emotional, psychological, and practical support to employees who encounter professional barriers alongside personal trauma, health risks, and the blurring of traditional work-life distinctions.

The management practices need to be redesigned to adequately manage the spectrum of issues facing modern workers, which includes professional setbacks, personal trauma, health hazards, and the blurring of work–life divisions. Therefore, the role of manager has changed into an actively redesigned competence.

The COVID-19 pandemic also accelerated already existing trends: the spread of distributed teams, increasing demands with regards to flexibility and inclusivity, and a widened focus on meaning and purpose. Such changes require new managerial strategies characterized by flexibility, sensitivity, and a holistic view of systems. The necessity to re-evaluate the roles of managers, therefore, is not a passing issue, but a strategic imperative, a more general re-conceptualization of value creation, employee support, and leadership in turbulent, complex environments. This review article traces this evolution, examining how management theorie, from Classical and Human Relations to Contingency, Systems, and Agile framework, have redefined the manager's role, responsibilities, and core competencies. The COVID-19 pandemic served as a catalytic force, accelerating trends toward distributed leadership, digital fluency, and employee well-being, while exposing critical gaps in traditional management paradigms (Carroll & Conboy, 2020). Where once managers were seen as enforcers of efficiency (Taylor, 1911) or bureaucratic administrators (Weber, 1947), they are now expected to orchestrate flexible teams, foster psychological safety, and navigate unprecedented volatility (Spreitzer et al., 2021).

This shift raises pivotal questions: How do we reconcile classical management principles with the demands of a post-pandemic world? Does the modern manager's role necessitate an entirely new theoretical framework?

By synthesizing historical and contemporary perspectives, this scientific review aims to:

- Map the trajectory of managerial definitions from industrial-era theories to digital-age adaptations.
- Identify key turning points (e.g., the rise of Agile, the impact of remote work) that reshaped managerial priorities.
- Evaluate unresolved tensions between control and autonomy, stability and innovation, and individual versus collective leadership.

In doing so, this review paper not only contextualizes the manager's evolving identity but also highlights future research directions to address emerging challenges in AI integration, generational workforce dynamics, and sustainable leadership. The analysis underscores that management is no longer a static function but a dynamic, interdisciplinary practice—one that must balance operational pragmatism with human-centric innovation to thrive in an era of perpetual disruption.

Moreover, this review article systematically traces the evolution of managerial thought from its foundational conceptualizations in the early 20th century to contemporary digital-era paradigms, synthesizing over a century of scholarly research across management theory, organizational behavior, and leadership studies. Beginning with the pioneering works of Taylor (1911), Fayol (1949), and Weber (1947) that first established management as a distinct organizational function during industrialization, the review critically examines how subsequent theoretical movements, including the Human Relations approach (Mayo, 1933; Barnard, 1938), Contingency Theory (Fiedler, 1964; Burns & Stalker, 1961), Systems Thinking (Bertalanffy, 1968), and Transformational Leadership (Bass, 1985), have progressively redefined the manager's role in response to socioeconomic, technological, and cultural shifts. The analysis incorporates peer-reviewed journal articles, seminal books, and empirical studies from diverse disciplines (psychology, sociology, cybernetics) to demonstrate how management scholarship has evolved from mechanistic control models to adaptive, human-centric frameworks. Particular attention is given to synthesizing post-2000 research on agile management (Denning, 2018), digital transformation (Brynjolfsson & McAfee, 2014), and hybrid work (Bloom et al., 2021), while maintaining dialog with classical theories to highlight continuities and ruptures in managerial practice. By integrating a multitude of cited sources spanning 1911-2023, including 78 peer-reviewed journal articles (e.g., from Academy of Management Review, Leadership Quarterly), 18 seminal books, and 16 industry reports, this review offers a comprehensive meta-analysis that bridges historical management principles with emerging post-pandemic realities.

The interdisciplinary approach consciously incorporates critiques from critical management studies (Alvesson & Willmott, 1992), non-Western perspectives (Jackson, 2020), and feminist organizational theory (Calás & Smircich, 2006) to challenge dominant Western corporate narratives. Methodologically, the review employs a historical-analytical framework (Wren & Bedeian, 2020) to trace theoretical lineages while utilizing evidence from longitudinal studies (e.g., Harvard's Management Change Project) and meta-analyses (e.g., Rudolph et al., 2021 on pandemic leadership) to validate paradigm shifts. This exhaustive synthesis not only maps the transformation from "manager as controller" to "manager as ecosystem architect" but also identifies critical gaps where contemporary research must address AI-mediated

leadership (Wilson & Daugherty, 2018), regenerative business models (Holling, 2001), and polycrisis management (Homer-Dixon, 2023).

Systematic Literature Review

This systematic review combines about 112 peer-reviewed literature sources (1911–2023), incorporating historical-analytical and thematic approaches. The inclusion criteria mainly included seminal theories (i.e., Classical, Contingency, etc.) and post-COVID adaptations, while the literature is placed and analyzed through three lenses: (1) chronological evolution, (2) paradigm shifts, and (3) emerging tensions. Moreover, non-Western perspectives were explicitly incorporated to counter Western biases.

Early Definitions and Conceptualizations of a Manager

In the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, a time in which the rate of industrialization employed new technology and gave rise to an ever more complex variety of enterprises, the intellectual elaboration of managerial responsibility as a distinct and essential organizational position attained codification. With the increase and expansion of production, transportation, and the workings of the public administration, the necessity of the codified systems of supervision and coordination became apparent. This situation triggered not only the professionalization of management practice, but also the science of investigation of managerial functions. During this formative period, the manager was to a great extent viewed as an authority figure tasked with imposing discipline, maintaining order and ensuring optimum efficiency in increasingly formal institutions.

Henri Fayol (1949), was among the first and most influential participants in this discourse. His masterpiece research based on and described one of the first systematic accounts of the duties of a manager. Fayol (1949), identified six functions that identified the management responsibility, these included forecasting and planning, organizing, commanding, coordinating and controlling. This typology offered a comprehensive, but systematic explanation of the managerial activities. Fayol (1949) also focused on foresight and planning when it comes to the development of organizational goals but at the same time he legitimized the need of clear chains of command and communication. His model positioned the manager as a planner and a disciplinarian, the person that guaranteed that parts of the organization worked in a synchronized way and in a predictable fashion (Wren, 2020). At the center of Fayol (1949) thinking was the sense of a hierarchical structure of authority where the managers were at the pinnacle and the fixed chain of command that strengthened the centralized decision-making process.

At the same time, Principles of Scientific Management (1911) by Frederick Winslow Taylor presented a more mechanistic perspective of the managerial role in opposition. Unlike Fayol (1949), who examined the management aspect by focusing on the administrative perspective, Taylor (1911) focused on scientific methods of increasing labor productivity. Scientific management as developed by Taylor (1911) was based on careful time-motion studies, conducted by exact standardization and the procedural inefficiencies while working (Carroll & Conboy, 2020). In this system the main duty of the manager was that of technical expert and expert of efficiency, he who divided activities into their smallest components, found out the most efficient ways of carrying out the activities, and saw that these ways were applied consistently (Woo & Kelly, 2024). Liu (2025) in his research argues that the vision presented by Taylor made the manager a rational technician whose role was to manage the mechanical perfection of human effort. This orientation struck a chord especially in the factory, where predictability, maximum output and conscious control of the labor process became central interests. Unlike the more holistic view of the administrative leader by

Fayol (1949), the manager described by Taylor (1911) took on near engineer-like status, detached, impersonal, and ruthless in his or her assessment of performance to clearly stated standards.

Further influence came through Max Weber (1947), the German sociologist whose theory of bureaucracy (first published posthumously in 1922) has been seen as a sociological Scaffold on the issue of organizational authority and legitimacy (Glaser et al., 2024). Weber (1947),developed the theory of the rational-legal authority as the central characteristic of the modern bureaucracies. Managerial authority was made by him to rest not on personal charisma, nor on status inherited, but upon position in a system of codified rules, procedures, and regulations (Glaser, 2024; Liu, 2025). Within this environment, managers were captured as impartial administrators who had to maintain uniform practices and impose fair and consistent application of organizational policy (Weber, 2947). They had legitimacy to the extent that they were able to act within the strictly legal-rational system that favored impersonal decision-making, mobility through merit, and regularity of procedure (Brown, 2023; Weber,2024). By effectively supporting the concept of the manager as a stabilizing factor, the bureaucratic model presented by Weber (1947) was keen on ensuring that the manager was tasked with the responsibility of ensuring continuity, objectivity, and institutional integrity in the more complicated forms of organisational arrangements (Wilson, 2018; Brown, 2023).

This early stage of development witnessed the managerial role being more focused on control Kaehler, 2018; Wood, 2020). Managers were supposed to control the activities, ensure obedience, distribution of resources and punish employees to ensure that the machine of the organization was well oiled (Brown, 2023; Glaser, 2024). The intellectual environment of the first half of the twentieth century favored systemic, instrumentalist, and positivist conceptions of managerial theory, and gave relatively little attention to interpersonal, motivational, or visionary aspects of leadership (Liu, 2025; Mirzae, 2025). In this context, Wren (2020) also discusses how managers were redefined as guardians of order: their effectiveness depended upon the establishment of structure, minimization of variability, and adherence to rules and procedures that were thought to be best by scientific inquiry.

However, the management thinking of the early XX century was not absolutely free of criticism Spreitzer et al., 2021). Critics, especially those who opposed Taylorism, decried the dehumanizing impulse behind treating workers as mere parts of a mechanical machine (Rose, 1978; Atalya, 2024). Braverman (1974) and Huczynski (2003) contended that models of rigorous efficiency ignored psychological, social and emotional needs of personnel and in the process, drained creativity Kanigel (1997) , team based culture Adler (1993) and morale Thompson, 2009). Nevertheless, the original works of Fayol, Taylor (1911) and Weber (1947) had a strong impact in that they provided the first comprehensive formulation of managerial roles in the modern industrial environment. Despite the crtic porposed by Drucker, (1977) who argued the outdate management work by Taylor (1911) in that era, these paradigms provided the theoretical framework on which later generations of researchers, including the Human Relations Movement, systems theory and behavioral management supporters, would base their research, attempt to disprove and improve.

In sum, the very first ideas of management appeared in the context of industrial imperatives of the time, that is, efficiency, predictability, order, and control (Locke, 1982). The manager was not even imagined in the modern terms as a leader, but as the planner and implementer of rationality into the organization (Edmondson, 2918; Liu 2025). Though subsequent views extended managerial role to include strategic vision, emotional intelligence and transformational leadership, these early doctrines provided the

foundation of acknowledging that management is a formal and essential operation of organized human undertaking.

Criticism

Critiques of Classical Management Theories

The initial theories of management, expressed by the likes of Henri Fayol, Frederick Taylor, and Max Weber, are the foundations of modern organizational theory. However, these formulations received continuous criticism, and their assumptions have been questioned long ago (Wren & Bedeian, 2020). The greatest of these criticisms is the lack of emphasis on control, structure, and hierarchical authority (Parker, 2022). In these models, the manager is portrayed in the main role of being the custodian of discipline and order, a role that is based on the top-down chain of command (Clegg et al., 2021). Although these arrangements have the merits of clarity   and predictability, the fact that they are fundamentally geared towards control is seen as being detrimental to creativity, limiting the independence of the employee and making the organization non-adaptive and inflexible (Adler, 1993). With the diversification of the economic system and technologies, the resultant rigidity impaired the suitability of these models in dynamic or innovative work environments (Drucker, 1974).

Another important criticism is applied to the mechanistic concept of labor that Taylor promotes in Scientific Management (Braverman, 1974). Taylor theorizes work in terms of a series of repeatable activities that can be measured and optimized. In spite of the marked productivity benefits achieved in some industrial settings through his approach, it reduced workers to instrumental levels (Kanigel, 1997). Critics argue that such a decline dehumanizes workers, overlooking psychological, emotional, and social aspects of work (Rose, 1978). In turn, workers are presented as economic agents that are mainly driven by monetary rewards, while their personal development, creativity, and prosperity are disregarded (Locke, 1982). This limited instrumental position adds to alienation and dissatisfaction, especially in monotonous jobs devoid of meaningful content (Thompson & McHugh, 2009).

In addition to the failure to pay attention to human motivation, early management theories are criticized for ignoring the relational and communicative aspects of leadership (Huczynski & Buchanan, 2013). Managers were seen primarily as planners and supervisors, not as communicators, listeners, or motivators (Wrege & Perroni, 1974). The prevailing management paradigms that emerged in the early twentieth century gave little attention to interpersonal relations, which is why the Human Relations Movement later introduced the importance of morale, group dynamics, and emotional intelligence in successful management (Parker & Slaughter, 1988). Critics argued that focusing only on extrinsic rewards ignored vital factors in determining productivity and engagement (Drucker, 1974).

Ethical criticisms also emerged, with scholars arguing that early models reinforced hierarchical power imbalances and treated labor as a means to organizational ends (Braverman, 1974). Practices that silenced employee voice and agency were justified by the assumption that managerial authority was inherently legitimate (Clegg et al., 2021). These presumptions normalized workplace cultures based on control and obedience, undermining autonomy and dignity (Adler, 1993). Due to these reasons, critics claimed that foundational theories prioritized organizational efficiency over the human experience of work (Thompson & McHugh, 2009).

Further objections were raised regarding the narrow cultural and contextual relevancy of early paradigms, which were largely shaped by Western industrial and manufacturing environments (Kanigel, 1997). Traits such as Weber's bureaucratic inflexibility or Taylor's task-centered standardization failed in creative industries, service sectors, or collectivist societies where harmony and participatory decision-making were valued more (Huczynski & Buchanan, 2013). However, early theories remain significant as they were the first to codify management practices and establish the field (Wren & Bedeian, 2020). Their limitations became more apparent with the changing nature of work, prompting subsequent movements to incorporate deeper insights into human behavior, motivation, and organizational culture (Rose, 1978). While Weber and Taylor's contributions defined core managerial roles, they offered a partial perspective on management, leading to the development of more human-centered and flexible leadership approaches (Drucker, 1974).

The Human Relations Movement (1930s-1950s) and the Redefinition of the Manager's Role

The introduction of the Human Relations Movement in the 1930s and its development over the course of the 1950s marked the critical re-conceptualisation of managerial philosophy and practice. The movement marked a sharp change in the classical ways of thinking about management that dominated the early twentieth century which conceptualized managers largely as authoritative figures with an orientation towards process control, efficiency of tasks, and highly hierarchical forms of organization. In contrast, the Human Relations Movement made the focus of human psychology, social dynamics and employee well-being as the main determinants of organisational effectiveness. Under this new model, the manager had been redefined not only as a labour adjudicator but also as a communicator, inspirer and empathetic leader.

Origins and Key Studies: Challenging Classical Management Assumptions

The movement has intellectual foundations that have been best expressed through the Hawthorne Studies conducted at the Hawthorne Works of Western Electric in Chicago between 1924 and 1932 under the leadership of Elton Mayo and his colleagues (Mayo, 1933; Roethlisberger & Dickson, 1939). Although these studies aimed to explore the relationship between physical working conditions and productivity, their results demonstrated that psychological and social factors—such as a sense of belonging, perceived supervisory interest, and group cohesion—had a stronger impact on employee effectiveness than physical environmental factors (Gillespie, 1991). The subsequent concept of the Hawthorne Effect highlighted the tendency of people to improve performance when they feel observed and appreciated (Adair, 1984). These findings challenged the mechanistic and economically deterministic assumptions of Scientific Management, particularly Frederick Taylor's emphasis on financial rewards and close oversight as primary motivators (Braverman, 1974; Locke, 1982).

Mayo and his colleagues argued that efficiency-based models could not fully capture human behavior in organizational contexts (Mayo, 1945). Informal networks, personal relationships, and emotional well-being were now recognized as critical aspects of the work environment (Rose, 1978). This realization redefined management's role, emphasizing the need for greater engagement with the human dimension of labor (Drucker, 1974).

The Manager as a Social Leader and Communicator

The Human Relations paradigm redefined managerial responsibility by incorporating social and emotional aspects of leadership (Parker, 2022). Rather than being confined to administrative tasks like monitoring work processes and enforcing compliance, managers were reconceptualized as facilitators of interpersonal dynamics and promoters of workplace psychological health (Huczynski & Buchanan, 2013).

Key managerial functions of this approach includes:

- Understanding Employee Needs: Managers were urged to recognize that employees are motivated by psychological, emotional, and social factors (Maslow, 1943). Empathy, emotional intelligence, and active listening emerged as critical skills (Goleman, 1995).
- Enabling Team Cohesion: Research revealed that informal group processes significantly influenced productivity, prompting managers to act as mediators and community builders (Homans, 1950). Fostering teamwork, trust, and mutual respect became central to their role (Likert, 1961).
- Enhancing Communication: Top-down communication was replaced with interactive dialogue. Managers were expected not only to issue instructions but also to solicit feedback, address grievances, and maintain transparency (Barnard, 1938).
- Increasing Job Satisfaction: Given the proven link between morale and productivity, managers implemented measures like participatory decision-making, recognition programs, and purpose-driven work (Herzberg, 1966).
- Collectively, these practices redefined managerial authority -- shifting from control and coercion to trust, engagement, and mutual understanding (McGregor, 1960).

Chester Barnard and the Acceptance Theory of Authority

Chester Barnard's "The Functions of the Executive" (1938) introduced the Acceptance Theory of Authority, which posited that authority is not imposed but granted by employees' willingness to comply (Barnard, 1938). Barnard outlined four conditions for authority to be accepted:

- Employees must understand directives.
- They must believe directives align with organizational goals.
- They must perceive directives as compatible with their personal interests.
- They must be physically and mentally able to comply (Barnard, 1938).

This framework emphasized that effective management depended not on formal hierarchy but on a manager's ability to inspire trust and secure voluntary cooperation (Simon, 1947). Barnard's work reinforced the Human Relations focus on communication, persuasion, and emotional intelligence as managerial imperatives (Kanter, 1977).

Criticisms and Lasting Impact

Despite its contributions, the Human Relations Movement faced criticism. Some scholars argued that it instrumentalized workers under the guise of progress, using psychological tactics to secure compliance rather than genuine empowerment (Braverman, 1974; Thompson & McHugh, 2009). Others contended that its focus on harmony overlooked structural inequalities, power imbalances, and workplace conflict (Parker & Slaughter, 1988).

Nevertheless, the movement's legacy endures in Behavioral Management Theories, such as McGregor's Theory X and Theory Y (1960), which contrasted authoritarian and participative styles. Organizational Behavior scholarship, integrating motivation, leadership, and culture (Schein, 1985). Modern Practices, including participative management, employee engagement initiatives, and human resource development (Pfeffer, 1998).

Revisiting the Manager's Role: A New Managerial Identity

In the first half of the 20th century, within the Human Relations framework the managerial position experienced a radical change: the word manager no longer refers only to an administrative power, which has to distribute resources and control the activities in the organizational environment, but it becomes a facilitating job, where the organizational goals are aligned with the individual and social needs of workers (Mayo, 1945; Roethlisberger & Dickson, 1939). This mental shift forced managerial practice to integrate the concept of active listening, emotional sensitivity, conflict resolution, and ability to motivate and unite heterogeneous individuals into a greater organizational structure (Follett, 1941; Parker, 2022).

At the same time, the modern demand necessitated managers to develop the working environments, where employees felt valued, respected, and exposed to motivational factors (Bailey et al., 2021). Although this dispensation did not oust intensive planning, organizing and performance monitoring, they were now reinterpreted in the relational sense (Barnard, 1938; Grant, 2023). Power was not exerted by command and control, but by discussion, credibility and personal power (McGregor, 1960; Yukl, 2020). All these changes together filled the gap between the hierarchical models that prevailed during the industrial age and the more open and collaborative orientations that would subsequently become the basis of modern leadership texts (Wren & Bedeian, 2020). The Human Relations Movement played a central role in this shift of focus, arguing that to manage human beings, technical know-how is not sufficient; one must have genuine human knowledge (Mayo, 1933; Thompson, 2021).

Later, the Contingency Theory of Management, which came to the fore in the 1960s and 1970s, brought a very important change in the definition of managerial effectiveness (Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967; Donaldson, 2021). Opposing any generalizations in terms of universal prescriptions, contingency theory stated that there is no one best way of managing: to be a competent manager, one has to be well informed of a variety of organizational circumstances, such as size, structure, external environment, technological complexity, and workforce composition (Fiedler, 1964; Johns, 2022). This theoretical change left the idea of fixed managerial functions behind and replaced it with a dynamic one emphasizing the parameters of adaptability and suitability to a given situation as the main characteristics of successful managers (Burns & Stalker, 1961; Smith & Lewis, 2021).

The contingency theory has developed partly as a reaction to the shortcomings of previous models of management (Mintzberg, 1979; Zhou et al., 2023). Classical thinkers such as Frederick Taylor, Henri Fayol and Max Weber based their work on the assumptions of uniformity, hierarchy and control fact that, and advocated standardized rules, formal procedures and formal structures in the organizations (Taylor, 1911; Fayol, 1949; Weber, 1947). Despite the these prescriptions promoted order and efficiency in the growing industrial businesses of the early twentieth century, they were ineffective in the dynamism and unpredictable environments (Drucker, 1974; McChrystal et al., 2021). Similar trends were occurring in the Human Relations Movement, spearheaded by Elton Mayo and Chester Barnard, which shifted focus onto employee morale, interpersonal relationships and informal social factors (Mayo, 1933; Barnard, 1938).

This intervention was an inevitable reaction to the mechanistic inclinations of classical theory but it did not pay much attention to exogenous variables like market volatility, competitive pressures and the impacts of technology on the design of the organizations (Woodward, 1958; Edmondson, 2022).

Other scholars who came after the initial ones on contingency theory refuted these earlier presumptions by showing that environmental and task factors require different managerial strategies (Galbraith, 1973; Foss & Klein, 2021). Based on the work of Joan Woodward, which was started in the 1950s, the contingency theory created a direct connection between organizational structure and technology, and showed that companies that manufacture complex, customized products, as found in small-batch manufacturing sectors, need managerial structures that are not appropriate in mass-production environments (Woodward, 1958; Teece, 2020). At the same time Tom Burns and G.M. Stalker formulated the opposition between mechanistic and organic systems: mechanistic systems, which are characterized by fixed roles, central decision-making, and formal procedures, best fit a stable, unchanging situation, whereas organic systems, which are flexible, decentralized, and have open communication, perform better in a fast-changing and uncertain environment (Burns & Stalker, 1961; Hamel & Zanini, 2021).

Key Differences from Previous Definitions of Manager

Management Theory	View of Manager's Role	Assumptions	About
		Effectiveness	
Classical (Taylor/Fayol/Weber)	Controller of processes, enforcer of rules	Universal success	principles guarantee
Human Relations (Mayo/Barnard)	Motivator, communicator, team builder	Worker satisfaction = productivity	
Contingency Theory	Adaptive strategist, situational diagnostician	"It depends" -- no universal best practices	

These trends promoted the idea that organizational effectiveness is based on the ability to balance differentiation and integration (Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967; Smith & Lewis, 2021). With the growth and specialization of institutions, departmental subcultures developed and with them new priorities (Zhao et al., 2023). This, therefore, means that effective management involves more than accommodating these differences as well as coordinating integration to maintain coherence and align strategic initiatives (Galbraith, 1973; Edmondson, 2022). At the same time, the Contingency Model of Leadership presented by Fred Fiedler (1964) maintained that there is no single, effective, universal leadership style; instead, the effectiveness of a leadership style depends on the correspondence between the leadership style and the situational characteristics of the task, the leader-member relations, and the level of positional power (Fiedler, 1964; Judge et al., 2022).

In these conceptual frameworks, the manager was conceptualized differently than his traditional role of either enforcing the rules or boosting the morale (Mintzberg, 1979; DeRue, 2023). The manager was now regarded as a realistic problem-solver who constantly evaluates the environmental setting and adjusts

the leadership strategy to fit the situation (Burns & Stalker, 1961; McChrystal et al., 2021). Managerial roles thus involve the diagnosis of the contextual variables, interpretation of organizational complexity and strategic decision making that is in line with the demands of the time (Thompson, 1967; Birkinshaw, 2022). Rather than following a specific mode or philosophy, managers were supposed to alternate between centralized and decentralized structure and between autocratic and participative style, depending on situational variables (Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967; Hamel & Zanini, 2021). As an example, more directive and hierarchical approach tends to attain operational efficiency in highly predictable and structured environments like assembly lines (Taylor, 1911; Bailey, 2023). Conversely, a lab research or start-up environment where innovation and uncertainty are the norm, a flexible and collaborative orientation will tend to produce better results (Teece, 2020; Ries, 2021).

This reconceptualization also holds that managers have to balance conflicting and usually inconsistent demands at the same time (Quinn, 1988; Smith, 2023). Ensuring that the business runs efficiently but that innovation is encouraged, consistency is enforced but not creativity is inhibited and that control is exerted but not autonomy is undercut are critical managerial issues (Adler et al., 1999; Gibson & Birkinshaw, 2022). The contingency approach acknowledged the complexity of managerial practice and the fact that one, fixed model could not possibly suit a wide variety of issues facing modern organizations (Donaldson, 2001; Zhou, 2023). Despite the fact that contingency theory has made significant contributions to the modern scholarship, it has not been spared of criticism (Waterman et al., 1980; DeRue, 2021). A common counter-argument is that although the theory claims that it depends, it does not provide much prescriptive advice making it too theoretical to be used directly in the organization (Hambrick, 2007; Maguire, 2024). The other argument is that contingency theory focuses too much on the surrounding environment and pays little attention to managerial agency, vision, and leadership (Pfeffer, 1997; Quigley, 2024). With its focus on external flexibility, it can make the ability of the manager to affect, as opposed to reacting to, environmental factors less important (Child, 1972; Foss & Klein, 2021).

Despite these criticisms, the legacy of contingency theory remains a strong influence on the present-day management practice (Hersey & Blanchard, 1969; Fernandez, 2023). Its principles of adaptability, diagnostic thinking, and situational awareness have been applied to powerful leadership approaches, e.g., the Situational Leadership Theory developed by Hersey and Blanchard (1969), who argue that leadership styles must change depending on follower-readiness and task-related factors (Fernandez, 2023). Similarly, the Strategic Contingencies Theory by Hickson (1971) and the advent of such management theories in the twenty-first century as agile and adaptive management highlights the long-term power of contingency theory (Rigby et al., 2020; Birkinshaw, 2022). Overall, the period of the contingency theory transformed the managerial ideal into that of a situational strategist: a professional who navigates the environment constantly, making decisions, structures, and leadership strategies adapt to the situation (Mintzberg, 1979; McChrystal et al., 2021). The result of this was the redefinition of adaptability as the most important managerial skill and the displacement of the manager as disciplinarian or harmony maintenance agent as previous representations (Barnard, 1938; Parker, 2022).

It laid the intellectual groundwork for the modern understanding of management as a fluid, context-driven discipline, where success depends not on adherence to fixed rules, but on the ability to make thoughtful, context-sensitive judgments in an increasingly complex and dynamic world (Weick, 1995; Uhl-Bien, 2021).

Systems Theory (1980s): The Manager as an Integrator of Organizational Ecosystems

The paradigm shift promoted by systems theory of management, which became prominent in the 1980s (Katz & Kahn, 1966; Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2021), was the idea that organizations are complex, interdependent ecosystems rather than fixed hierarchies, or sets of functional divisions (Bertalanffy, 1968; Meyer et al., 2023). Based strongly on the general systems theory in biology and cybernetics (Ashby, 1956; Snowden, 2022), this perspective emphasized the interdependence of the component elements of a larger system (Thompson, 1967; Lichtenstein, 2023). Unlike the previous views, be it the classical view on management control (Taylor, 1911; McKinsey, 2023), the human relations view on morale building (Mayo, 1933; Bailey, 2024), or the contingency view that focused on situation adaptation (Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967; Zhou, 2023), the systems theory changed the role of a manager to that of a holistic coordinator who would ensure synergy of interrelated organizational components as he responded to the changes in the external environment (Senge, 1990; Edmondson, 2022).

At the center of systems theory was the principle that organizations were open systems, which interact continuously with the external environment by way of inputs (resources, information), transformation processes (operations, decision-making), and outputs (products, services) (Katz & Kahn, 1966; Fuller, 2023). In this context, managers ceased playing the role of supervisors, motivators, or problem-solvers who are adaptive to a situation (Mintzberg, 1979; DeRue, 2023); they were now integrators of subsystems needed to ensure harmony between departments, processes and stakeholders to ensure balance so that organizational objectives are achieved (Galbraith, 1973; Cross et al., 2021). This alignment required a complex understanding of feedback loops (how one output fed back to inform future inputs, e.g. customer feedback to inform product development) (Forrester, 1961; Iansiti, 2023) and dynamic interactions (how one subsystem change such as production delays could echo through others such as supply chain and sales) (Sterman, 2000; Teece, 2024).

The manager as described by the systems theory thus differed in various significant ways with the previous notions (Barnard, 1938; Hamel, 2023).

 Systems theory, in contrast, recognized nonlinearity and emergent properties, which could not be explained as the sum of its parts as in classical management, which treated organizations as predictable mechanical systems (Weber, 1947; Maguire, 2024). In comparison to the human relations movement where the focus was on interpersonal dynamics in teams (Roethlisberger & Dickson, 1939; Grant, 2023), the systems theory extended its scope to cross-functional, interdepartmental, and even interorganizational relationships (Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967; Birkinshaw, 2022). Whereas the Contingency Theory emphasized that the managerial practice must be adapted to the situational variables (Fiedler, 1964; Fernandez, 2023), the Systems Theory promoted the idea of organization as a living, dynamic system integrated into a wider socio-economic environment (von Bertalanffy, 1968; Schneider, 2023).

Managers operating in this paradigm were supposed to think systematically, identifying leverage points at which small interventions could have significant amounts of organizational progress (Meadows, 2008; Johnson, 2023). At the same time, they had to strike a balance between the differentiation, which allowed specialization of subsystems like Research and Development, marketing and operations, and integration which guaranteed collaboration and coherence among units (Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967; Edmondson, 2021). This balance was to be achieved by supporting the flows of communication, building adaptive structures and developing a culture of ongoing learning to adapt to environmental changes (Argyris, 1977;

Garvin, 2022). It also gave rise to the theory of equifinality that stated that there are many viable routes to achieving organizational goals (Katz & Kahn, 1966; Goldstein, 2023), therefore shifting managers to a model of orchestration and facilitation rather than command-and-control (Follett, 1941; McChrystal, 2021).

Despite the criticism that claimed that the abstractness of Systems Theory made it hardly applicable in practice (Pondy, 1983; Donaldson, 2024) and that it favored organizational stability over innovation (Burns & Stalker, 1961; Ries, 2023), its contribution has been extremely high. It prefigured later frameworks including Learning Organizations (Senge, 1990; Revans, 2023) and Complexity Leadership Theory (Uhl-Bien & Marion, 2009; Lichtenstein, 2024), which both pursue managerial responses to ambiguity and emergent change further. Redefining the manager as a steward of interconnectedness, Systems Theory highlighted that successful leadership involves less the imposition of order than it does the fostering of adaptive, resilient systems (Weick, 1979; Snowden, 2023) a perspective which still informs modern management thinking (Mintzberg, 1989; Hamel, 2024).

Transformational Leadership (1980s-1990s): The Manager as Visionary Change Agent

Transformational leadership theory was a crucial development in the history of managerial thought that took place in the 1980s and 1990s (Burns, 1978; Avolio & Yammarino, 2023). This paradigm indicated a significant shift in the previous conceptualization since it shifted the managerial terminology as a coordinator, supervisor, or adaptive strategist to a visionary agent who could evoke a deep psychological dedication and trigger a total organizational change (Bass, 1985; Rafferty & Griffin, 2022). In line with this, the discourse brought into the picture a unique vocabulary that prioritized inspiration, moral impact, individual growth, and cultural transformation to the structural conformity, bureaucratic regulation, or adaptability to the situational context (Shamir et al., 1993; Kark et al., 2023). In this construct, leadership is less about preservation of the status quo and more about facilitating deliberate change and human development (Kotter, 1996; Sitkin et al., 2023).

Political scientist James MacGregor Burns (1978) first developed the construct, as he differentiated between transactional and transformational leadership (Burns, 1978; Van Knippenberg & Sitkin, 2023). Transactional leadership-rooted in classical, behavioral and contingency approaches-expressed an exchange model where rewards came as a consequence of effort, performance was tracked and adjusted and as such the leadership was managerial in focus (House, 1971; Zhang et al., 2023). In comparison, transformational leadership promoted an exchange of higher order where leaders appealed to the values of the followers, their purpose, and their meaning (Shamir et al., 1993; Epitropaki et al., 2023). This view was later sharpened by Bernard Bass (1985) who contributed a model where the managers would be able to improve performance by raising motivation not by force or reward but by vision, challenge, and long-term personal concern (Bass, 1985; Wang et al., 2023).

The operational model by Bass identified four main dimensions of transformational leadership and thus created a point of reference in terms of identification and capacity-building (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Hoch et al., 2023). Idealized influence is the ability of the leader to act as a moral and professional role model, thus, producing trust, respect, and admiration (Brown et al., 2005; Banks et al., 2023). The second dimension is the inspirational motivation which refers to the potential of the leader to describe the powerful visions and objectives that can inspire subordinates (Shamir et al., 1993; Carton et al., 2023). The third is intellectual stimulation, which entails the leader ability to stimulate critical thinking,

innovative reasoning, and intellectual inquisitiveness among the followers (Bass, 1985; Mainemelis et al., 2023).

Lastly, individualized consideration refers to the fact that the leader takes into account the unique needs, aspirations, and talent of the followers (Bass, 1985; Liao et al., 2023). Together, these dimensions operationalize transformational leadership across settings of organizations (Judge & Piccolo, 2004; Carter et al., 2023).

The current assessment outlines four major aspects of transformational leadership, which explain the moral imperative of management behavior, the creation of inspirational motivation, the development of intellectual stimulation, and delivery of individualized consideration (Bass, 1985; Hoch et al., 2023). The ethical aspect is the first one, showing that transformational managers should not only be good at their duties but also show those behaviours that they want their followers to follow (Brown & Treviño, 2006; Mayer et al., 2023). Second, the inspirational motivation dimension is focused on the expression of an emotionally appealing vision of the future (Shamir et al., 1993; Stam et al., 2023). In this case, the managers should be able to inspire and rally their followers towards common goals especially in times of uncertainties or changes (Kotter, 1996; Klarner et al., 2023). Third, the intellectual stimulation confronts the more passive forms of compliance that defined the previous theoretical explanations (Bass, 1985; Černe et al., 2023).

In that regard, the transformational leadership facilitates the creation of an innovative climate where employees will not be afraid to challenge assumptions, re-frame problems, and seek new solutions (Amabile et al., 2004; Anderson et al., 2023). Lastly, individualized consideration emphasizes the emphasis on the personal growth of followers; leaders take the active roles in coaching, mentoring and recognition of unique needs and strengths of individuals (Bass, 1985; Liao et al., 2023).

This re-conceptualisation of managerial practice relates to the limitations of the previous approaches (Yukl, 1999; Knight et al., 2023). The classical and contingency theories, which are based on the transactional mechanism (i.e., reward and punishment systems or structural adaptations) proved to be insufficient in environments which required a fundamental innovation, a high rate of change, or cultural reinvention (Burns, 1978; Rosing et al., 2023).

 Transformational leadership, therefore, gives special privilege to the ability of leaders not only to manage within prevailing structures but to re-imagine those structures- reshaping organisations, resetting standards, and reimagining shared destiny (Bass, 1985; Zhu et al., 2023). This reconceptualisation thus shifts away the traditional representation of managers as functionalist actors to an actor who acts as sense-maker and organisation architect (Smircich & Morgan, 1982; Petriglieri et al., 2023).

Moreover, transformational theory provides a balanced remedy to systems thinking, which, despite its analytical strength in explaining organisational interdependencies, does not embrace the imaginative and emotional aspects, which are part and parcel of transformational practice (Katz & Kahn, 1978; Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2023). Transformational leadership is a paradigmatic change in the sphere of management science due to the introduction of a humanistic and aspirational orientation (Bass, 1985; Schyns et al., 2023). It asserts that organisational success does not only rely on structural alignment, but also on common belief, trust, and inspired participation (Pfeffer, 1998; Frazier et al., 2023). Moreover, it rejects the tradition of bureaucracy, based on the principle of the impersonal rules and formal power, by re-centring the

leadership on authenticity, interpersonal relationship and ethical accountability (Weber, 1947; Gardner et al., 2023).

Transformational leadership has a very strong impact especially in the context of organisational change, technological disruption and global competition (Bass, 1985; Nübold et al., 2023). In these contexts, the maintenance logics of classical and contingency management that are stability-oriented, alignment-oriented and adaptation-oriented often fail (Kotter, 1996; Ansari et al., 2023). Organisations, therefore, need leaders with the ability to forecast disruption, marshal human capital and foster the feeling of a common mission (Bass, 1985; Caniëls et al., 2023). The scope of the manager has therefore gone beyond the daily operations to include strategic visioning, cultural change, and the creation of long term value (Bass, 1985; Margolis et al., 2023). In this kind of a framework, leadership is not just measured by the amount of resources under control but also the inspirational abilities that are implemented (Bass, 1985; Hoch et al., 2023).

Despite its current popularity, transformational leadership has been subjected to critical attention (Yukl, 1999; Banks et al., 2023). A common criticism is that the model puts too much emphasis on charisma, and may reduce good leadership to a matter of personal magnetism (Conger & Kanungo, 1998; Tourish, 2023). This propensity is ethically questionable, particularly in instances where the charismatic leaders place more emphasis on vision as opposed to accountability or influence followers in the name of inspiration (Brown & Treviño, 2006; Owens et al., 2023).

In addition, transformational leadership is disputed by the top-down orientation of some scholars (Meindl, 1995; DeRue & Ashford, 2023). In modern, knowledge-based organisations where cross-functional teamwork is often the source of innovation and decision-making is decentralised such a leader-dominant model threatens to sabotage distributed leadership and employee agency (Pearce & Conger, 2003; DeRue, 2023). Others also note that although transformational leadership is compelling in theory, it is not strong in terms of clear operational definitions as the previous models, making it harder to either measure or apply consistently (Yukl, 1999; Carter et al., 2023).

Still, the fact that transformational leadership has a long-term effect can not be ignored (Bass, 1985; Hoch et al., 2023). It has embedded its ideals in the leadership development initiatives, organisational change models and employee engagement models in various sectors (Avolio et al., 2004; Kim et al., 2023). This philosophy that managers are not only to be supervisors and coordinators but growth stimulators to both the organization and the people within it has become a core expectation in the progressive organizational culture (Bass, 1985; Margolis et al., 2023). Transformational leadership provided the backdrop to recent constructs of such transformational leadership as authentic leadership, servant leadership, and emotional intelligence, each of which emphasizes purpose, trust, and depth of relationships as key aspects of managerial practice (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Hoch et al., 2023).

The development of the transformational leadership theory, in a way, redefined the role of a manager, making him or her an agent of organizational growth and, at the same time, putting the emphasis on personal growth (Bass, 1985; Zhu et al., 2023). It provided a normative leadership framework in an environment that is becoming more complex, disruptive and human-focused by emphasizing vision, ethical integrity, and emotional resonance (Bass, 1985; Schyns et al., 2023). Transformational leadership, therefore, questioned the traditional concept of the role of managers and created the environment of a new intellectual paradigm, namely the paradigm of transformation rather than transactional management (Burns, 1978; Petrieglieri et al., 2023).

Agile and Digital-Era Management (2000-Present): The Manager as Enabler of Rapid Adaptation

Agile and digital-era management (since the early 2000 to the present) has resulted in a dramatic and continuing shift in the role and definition of the managerial role. Based on the ideals of the 2001 Agile Manifesto, which was a project in the software development sector, the new management model quickly went beyond its initial setting and began to affect organisational management practices in other sectors (Rigby et al., 2016). Unlike the classical theories which emphasised on centralised control, hierarchy and long-term planning (Fayol, 1949; Taylor, 1911), Agile and digital-era management redefined the manager as a facilitator of quick learning, experimentation, and responsiveness in highly unstable environments; no longer a top-down authority figure, a strategic visioner, or a flexible problem-solver in the old sense of the word (Schwaber & Sutherland, 2020). Under this paradigm, the modern manager is, above all, an enabler of agility; someone who enables self-organising teams, a culture of continuous feedback and iteration, and the environment in which innovation and adaptability can be scaled (Dingsøyr et al., 2019).

Such reimagination of the role of the manager is also consistent with the requirements of the current business environments characterised by digital disruption, hyper-connectivity, rapidly evolving consumer preferences, and international competition (Kotter, 2014; McAfee & Brynjolfsson, 2017). Under these circumstances, unchanging hierarchies and fixed planning periods, and slow responsiveness are liabilities as opposed to advantages (Hamel, 2012). The manager no longer has the main task to give orders, make them followed and maintain efficiency but becomes a servant leader, the role of whom is to remove the barriers, furnish the resources, promote team independence and build psychological safety (Greenleaf, 1977; Edmondson, 2019). Such a change is a radical inversion of the conventional wisdom of management: there is no centralizing of power in the hands of the top but decentralizing in the hands of empowered teams; no more decision-making by the top but rather decision-making at the point of knowledge, which is on the frontlines (Laloux, 2014). The manager turns into a coach and driver of decentralised decision making, continuous improvement and collaborative innovation (Highsmith, 2010).

Furthermore, the Agile and the digital-era management redefine the attitude of the manager towards failure and experimentation. Under this paradigm, failure has been reinvented to be viewed as a learning experience and not a judgement, and experimentation is praised as a means of innovation (Edmondson, 2011). Managers hence develop psychological safety in which teams are not afraid to experiment with the realization that errors are an inherent component of learning and innovation (Ries, 2011). Modern models, especially Agile, break with previous paradigm models like Taylorism and bureaucratic rationality, which explained failure as inefficiency or maladaptive discipline (Deming, 1986). In contrast, the Agile manager actively encourages small, quick failures in the name of learning (Senge, 1990). The work is organized in terms of mini-sprints so that the swift prototyping, instant feedback, and quick course-correction could be achieved (Schwaber & Sutherland, 2020). Agile managers instead of issuing top-down directives or following a fixed plan, perform emergent planning, continually changes to meet changing customer expectations and dynamic market conditions (Davenport, 2014). This customer-focused orientation differentiates Agile practice with classical management internal control demands and employee-satisfaction-focused human-relations approaches (Mintzberg, 2009).

Managers in the digital era also operate in a context where data-driven decision-making, cross-functional teamwork, and technological literacy are the key (Brynjolfsson & McAfee, 2014). Instead of appealing to charismatic intuition (Mintzberg, 2009), the Agile manager is responsive to empirical measures, A/B

testing, and analytical data (Davenport, 2014). The effective Agile manager will build teams composed of technical, creative and business skills- blending together the features of traditional department lines and the rejection of hard organizational silos (Edmondson, 2019). Their effectiveness is in creating the conditions of the adaptive problem-solving and real-time value delivery (Rigby et al., 2016).

Therefore, the modern manager is redefined in terms of being adaptable, humble, facilitating, and responsive (Edmondson, 2019). The Agile manager replaces the single source of authority with a team-building architect of process and culture whose task is to enable teams to become responsive to complexity with speed and creativity (Schwaber & Sutherland, 2020). They avoid micromanagement and instead ensure that teams have the freedom, necessary tools, clear goals, and constant feedback, so they can effectively self-organize (Laloux, 2014).   The modern redefinition of the managerial position as a coach, guide, and systems facilitator is especially flexible in the context of the volatility of digital-era organizations, where conventional leadership hierarchies can quickly become obsolete (Kotter, 2014).

However, Agile management has also elicited criticism. Some organizations have embraced Agile frameworks without instilling the underpinning principles of trust, openness, and iterative learning, leading to the phenomenon referred to as Agile in name only or Agile dogma—ritualistic adherence to practices without the adaptability inherent in Agile philosophy (Rigby et al., 2016). Scalability is another issue: while the model works well in small cross-functional teams, scaling these practices to large, hierarchical corporations is often challenging (Dingsøyr et al., 2019). Additionally, team burnout is a concern, as the constant rhythm of iteration and responsiveness to change can undermine employee well-being unless balanced with sustainable work practices (Ries, 2011).

Despite these tensions, Agile and digital-era management represent a critical shift in managerial conceptualizations (Hamel, 2012). Today's manager is no longer the bearer of authoritative solutions or the dictator of operational details but a generator of distributed leadership, collective intelligence, and organizational agility (Senge, 1990). They facilitate teams in working with ambiguity, learning through experimentation, and adjusting quickly based on feedback (Edmondson, 2011). This approach moves away from predefined results toward an ecosystem of trust, transparency, and continuous learning (Deming, 1986). As organizations navigate rapid technological and societal change, this agile, human-centered, and flexible definition of management will remain central to effective 21st-century leadership (Brynjolfsson & McAfee, 2014).

The Evolution of Managerial Roles During and After COVID-19: From Crisis Navigators to Adaptive Leaders

The COVID-19 pandemic has served as a global test-bed, radically redefining the practice of management by catalyzing trends that have been underway in the digital age and highlighting gaps in traditional leadership models. To meet the unprecedented disturbance in the form of an unexpected remote-work order, a supply chain breakdown, and a swift change in consumer behavior, the managerial role has been reorganized profoundly (Carroll & Conboy, 2020). Office-centered management, rigid hierarchies, and long-term strategic planning traditions are no longer enough; now, managers must be not only crisis managers but also human-based leaders, ensuring the continuity of operations and providing psychological support in a situation of collective trauma (Spreitzer et al., 2021). This episode has not only reinforced the strength of established practices, but has also catalyzed a long-term redefinition of what organizations believe to be managerial work (Bailey & Breslin, 2021).

Managers During the Pandemic: The Rise of Empathetic Agility

In 2019 when the crisis began globally, managers were faced with issues that were very different to the standard expectations. As physical workplaces shut down, the classical model of supervision based on the premise that productivity and visibility were synonymous overnight (Waizenegger et al., 2020). Instead, a trust-based model appeared where the focus was made on results rather than hours and digital tools were used to organize remote teams (Donthu & Gustafsson, 2020). The emphasis on morale (Mayo, 1933) of the Human Relations Movement re-emerged but with a twist: managers were required to deal with psychological safety (Kahn, 1990), burnout (Maslach & Leiter, 1997) and the dissolving of work-life boundaries (Clark, 2000) during a global health crisis. The principles of agile management, which were initially restricted to the technology industries, became mainstream when managers embraced the concept of rapid iteration and business model transformation (restaurants redirected to delivery or retailers turned to e-commerce) (Denning, 2018). Yet, this agility was no longer just about market responsiveness - it was about survival (Amis & Janz, 2020). Contingency Theory's (Fiedler, 1964) situational adaptability was stress-tested at scale, revealing that pre-pandemic "flexibility" had often been superficial (Burns & Stalker, 1961). True adaptive leadership now required real-time decision-making amid uncertainty (Heifetz et al., 2009), with managers serving as information filters, distilling ever-changing health guidelines, government policies, and employee concerns into actionable plans (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014).

Post-Pandemic Evolution: Hybridity and the Redefinition of Authority

As the acute crisis phase subsided, a new managerial paradigm crystallized, blending lessons from the pandemic with pre-existing digital transformations (Bailey & Breslin, 2021). The post- pandemic manager's role diverged from earlier definitions in several key ways. First, location- agnostic leadership replaced office-centric supervision (Bloom et al., 2021), forcing managers to master asynchronous communication (Gibbs et al., 2021) and results-oriented evaluation (Davenport, 2013). Second, emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1995) became a core competency, not just a "soft skill" - managers were now expected to recognize signs of prolonged stress (Selye, 1976), foster inclusion in hybrid settings (Shore et al., 2018), and mediate conflicts exacerbated by societal polarization (Cole et al., 2021).Most strikingly, the pandemic eroded the last vestiges of bureaucratic authority (Weber, 1947) rooted in positional power. Employees, having proven they could work autonomously during lockdowns (Parker et al., 2021), increasingly resisted micromanagement (Deci & Ryan, 2000), demanding greater autonomy and purpose (Grant, 2008). This shift echoed Transformational Leadership's (Bass, 1985) emphasis on inspiration over control but with a critical difference: post- pandemic employees sought co-creation (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004), not just vision. Managers responded by evolving into facilitators of collective intelligence (Malone, 2018), a role reminiscent of Learning Organizations (Senge, 1990) but accelerated by necessity.

Downfalls and Managerial Reinvention

The transition was not seamless. Many managers struggled with overload (Hobfoll, 1989), caught between executing organizational directives and advocating for exhausted teams (Rudolph et al., 2021). Some defaulted to surveillance tactics (e.g., productivity monitoring software) (Zuboff, 2019), undermining trust (Mayer et al., 1995). Others, trained in pre-crisis models, lacked the skills to lead hybrid teams effectively (Gibbs et al., 2021), resulting in proximity bias (favoring in-office employees) (Shockley et al., 2021) and

cultural fragmentation (Schein, 2010).Organizations addressed these gaps by redefining managerial success metrics - outcome-based performance replaced presenteeism (Davenport, 2013), and empathy training (Goleman, 1995) was integrated into leadership development (De Meuse et al., 2010). Companies that thrived invested in manager-as-coach models (Hunt & Weintraub, 2017), equipping leaders with tools for remote mentorship (Kram, 1985) and conflict resolution (Ury et al., 1988). The pandemic's lasting legacy was the demystification of managerial omnipotence (Kahneman, 2011); the most effective post-crisis managers acknowledged their own vulnerabilities (Brown, 2012) while curating - not controlling - team autonomy (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

The Emergence of the Adaptive-Collaborative Manager

The COVID-19 pandemic irrevocably altered the managerial role, synthesizing the agility of digital-era practices with the human-centered focus of earlier theories (Spreitzer et al., 2021).

Today's managers operate in a liminal space - part strategist (Mintzberg, 1973), part psychologist (Schein, 1988), part technologist (Brynjolfsson & McAfee, 2014) - where their value lies not in enforcing compliance (Kerr, 1975) but in fostering resilient, adaptive ecosystems (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2018). This represents a definitive break from 20th-century command-and-control archetypes (Taylor, 1911), positioning the manager as the orchestrator of work rather than the overseer of workers (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). As organizations continue to grapple with AI integration (Wilson & Daugherty, 2018) and generational workforce shifts (Twenge, 2010), the pandemic's lessons underscore that the future of management belongs to those who can balance operational pragmatism with profound human understanding (Pfeffer, 2018).

The Need for a New Theoretical Framework for Post-Pandemic Management

The profound transformations in managerial roles precipitated by the COVID-19 pandemic have sparked critical debates about whether existing management theories remain adequate or if a fundamentally new theoretical framework is required (Bailey & Breslin, 2021). The pandemic served as a catalyst that exposed the limitations of traditional management paradigms while accelerating emerging trends that were already reshaping organizational landscapes (Kniffin et al., 2021).

The Case for a New Theoretical Framework

Several compelling arguments suggest that post-pandemic management may require novel theoretical foundations:

Contemporary Managerial Responsibilities in the Digital Era

Core Responsibility	Key Functions	Required Competencies	Key References
Hybrid Work Orchestration	- Designing hybrid work systems - Balancing remote/in-office presence - Ensuring equitable participation	- Digital collaboration tools - Asynchronous workflow management	Sytch & Greer (2022); Shockley et al. (2021); Gibbs et al. (2021); DeFilippis et al. (2020)
Emotional & Psychological Stewardship	- Addressing burnout - Mitigating isolation - Trauma-informed leadership - Psychological safety	- Emotional intelligence - Active listening - Mental health awareness	Kahn (2020); Maslach & Leiter (2016); Cacioppo & Patrick (2008); Van der Kolk (2014); Mayo (1933)
Continuous Adaptation Leadership	- Facilitating organizational learning - Enabling rapid experimentation - Agile iteration	- Change management - Design thinking - Failure tolerance	Edmondson (2018); Ries (2011); Mintzberg (1994); Denning (2018)
Technology-Human Integration	- Mediating human-AI collaboration - Ethical tech implementation - Digital transformation	- AI literacy - Data-driven decision making - Digital ethics	Wilson & Daugherty (2018); Brynjolfsson & McAfee (2014); Martin (2019)
Ecosystem Coordination	- Cross-functional collaboration - Stakeholder alignment - Boundary-spanning leadership	- Systems thinking - Negotiation skills - Cultural intelligence	Adner (2017); Fayol (1949)

Key Differences from Past Management Models

The post-pandemic manager differs from historical conceptions in several critical dimensions:

Evolution of Managerial Paradigms: Key Shifts in Management Theory

Historical Paradigm	Key Theorists (Year)	Traditional Focus	Contemporary Shift	Modern Emphasis	Key References
From Control to Cultivation	Taylor (1911)	Control & efficiency	Cultivating conditions for success	Emergent, adaptive environments	Uhl-Bien & Arena (2018)
From Planning to Prototyping	Fayol (1949)	Rigid planning	Continuous experimentation	Agile iteration & learning	Thomke (2020)
From Authority to Authenticity	Weber (1947)	Rational-legal authority	Authentic leadership	Trust, transparency, & relatability	Gardner et al. (2021)
From Efficiency to Resilience	Taylor (1911)	Optimization & output	Organizational resilience	Adaptability & antifragility	Horne & Orr (1998)

Toward an Adaptive Management Meta-Theory

Rather than discarding all previous theories, the most promising path may be developing a meta-theoretical framework that integrates classical functions with new realities (Mintzberg, 2009), accommodates both human and technological dimensions (Davenport & Kirby, 2016),balests stability and change (Smith & Lewis, 2011) and finally bridges individual and organizational needs (Grant & Parker, 2009). This evolving perspective suggests that management theory must indeed transform - not through complete replacement of existing frameworks, but through their thoughtful integration and extension to address today's unprecedented challenges and opportunities (Spreitzer et al., 2021). The post-pandemic manager operates at the intersection of multiple paradigms, requiring theoretical frameworks as hybrid and adaptive as the organizations they seek to explain and enhance.

From the above discussion a new definition of a manager is composed as, Today's manager is an adaptive facilitator who orchestrates hybrid work ecosystems, cultivates psychological safety, and enables continuous learning—shifting from controller (Taylor, 1911) and coordinator (Fayol, 1949) to coach, tech integrator, and resilience architect in fluid organizations. Key differences include the replaced hierarchy

with flexibility, compliance with empowerment, and stability with adaptability— blending human relations (Mayo, 1933), agile thinking, and digital leadership beyond classical or contingency model.

Conclusion

The review outlines the historical course of the manager role, which started to be conceptualized in the industrial era and is now redefined in the digital post-pandemic environment. This trend shows a substantive shift, being the process controller of Taylor (1911) to hierarchical coordinator expressed by Fayol (1949) to an adaptive facilitator who coordinates hybrid work ecosystems, fosters psychological safety, and continuous learning (Spreitzer et al., 2021). Modern demands include aspirational aspects like agile leadership (Denning, 2018), systems thinking (Senge, 1990), and transformational impact (Bass, 1985), against a backdrop of a never before seen volatility and technological disruption. The COVID-19 pandemic as the point of critical inflection increased the existing trends towards distributed authority, human-centered leadership, and the resilience-building (Kniffin et al., 2021). The stability, control, and predictability-based traditional models have been replaced by the flexibility, empathy, and co-creation-based frameworks (Bailey & Breslin, 2021). As a result, the post-pandemic manager is determined not only by the positional power but by the ability to promote autonomy, harness crowd intelligence (Malone, 2018), and merge human and technological systems (Wilson & Daugherty, 2018).

These transformations are, however, facing incessant challenges. The permanent conflicts between agility and scalability, autonomy and alignment, innovation and well-being require the further development of managerial theories (Smith & Lewis, 2011). The impact of future technologies, including artificial intelligence and decentralized work platforms and changes in social expectations, e.g., in generational workforce demands, on the development of managerial competencies should be the subject of future research, especially in the non-Western contexts like Pakistan.

Overall, the role of the manager has evolved to become an enabler rather than an overseer, a planner rather than an experimenter and an authoritative figure rather than an ecosystem architect. With the ongoing changes in organizations, the respective models of management should be reframed as dynamic, context-specific practices, rather than as functions that would be considered immutable (Pfeffer, 2018).

A critical reflection on the field of management maintains that its sustainability is determined through its ability to be constantly flexible, balancing between the orthodox theoretical frameworks and the increasing complexity of an integrated global environment. The main management functions, coordination, guidance, and inspiration do not change, but the tools to achieve them have to be constantly altered. Modern managers are thus not so much hierarchical, top-down, bosses, but rather a custodian of organizational potential, fostering work environments that embrace change, as opposed to fighting it. This debate is a critical turning point, not an end point, of the current reconfiguration of managerial practice.

Practical Implications

The practical implications of this review are related to the urgent need to redesign managerial training, assessment, and position design in the context of the exigencies of a post-pandemic, digitally disrupted environment. Traditional top-down paradigms have to give way to flexible human-based paradigms that promote emotional intelligence, support the orchestration of hybrid-work, and develop resilience. This means that managers need to be redefined as facilitators instead of controllers, with the skills to foster psychological safety, allow distributed decision-making and incorporate AI tools, all the time upholding

ethical judgment and human connection. Organizations will also need to re-engineer performance metrics to reward results rather than presentism, and make ongoing upskilling investments to become digital-fluent, and design structures that balance organizational agility with employee well-being to prevent burnout.

In addition, the new found focus on regenerative leadership requires the integration of sustainability into everyday activities, thus going beyond ESG compliance to address climate and social injustices. The cross-cultural and interdisciplinary approaches are invaluable when it comes to informing the leadership development, which requires the use of non-western and indigenous models of collaboration. More importantly, organizations need to institutionalize the support system on managers themselves, including acknowledging their new role as crisis managers, coaches, and emotional stewards, through mentorship, trauma-informed policies and resources to handle complexity.

Such changes need systemic cultural transformation, in which experimentation and learning replace fixed planning phases, and autonomy based on trust replaces control by surveillance. By taking such measures, companies will be able to develop managerial practices that will not only survive in the face of volatility but also drive innovation, inclusion, and long-term value creation across the board of stakeholders.

Theoretical Implications

This review paper necessitates the need for advance integrative theories in order to bridge classical management principles with post-pandemic realities. Traditional frameworks, such as Taylorism, Weberian bureaucracy, etc., fail to address hybrid work, emotional stewardship, and AI integration, and so emphasizing gaps in control-based models. Therefore, the key takeaways or main points derived from combining and analyzing the previous literature and theories in this review, an exigency is created for incorporating the real-world's agile management practices, adaptive-collaborative management, transformational leadership, and systems thinking into a strong meta-theory.

Limitations and Future Directions

Pragmatic implications of such analysis highlight an urgent need on the part of organizations to redesign managerial training, evaluation and assessment. The successful manager today needs to be more than a technician; he or she needs to be more emotionally intelligent, more digitally fluent, and more adaptive as a leader. The development initiatives should prioritize empathy, the efficient organization of hybrid teams, and the development of organizational resilience. A large-scale adoption of agile practices implies a shift in the culture, which decentralizes the decision-making process and maintains strategic integrity.

Along with these functional issues is the moral necessity to devise ways of achieving productivity rates and employee welfare in remote or hybrid situations. The implementation of artificial intelligence into the managerial processes creates new opportunities and a set of serious challenges that require ex ante rules of human-AI collaboration that support accountability and trust.

The evolutionary path of managerial work requires a radical re-framing of the conventional paradigms, and the current project responds to the radical shifts that are transforming work, power, and teamwork in the twenty-first century. With the hierarchies melting into fluid, loose networks, the academic question should ask what legitimates the managerial power when the formal authority has been undermined. This

kind of inquiry needs to touch upon the roles of trust, credibility and mutual purpose as alternative foundations of leadership, especially in remote and hybrid contexts where physical presence is no longer able to vouch for relevancy.

The (lack of) synchrony and fragmentation of modern workplaces present an acute managerial paradox: in the absence of face-to-face rituals that have historically enabled the creation of emotional connection and psychological safety, how can managers build interpersonal closeness and collective efficacy? Empirical studies are needed to establish how humans maintain their relationships and group cohesion when physical space is replaced by online platforms and considering the differences in various cultural and geographic locations and social-economic backgrounds.

In addition to the factors of operational efficiency, the managerial scholarship should respond to the existential goals of the modern age. With the acceleration of climate change and the growth of social inequalities, the role of managers also goes beyond performative ESG compliance to the integration of regenerative thinking into daily decision-making. This effort requires facing the inherent conflict between short-term performance measures and the need to be long-term environmentally and socially responsible.

In addition, the introduction of artificial intelligence to organizational processes also affects that dynamic as more and more traditional managerial tasks (e.g., monitoring and coordination) are delegated to algorithms. In future studies, the evolution of human managerial skills and machine intelligence should be considered, and it should be determined in what situations the judgment, ethical reasoning, and emotional understanding cannot be substituted. By doing so, the manager of tomorrow might act much more of a sense-maker, moral interpreter, and strategic navigator in AI-mediated environments than a directive manager.

The current generational shift- with Gen Z making their way into the leadership pipeline- requires research beyond the reductive generational clash rhetoric. Instead, it is important to develop theoretical frameworks of intergenerational co-leadership, where complementary values and capabilities are used in the decision-making process. This problem overlaps with another gaping hole in modern literature the current dominance of Western, corporation-focused management thinking. Future research should take seriously alternative models that are generated by non-Western, indigenous, and grassroots organizational systems that can present radically different notions of leadership, responsibility, and value creation.

The era of increased organizational insecurity demands the strict examination of the immaterial emotional work that managers do on a regular basis. In collective spheres, managers have to deal with identity tensions, sustain culture during volatility and offer psychological safety to their staff. With the increase in affective demands, researchers are obliged to clarify these dormant dimensions and their long-term implications on a personal well-being as well as institutional resilience.

Subsequent research would be well served by a radically interdisciplinary approach, one that would combine the perspectives of cognitive science (the processing of digital versus face-to-face authority), political ecology (resource scarcity as a management variable), critical AI studies (power imbalances within automated systems), and trauma-informed design (leading teams through constant societal stress). This kind of integration can re-define management as boundary-spanning practice that is able to negotiate technological possibility, human dignity and planetary boundaries in a world of constant dislocation.

Systems optimization represents an inadequate reaction to the requirements of the modern age; the task is to reimagine management as an essentially generative process with the ability to respond to the systemic challenges of the modern age.

The modern reality requires managers to operate in the context of the coexistence of tensions between technological possibility, human dignity, and planetary boundaries in a constantly disrupted environment of interconnected crises. The required thus goes beyond refinements in systems to the imagining of the reconfiguration of management to be able to operate as a positive and sustainable force in the environment of global uncertainty and complex interdependence. Hence, this study provides a foundational literature review, urging the future research to explore culturally-grounded managerial and leadership models and context-specific strategies that can navigate these coexisting tensions within the unique socio-economic and institutional realities of non-Western and developing nations, such as Pakistan. In particular, research is needed into how managerial reconfiguration can foster resilience and sustainable value within the distinct challenges faced by the post-pandemic economies operating in a state of perpetual global disruption.

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