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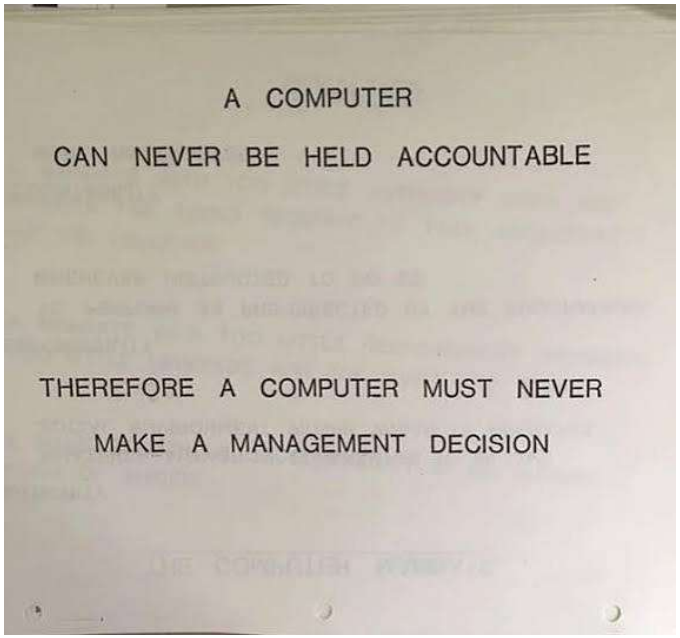
Negotiating managerial identity with and against the 'technological other'

Identity work in AI-assisted managerial work

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80 YEARS OF WELL-BEING THROUGH WORK



IBM training manual, 1979

*“Identities are fragile and fleeting processes, rather than fixed constructs (e.g. , Caza et al., 2018; Giazitzoglu, 2024; Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003), in which we engage through identity work and attempt to meet societal and organizational demands (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002).”**

IBM training manual, 1979

*Turunen, T., Katila, S., Huopalainen, A., Hwang, S., & Diehl, M. R. (2026). ‘And then I undress the work’: Materiality and embodied identity work among professional mothers. *Human Relations*, 79(6), 663-693.

Professional identity of a leader

- **Professional identity** refers to how individuals understand and define themselves as members of a profession, expressed through their professional roles and shaped by the tasks and organizational positions they occupy (Chreim et al., 2007; Ibarra et al., 2010).

- Expectations related to **leader role** are often *ambiguous* and *idealistic* in nature (Derue & Ashford, 2010; Sveningsson & Larsson, 2006).

- Leadership is always embedded within interpersonal relationships; a leader without a social context simply cannot be a leader (Day & Harrison 2007; Pakarinen & Huising, 2025).

- Leaders' identity guides their motivations, decision-making and organizational behavior (Kwok et al., 2018)

AI delegation as a managerial identity dilemma

- Professionals may find their identity threatened by AI as it reshapes the involvement of skills and competencies in fulfilling tasks (Mirbabaie et al., 2022; Strich et al., 2021).

- **AI delegation** poses a peculiar identity dilemma in managerial work, which embodies *moral obligations* subordinates (i.e. decision subjects) (Grant et al., 2023; Huhtala et al., 2021).

- **Identity work** has been conceptualized as a mechanism that is salient in situations that are ambiguous, confusing, and filled with tensions such as identity threats (Ahuja, 2023).

Actor-network perspective on AI and managerial authority

- ANT treats both humans and non-human technologies as participants capable of shaping organizational outcomes (Latour, 2005; Law, 1992).
- ANT sensitizes to how managerial identity emerges through relations between managers, employees, AI systems, organizational norms, and data infrastructures (Gutiérrez, 2024).
- **AI anthropomorphism** = the tendency to attribute human-like characteristics, intentions, emotions, cognition, agency, or social capabilities to artificial intelligence systems, regardless of whether the systems actually possess such qualities (Kim & Im, 2023; Ramaul et al., 2026; Scorici et al., 2024)

RQ: How do managers construct and negotiate their managerial identity in AI-assisted managerial work?

Data and methods

- **21 interviews** with supervisors working in ICT sector in the United States.
- *Discursive* identity work focuses on how people author self-narratives about themselves as leaders (Caza et al., 2018; Slay et al., 2010; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003).
- Interview themes included discussions about managerial work and the use of AI in managerial work.
- The analysis examined supervisors' claims about AI's role in managerial work and how participants established boundaries around its legitimate organizational role.

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(preliminary) RESULTS

80 YEARS OF WELL-BEING THROUGH WORK

Theme 1: Claiming non-delegable relational labor

I think managerial work involves a lot of emotions. And you end up getting like connected to them [employees], whereas **AI doesn't have emotions or feelings and it doesn't feel pain. While as a manager, a manager can be in your shoes and deal with the same problems that you're dealing with rather than an AI.** (US06)

AI is getting better at matching patterns, but it doesn't exist in the real world here with the rest of us. So, you know, the **AI will not know the personalities or communication styles.** Like, for example, I can see that Jane is looking down today, and maybe I don't know why, but clearly something is going on. And I'm not going to ask about it, but that will inform me how I interact with them that day. (US01)

Theme 2: Constructing delegation boundaries

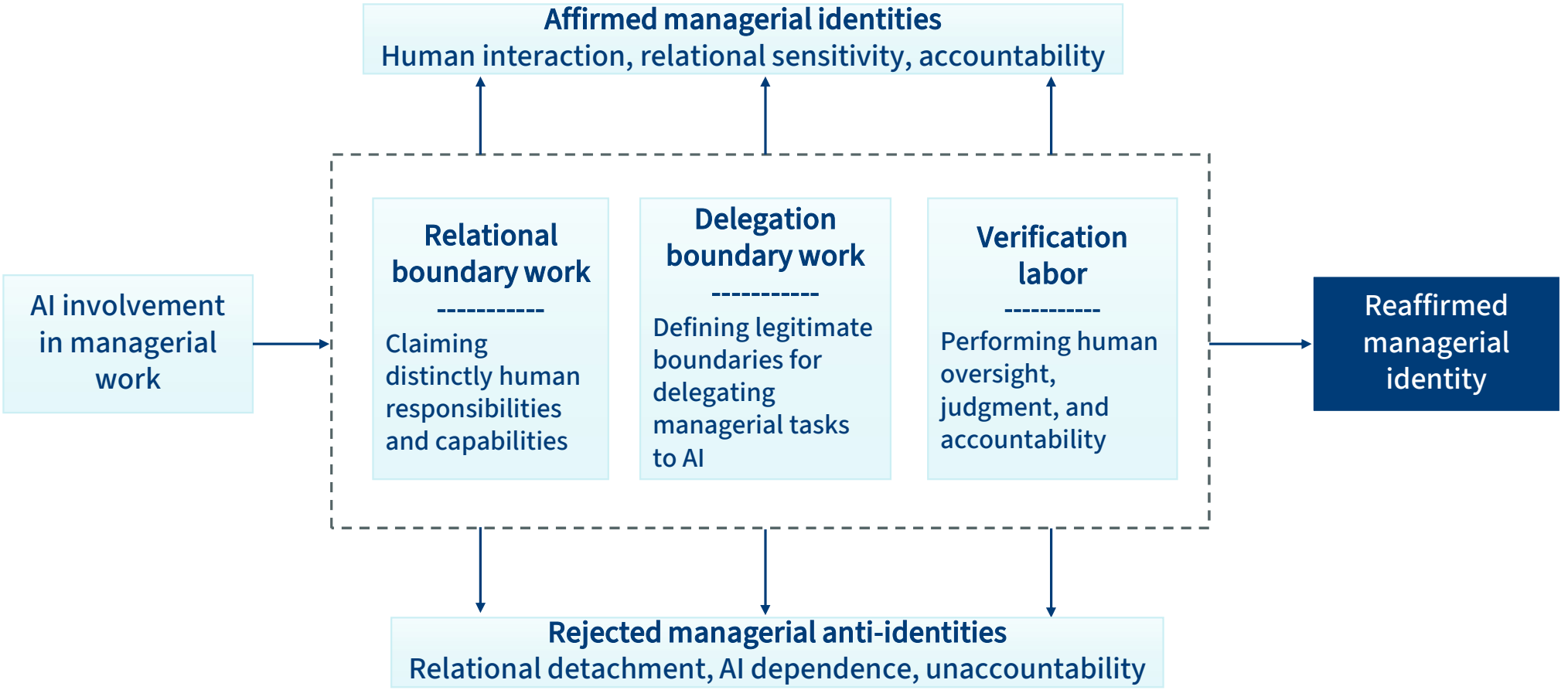
If I did nothing else, **I would never replace team meetings and my one-on-ones with my employees. You want AI to replace, like, reviewing project plans, ensuring capacities are evenly distributed, and providing suggestions from a behavioral standpoint.** But I don't think that you have people invested in the same way and getting the same inspiration that they would otherwise. (US12)

I think **if managers depend on AI to give out tasks and all of that, that's just being lazy and just coming in the office and letting the AI work**. I think that **to be a manager, you need to get your hands dirty, be physically present, assign tasks, monitor your team's progress, and not rely on AI.** (US06)

Theme 3: Performing verification labor

I think they're fairly accurate, **but I sanity-check anything I have AI do for me** if I'm going to send it out and put my name on it. And I do have to make some adjustments here and there. But I've noticed they're getting much better at being concise. So, I proofread everything because, you know, I'm putting my name on it, and there might be certain things I have to remove. (US07)

Well, there's like, certain nuances in [employee] evaluation. Like, an employee may be going through a family situation, and you may have access to that data, but AI may not, so **it's going to have a skewed view of performance. So you basically have to double-check it because external circumstances can affect a person's work.** So I need to weigh what the AI says and not take it as gospel. (US05)


Affirmed managerial identities
Human interaction, relational sensitivity, accountability
AI involvement in managerial work
Relational boundary work

Claiming distinctly human responsibilities and capabilities
Delegation boundary work

Defining legitimate boundaries for delegating managerial tasks to AI
Verification labor

Performing human oversight, judgment, and accountability
Reaffirmed managerial identity
Rejected managerial anti-identities
Relational detachment, AI dependence, unaccountability

Conclusion

- Supervisors negotiate AI-assisted managerial identity through both positive identity claims and negative anti-identity constructions.
- Managers accommodate AI not by relinquishing their managerial identity, but by redefining the boundaries of legitimate AI delegation.
- Identity work against the technological other as an **imaginative thought experiment** helps to uncover important aspects of managerial identities and work in general.

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Thank you

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