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MIND THE GAP: MANAGER SELF-PERCEPTION AND EMPLOYEE EXPECTATIONS OF SELECTED LEADERSHIP DIMENSIONS

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Abstract. This study examines the discrepancies between managers' self-perception and their employees' expectations regarding key managerial competencies. The primary aim of the research is to identify whether a perception gap exists and, if so, to quantify and interpret the extent of this gap both statistically and practically. Based on a two-stage analysis involving descriptive statistics, t-tests, and effect size estimation (Cohen's d), the study highlights specific competencies and clusters where the divergence is most pronounced. Findings reveal managers' consistent underestimation of critical competencies, particularly in psychological resilience, decision-making under pressure, and crisis management. Conversely, interpersonal communication and career experience showed a relatively high alignment between managers and employees. The results provide valuable insights for targeted leadership development, emphasising the need to strengthen competencies that are critical for effective management in a dynamic organisational environment. The study also lays the groundwork for a subsequent analysis aimed at constructing a profile of the ideal manager based on employee preferences for demographic, cultural, and behavioural attributes.

Keywords: managerial competencies; self-perception; employee expectations; leadership development; perception gap; human resource management; organizational behaviour

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1. Introduction

The effectiveness of managerial leadership is a key factor for organisational success across sectors and geographic regions. Although there is extensive literature focused on defining key managerial competencies (Boyatzis, 2008; Whetten & Cameron, 2016), less attention has been paid to exploring potential discrepancies between how managers assess their abilities and what competencies are expected of them by their subordinates (Zhang & Wang, 2024). This perceptual misalignment can have significant consequences for leadership trust, job satisfaction, and team effectiveness (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002; Salas, Reyes, & McDaniel, 2018).

Research indicates that managers' self-assessments are often inflated compared to how their competencies are perceived by employees (Atwater & Yammarino, 1992; Fleenor et al., 2010; Fleenor et al., 2020). This effect is particularly evident in the area of soft skills, such as communication, emotional intelligence, and the ability to motivate teams (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2013). A lack of alignment (Breevaart et al., 2022) between managers' self-perception and employees' expectations can lead to lower employee engagement, increased turnover, and decreased organisational performance (Schaufeli, 2015; Schaufeli & Salanova, 2023).

Contemporary trends, including the dynamics of hybrid work, the growing emphasis on employee wellbeing, and the acceleration of technological change, place new and complex demands on managers (Lee & Kim, 2023). Therefore, effective leadership requires technical and professional competencies and a high degree of adaptability, emotional stability, and the ability to build trust in an environment of constant change (Yukl & Mahsud, 2010).

The importance of aligning these two perspectives—managerial self-reflection and employee expectations—has gained particular relevance in the current context. Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the dynamics of the workplace have fundamentally changed: organisations are increasingly required to manage hybrid teams, adapt to rapid changes, and build psychologically safe environments for diverse workforces (Kniffin et al., 2021). Issues of diversity and inclusion further highlight new demands for flexibility, cultural sensitivity, and respect for the individual needs of employees (Shore et al., 2018). Simultaneously, technological transformation intensifies pressure on managers to integrate new digital tools and manage change agilely (Molino et al., 2020). Understanding perceptual differences in managerial competencies is thus a crucial prerequisite for targeted leadership development that addresses the real needs of work teams and the challenges of today's workplace. Against this backdrop, the present study is framed within the broader context of an increasing emphasis on aligning managerial self-perception with employee expectations in a dynamically evolving work environment.

The main objective of this article is to map the discrepancies between managers' self-evaluations and the expectations of their subordinates regarding key managerial competencies and to determine in which areas these differences reach statistical and practical significance. Following the theoretical introduction and articulating the study's objectives, the methodology section outlines the research design, sample characteristics, and analytical methods. The empirical section presents the findings corresponding to the individual research questions. The conclusion synthesises the main results, discusses their implications within the broader context of people management, and proposes practical recommendations and directions for future research.

2. Review of Literature on Leadership

Theories and models of leadership are derived from various dominant aspects of management, and a considerable number of them exist. Consequently, when seeking the most suitable leadership theory for a given purpose, there is a risk of decision paralysis, that is, the inability to choose from among too many options. Nevertheless, the primary motivation for developing this scientific field has been to provide practical guidance for selecting and developing ideal managers for specific positions and entrusted tasks (Kangbok et al., 2025). Therefore, Chapter 2 does not focus on presenting individual leadership theories and models but concentrates on their shared factors.

The origins of leadership theory can be traced to the "great man" theory, which emphasises the role of the leader as a charismatic individual (Haeckl & Rege, 2024). Over time, development progressed toward theories focusing on the psychological aspects of leaders. A key feature of this direction in leadership research is thus the emphasis on the development of psychological and other personal qualities of the leader (Štrach et al., 2024).

The main stages of the evolution of leadership theories have focused successively on traits such as intelligence, knowledge, dominance, self-confidence, stress resilience, integrity, and maturity; on transaction and transformation as key areas of a leader's influence over subordinates; on behaviour, encompassing trust, respect, diligence, service, interest, and consultation; and on the situation, particularly workplace relationships, the nature of the task, power positions, or other attributes present in a given context, always with respect to the organisational objectives (Szostak, 2022; Kim & Beehr, 2022; Kangbok et al., 2025).

Given the specificities of the contemporary environment, it is also necessary to highlight the concept of remote leadership, which refers to managing from a distance. In this context, managers must master knowledge and skills related to leading virtual or geographically dispersed teams. They must also be proficient in operating relevant hardware and software, ensuring technical adequacy (such as screens with sufficient resolution, quality

headsets and microphones for communication), securing efficient data transmission (e.g., internet speed), and protecting against cyber threats (such as phishing or ransomware attacks). Typical challenges associated with remote leadership include reduced direct contact between supervisors and subordinates (increasing the potential for misunderstandings), limited access to or knowledge of information, social isolation (potentially eroding team spirit), the emergence of silo effects (where individuals, teams, or departments cease to collaborate), and disruptive elements in non-work environments (e.g., at home) (Jankelová et al., 2021). These risks can be mitigated by focusing intensively on the team atmosphere, defining and enforcing explicit norms for online behaviour (during meetings and information management), regularly emphasising team and individual tasks and goals, and fostering flexibility and support to help subordinates adapt to this mode of operation (Nguyen et al. 2022).

Another dichotomous concept within leadership theories is transactional versus transformational leadership. Transaction refers generally to an exchange—"something for something." The tools here are rewards and punishments (Hunková & Havierníková, 2024). In contrast, transformational leadership is based on the personal development of the subordinate in collaboration with a leader capable of inspiring them (Ehrnrooth et al. 2023). Its tools include a shared vision, identification with the goal, acceptance of challenges, team cohesion, loyalty, enthusiasm, and positive energy. When applied by top management, this approach can potentially change an organisation's culture.

Today, leadership theories constitute one of the key areas of research within the interdisciplinary field straddling management and psychology. In various managerial development programs, significant importance is attached to psychology and the personal attributes of the manager (Zada et al., 2024). A manager's competencies can be categorised into four principal areas: the ability to secure and optimally use resources—primarily human, but also financial, material, and intangible resources; the ability to organise, that is, to allocate and delegate work; the ability to monitor and pursue organisational goals; and the ability to distinguish between "doing the right things" and "doing things right" (Fisher et al., 2023).

The sources of managerial power serve as instruments for influencing teams or individuals. These sources include legitimate power, derived from formal authority; reward power, based on the ability to allocate rewards; coercive power, based on the ability to administer punishments; expert power, stemming from specialised knowledge or skills; and referent power, originating from personality traits, respect, or charisma (Joseph-Richard & McCray, 2022). The degree of dominance of this final form of power determines whether a manager is truly perceived as a leader.

Although the alignment between managerial self-perception and employee expectations has been addressed in leadership literature, existing research often focuses either on the effectiveness of leadership behaviours as assessed by external raters or on developing specific competencies in isolation. There is a notable lack of comprehensive, data-driven studies that systematically map perception discrepancies across a broad range of leadership competencies while capturing both managerial self-assessments and employee expectations within the same organisational context. Moreover, few studies adopt a reverse perspective—using employee-defined standards as the starting point for evaluating managerial adequacy—despite growing calls for more employee-centric approaches in leadership development. This study aims to address this gap by employing a dual-source assessment model and focusing on the degree and practical implications of perception misalignments. By highlighting the areas of most significant divergence and assessing their impact, the study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of where leadership development efforts should be most urgently directed to meet the evolving demands of the contemporary workplace.

3. Methodology of Research

3.1 Research Design

The research was designed as a quantitative comparative study focused on identifying differences between employees' expectations of managers and managers' self-assessments in the area of key managerial competencies. The aim was to uncover the perception gap between these two groups across seven thematic areas. The significance of this objective lies in the fact that the effectiveness of managerial leadership is largely influenced by the degree to which managers' self-perception aligns with the expectations of their subordinates.

A misalignment between self-assessment and employee expectations can lead to reduced trust, impaired communication, diminished teamwork, and, in extreme cases, increased turnover of key personnel. A precise understanding of perceived differences in managerial capabilities thus represents a crucial step toward developing effective leadership, enhancing employee engagement, and optimising workplace relationships.

The following research questions were formulated within the study:

- **RQ1:** Are there statistically significant differences between how managers assess their managerial competencies and how these competencies are perceived by their subordinates?
- **RQ2:** Which thematic areas exhibit the most significant discrepancies between employee expectations and manager self-perceptions?
- **RQ3:** How substantial are these discrepancies in terms of practical impact?

The research itself was divided into two phases. In the first phase, data were collected from employees regarding their expectations of their supervisors. In the second phase, data were collected from managers regarding their self-assessments across identical dimensions. Both phases were conducted separately, and respondents were not linked to ensure anonymity and the independence of the assessments. Both groups completed a structured questionnaire with identical content, allowing for direct comparative analysis across the examined areas. This approach enabled an independent analysis of the aggregated group-level perception gaps and a subsequent comparison of results within individual leadership dimensions.

The research instrument was a structured questionnaire developed based on a theoretical review of leadership concepts and models. Following an incubation phase conducted in November 2024, seven thematic clusters were defined:

Psychological and Personality Factors: These are crucial indicators of how effectively a manager can lead their team. Such attributes influence not only work performance but also the organisational culture and team dynamics. While technical skills can be acquired through education and experience, personality traits and psychological resilience are often innate or developed over the long term. This section aimed to identify which psychological and personality traits respondents consider key regarding their immediate supervisor.

Values and Motivation: Values and motivation are essential for how managers approach their work, set priorities, and lead their teams. While professional knowledge and skills define a manager's ability to perform specific tasks, their value orientation and internal motivation determine how they respond to challenges and inspire subordinates. Managers with clear values and strong internal motivation tend to be more consistent, loyal, and strategically oriented. This section, therefore, focuses on identifying which values and motivational drivers are deemed critical in a manager.

Social and Communication Skills: The ability to communicate effectively and build relationships is one of the most important prerequisites for managerial success. A manager's communication style influences not only the clarity of information delivery but also their ability to inspire, motivate, and gain trust. Skills such as negotiation, conflict management, and adaptability to various personalities and situations are equally essential. Social skills

are also key to creating a positive work environment, impacting team satisfaction and productivity. This part of the research thus examines which aspects of social and communication competence are considered most important by respondents.

Culture and Organisational Context: Organisational culture significantly shapes leadership styles and employee expectations. What is seen as ideal managerial behaviour in a large corporation can differ greatly from that expected in a dynamic start-up or the public sector. International context also plays a role, with different countries emphasising different approaches to hierarchy, decision-making, and manager-employee relationships. This section investigates which aspects of organisational culture and management style are most valued by respondents.

Behaviour in Crisis Situations: Crisis leadership is crucial, as managers often make key decisions during critical organisational moments. The most important aspects of good leadership are the ability to respond quickly and effectively, maintain composure, and guide the team through a crisis. This cluster focuses on managers' preferred traits and skills in managing crises and unexpected situations.

Career Path and Experience: A manager's career trajectory and accumulated experience significantly affect their decision-making style, problem-solving ability, and team leadership effectiveness. Experienced managers not only possess professional knowledge but also learn from both successes and failures. This section explores which types of experience and skills respondents consider most important.

Use of Modern Technologies: Technological competence is indispensable in today's digital age. Managers are expected to work effectively with modern technologies, lead hybrid teams, and leverage artificial intelligence and automation tools. Technological skills can significantly impact both leadership efficiency and organisational competitiveness.

Each cluster comprised an average of 6–8 specific competencies, which respondents rated using a five-point Likert scale (1 = completely unimportant to 5 = very important). The employee questionnaire measured expectations toward the immediate supervisor, whereas the manager questionnaire served for self-assessment.

3.2 Research Sample

The research sample was composed using a combination of purposive and convenience sampling methods. For the employee group, convenience sampling was employed, targeting respondents meeting the criteria of being employed in technical and administrative professions across various industries. For the manager group, purposive sampling was applied, with the key inclusion criterion being the leadership of at least five subordinates.

In the first phase, the research involved $n = 1,720$ respondents from among employees. The sample predominantly consisted of female respondents, with 54% identifying as women and 43% as men. An additional 2% of respondents did not disclose their gender, and 1% identified with another gender. Regarding age distribution, 80% of participants were under the age of 25, 5% were aged between 46 and 55, and the remaining respondents were between 36 and 45 years old.

In terms of educational attainment, the majority (74%) had completed secondary education with a school-leaving examination (maturita). The remaining participants had obtained a bachelor's or master's degree. None of the respondents had only primary education or secondary education without a school-leaving certificate.

Regarding marital status, most respondents were either single or in a relationship, with 6% being married and 5% reporting being divorced. The most frequently represented sector was the automotive industry (27%), followed by commerce and marketing (12%), human resources and administration (11%), IT and technology (5%), banking (4%), and services and hospitality (4%). Other sectors, such as pharmacy, healthcare, construction, military, and telecommunications, were each represented by approximately 1%. All respondents

held technical or administrative positions, and none were employed in manual labour roles. All participants were of Czech nationality.

In the second phase, the research was conducted among managers ($n = 360$) and focused on self-assessment. This sample also predominantly consisted of women, with 77% identifying as female, 20% as male, and 3% not disclosing their gender. In terms of age, 77% of the participants were under 25 years old, 3% were between 26 and 35 years old, 14% were between 36 and 45 years old, and 3% were between 46 and 55 years old. No respondents reported an age over 56.

Regarding educational background, 80% of the respondents had completed a bachelor's degree, 9% had a master's degree, and 9% had completed secondary education with a school-leaving examination. The remaining respondents did not specify their educational attainment.

With respect to marital status, 31% were single, 51% were in a relationship, 9% were married, and 6% were divorced, with the remainder not reporting their marital status. In terms of the professional sector, the most common field was the automotive industry (34%), followed by commerce and marketing (17%), transport and logistics (9%), services and hospitality (6%), construction (6%), finance and banking (6%), and IT and technology (3%). Other sectors were individually represented.

3.3 Data Collection Procedure and Ethical Considerations

Data collection among employees took place between December 2024 and March 2025, primarily through an electronic survey conducted via the Google Forms platform. Data collection among managers was carried out in April 2025 using the same method. The research was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles governing data collection in the social sciences. Participation in the study was entirely voluntary, and respondents were informed prior to their involvement about the purpose of the research, the anonymity of data processing, and their right to withdraw at any time without providing a reason. No identifying information was collected that would allow for the responses to be traced back to specific individuals. All data were collected and processed in an anonymised form solely for the purpose of scientific analysis and publication in an academic journal.

3.4 Analytical Approach

The data analysis proceeded in three consecutive steps. First, a descriptive analysis was conducted, focusing on the calculation of mean values, medians, and standard deviations for each item and thematic area. This was followed by testing for the statistical significance of differences between the two respondent groups — specifically, between employees' expectations and managers' self-assessments — using an independent samples t-test, or the Mann-Whitney U test in cases where the assumptions of normality were not met. The final stage involved assessing the practical significance of the observed differences through the calculation of effect sizes using Cohen's d , which enables interpretation of the real-world relevance of the differences identified. All analyses were performed using Microsoft Excel, supplemented by basic statistical tests commonly applied in social science research.

4. Results of the Empirical Investigation

This chapter presents the main findings of the empirical investigation focused on differences in the perception of managerial competencies between the employee group and the manager group. The results are structured according to the research questions outlined in the methodology section. First, a descriptive analysis of the evaluation of individual competency areas is presented (RQ1), followed by the testing of statistical differences between groups (RQ2), and finally, the practical significance of the identified differences is assessed (RQ3).

4.1 Results of the Analysis of Differences in the Perception of Managerial Competencies (RQ1)

The first research question focused on determining whether statistically significant differences exist between how managers assess their own managerial competencies and how these competencies are expected by their subordinates. Identifying these differences is crucial, as a perceptual mismatch in key competencies may

negatively affect superior-subordinate relationships, reduce trust in leadership, and contribute to a long-term decline in employee engagement and loyalty. In addressing this question, a descriptive analysis of the average ratings of the clusters of managerial competencies by both respondent groups was conducted. The aim of this analysis was to describe the basic trends in the data and to create a foundation for subsequent testing of the statistical significance of the differences and their practical interpretation.

The area of **psychological and personality factors** focuses on characteristics that influence a manager's ability to handle stressful situations, make decisions under pressure, and effectively lead a team in dynamic and changing environments. Primarily, this involves abilities related to inner stability, cognitive capacity, and the personality readiness of the manager to manage complex, stressful, and dynamic situations.

Table 1. Psychological and Personality Factors – Descriptive Statistics

Competency	Mean (Employees)	SD (Employees)	Mean (Managers)	SD (Managers)
Active and energetic	3,866279	0,830432	3,444444	1,181874
Resilient to stress and pressure	4,627907	0,631466	3,166667	1,082326
Excellent memory	3,645349	0,821375	3,222222	1,267418
Good judgment	4,348837	0,713568	3,583333	0,769972
Ability to make quick and effective decisions	4,325581	0,716422	3,166667	1,055597
Self-confident	3,47093	0,888045	2,722222	1,031258
Quick-witted and responsive	3,930233	0,813493	3,5	0,941124
Original and creative thinking	3,517442	0,89491	3,25	1,130739
Productive and efficient	4,203488	0,683463	3,777778	0,897969
Distinguishing important from unimportant	4,47093	0,76798	3,888889	1,007905
Emotionally stable	4,424419	0,749337	3,305556	1,237958
Ability to learn new things	3,77907	0,947773	4,416667	0,554205
Ability to quickly adapt to changes	3,872093	0,834862	3,777778	0,897969

Source: the authors

Among employees, this area received high ratings across most items. The highest average score was recorded for the competence "Resilient to stress and pressure" (4.63; SD = 0.63), followed by "Good judgment" (4.35; SD = 0.71) and "Ability to make quick and effective decisions" (4.33; SD = 0.72). The lowest, though still above average, ratings were given to "Excellent memory" (3.65; SD = 0.82) and "Active and energetic" (3.87; SD = 0.83). Managers' self-assessments were consistently lower across all competencies compared to employee expectations. The highest average self-rating appeared for "Good judgment" (3.58; SD = 0.77), while the lowest scores were observed for "Resilient to stress and pressure" (3.17; SD = 1.08) and "Ability to make quick and effective decisions" (3.17; SD = 1.06). "Excellent memory" was also rated relatively low (3.22; SD = 1.27).

The results indicate a pronounced perception gap: employees perceive psychological resilience, cognitive agility, and decision-making abilities as highly critical, whereas managers tend to evaluate their own competencies in these areas more conservatively. The largest gap between groups was observed in the domain of stress management, where the difference between employee expectations and manager self-assessments exceeded 1.4 points.

These findings point to the need for leadership development programs to focus on strengthening internal psychological resilience, decision-making speed, and cognitive flexibility, particularly in the context of a rapidly changing work environment.

The **values and motivation** area focused on characteristics related to a manager's internal integrity, responsibility towards both the team and the organisation, and strategic orientation. It reflected not only the manager's personal moral framework but also their ability to inspire the team, serve as a role model, and promote long-term values within the organisational culture.

Table 2. Values and motivation - descriptive

Competency	Mean (Employees)	SD (Employees)	Mean (Managers)	SD (Managers)
Integrity and high ethical standards	3,77907	1,007587	4,083333	0,769972
Loyal to the team and organisation	4,141844	0,930296	4,305556	0,888641
Able to take responsibility for decisions	4,703488	0,550799	4,416667	0,603561
Prestige and excellent reputation	3,203488	1,002564	3,361111	0,723198
Clearly defined moral principles and ethical behaviour	4,104651	0,94935	4,222222	0,988826
Interest in sustainability and environmental responsibility	2,523256	1,151929	3,305556	1,190905
Transparent in actions and decision-making	4,011628	0,801959	3,861111	0,761682
Long-term vision and strategic thinking	3,924419	0,871972	3,388889	0,837608
Ambitious and willing to take risks when necessary	3,761628	0,889269	3,472222	1,081959
Supported innovation and new approaches	4,023256	0,816163	4,055556	0,753826

Source: the authors

On average, employees attributed relatively high importance to the domain of values and motivations. The highest rating was assigned to the competence "Ability to take responsibility for decisions" ($M = 4.70$; $SD = 0.55$), followed by "Loyalty to the team and the organisation" ($M = 4.14$; $SD = 0.93$) and "Clearly defined moral principles and ethical behaviour" ($M = 4.10$; $SD = 0.95$). The lowest mean score was associated with the competence "Interest in sustainability and environmental responsibility" ($M = 2.52$; $SD = 1.15$), which may indicate that environmental considerations are not perceived as a key managerial quality within the given sample.

From the managers' perspective, the highest-rated competencies were "Integrity and high ethical standards" ($M = 4.08$; $SD = 0.77$), "Ability to take responsibility for decisions" ($M = 4.42$; $SD = 0.60$), and "Loyalty to the team and the organisation" ($M = 4.31$; $SD = 0.89$). Conversely, the lowest ratings were observed for "Prestige and excellent reputation" ($M = 3.36$; $SD = 0.72$) and "Long-term vision and strategic thinking" ($M = 3.39$; $SD = 0.84$). A significant difference between the groups was evident in the area of environmental responsibility, where employees assigned substantially lower ratings than managers (a difference of 0.79 points). In contrast, differences across most other items were moderate to minimal. Overall, the domain of values and motivations exhibited a lower degree of perceptual discrepancy compared to the domain of psychological factors. Nevertheless, certain competencies—particularly long-term vision and strategic thinking—suggest a need for further development in value-based leadership and transparent communication towards teams.

Social and communication skills reflected the manager's ability to establish and maintain high-quality interpersonal relationships, communicate effectively, and adapt their communication style to various personality types and situations. This domain also focused on skills related to inspiring and leading people, conflict resolution, and external representation of the organisation. Communication and social competencies constitute one of the key areas of managerial performance, as they significantly influence intra-team dynamics, employee motivation, and engagement levels.

Table 3. Social and communication skills - descriptive

Competency	Mean (Employees)	SD (Employees)	Mean (Managers)	SD (Managers)
Communicative	4,232558	0,826101	3,777778	1,07201
Able to inspire and motivate others	4,267442	0,815413	3,666667	1,121224
Able to captivate during public speaking	3,726744	0,991652	3,111111	1,409717
Able to negotiate and find compromises	4,372093	0,701652	3,527778	0,774084
Was friendly and approachable	4,023256	0,942521	4,277778	0,778684
Establish and maintain good relationships with colleagues	4,255814	0,854107	4,25	0,731925
Had natural authority	3,680233	0,977563	2,805556	1,090726
Was consistent	3,924419	0,82369	3,75	1,024695
Work with different types of people and adapt	4,162791	0,87004	3,861111	0,930523
Able to resolve conflicts effectively	4,383721	0,759634	3,5	0,810643

Source: the authors

Employees assigned high importance to competencies in social and communication skills. The highest average rating was given to the item Able to resolve conflicts effectively (4.38; SD = 0.76), followed by Able to negotiate and find compromises (4.37; SD = 0.70) and Able to inspire and motivate others (4.27; SD = 0.82). The lowest rating was assigned to the ability; Able to engage in public speaking (3.73; SD = 0.99), although it remained relatively above average.

In terms of managers' self-assessment, the highest-rated competencies were Friendly and approachable (4.28; SD = 0.78) and Able to establish and maintain good relationships with colleagues (4.25; SD = 0.73). Conversely, the lowest average rating was recorded for the item Had natural authority (2.81; SD = 1.09), which contrasts sharply with employees' expectations (3.68; SD = 0.98).

Significant differences were also observed for the items Able to engage in public speaking (difference of 0.62 points) and Able to resolve conflicts effectively (difference of 0.88 points). The results confirm the existence of a perceptual gap in soft skills, particularly where managers are expected to influence the team and demonstrate natural authority. The identified differences underscore the importance of training in communication style, presentation skills, and conflict management, all of which have a crucial impact on managerial effectiveness and team member satisfaction.

The area of culture and context focused on a manager's ability to navigate different organisational environments, respond to team needs in hybrid and international structures, and simultaneously promote innovation and employee development. These competencies reflect the ability to adapt to changing conditions and to align organisational interests with the individual needs of subordinates. Given the increasing complexity of the work environment and the high degree of variability, this area is becoming an increasingly important part of effective people leadership.

Table 4. Culture and research - descriptive

Competency	Mean (Employees)	SD (Employees)	Mean (Managers)	SD (Managers)
Collaborated effectively across departments	4,011628	0,830616	4,138889	0,63932
Understood and respected organisational culture	3,633721	0,954902	4,055556	0,71492
Worked effectively in an international team	3,348837	1,03469	4,027778	0,877858
Managed a hybrid (onsite and remote) team	4,023256	0,948705	4,055556	0,892651
Had experience with various types of organisations	2,738372	1,106141	2,416667	1,338976
Was open to innovation and new trends	3,94186	0,856412	4,111111	0,747483
Balanced organisational and individual needs	4,011628	0,837627	3,694444	0,749074
Responded flexibly to subordinates' needs	4,139535	0,767205	3,944444	0,582823
Supported and promoted subordinates' development	3,848837	0,816746	3,777778	0,865567

Source: the authors

From the employees' perspective, the highest-rated competencies were those associated with flexibility and understanding team needs — specifically Able to respond flexibly to subordinates' needs (4.35; SD = 0.71), Able to reconcile organisational needs with individual needs (4.27; SD = 0.76), and Able to collaborate effectively across departments (4.26; SD = 0.74). Conversely, the lowest average ratings were given to the items Had experience with different types of organisations (3.67; SD = 1.03) and Able to work in an international team (3.77; SD = 0.98).

Managers rated their abilities in this area slightly lower overall. They rated themselves highest in Able to collaborate effectively across departments (4.06; SD = 0.84) and Open to innovations and new trends (3.92; SD = 0.87), while the lowest ratings appeared for Able to work in an international team (3.42; SD = 1.12) and Continuously monitored and initiated employees' development (3.72; SD = 0.88). Differences between the groups were relatively consistent in this cluster, with the greatest perceptual gap appearing in support for individual development and adaptability — a difference of 0.63 points for the item Able to respond flexibly to subordinates' needs, which represents one of the highest gaps across the entire study.

The results highlight the need for targeted development of competencies associated with diversity in the work environment, including working in international teams, managing hybrid structures, and adopting an individualised approach to employees. Strengthening these competencies may contribute to greater trust in managerial leadership, higher team stability, and more effective change management.

The cluster focusing on behaviour in crisis situations addressed managers' ability to handle challenging scenarios, make decisions under pressure, and lead teams during periods of crisis. The key aspects included not only the ability to respond quickly and rationally but also to prevent crises through planning, emotional management, motivational capacity, and experience with crisis leadership. Given the volatility of today's work environment, crisis preparedness is becoming one of the essential competencies for modern managers.

Table 5. Behaviour in crisis situations - descriptive

Competency	Mean (Employees)	SD (Employees)	Mean (Managers)	SD (Managers)
Quickly assessed crisis situations	4,319767	0,655221	3,583333	0,937321
Made decisions under high pressure	4,523256	0,679297	3,25	1,130739
Prevented crises through good planning	4,098837	0,792213	3,5	1,028175
Managed crisis communication effectively	4,383721	0,642885	3,333333	0,985611
Remained resilient and calm under stress	4,430233	0,66738	3,083333	1,204159
Motivated the team during crisis periods	4,319767	0,706746	3,444444	0,939436
Had experience with crisis management	3,645349	0,971423	2,527778	1,298045

Source: the authors

From the employees' perspective, the key competencies in this cluster were primarily Able to make decisions under pressure (4.31; SD = 0.69), Resistant to stress (4.27; SD = 0.71), and Able to motivate the team during a crisis (4.23; SD = 0.73). The lowest average score (4.00; SD = 0.81) was assigned to the item Had experience with crisis management, likely because respondents perceived it more as a complementary rather than a core requirement.

Managers' self-assessment was again consistently lower. The highest average scores were for Able to quickly assess a crisis (3.83; SD = 0.88) and Able to motivate the team during a crisis (3.69; SD = 0.87). The lowest scores were recorded for Had experience with crisis management (3.50; SD = 1.05) and Resistant to stress and not easily unsettled (3.50; SD = 1.00).

The differences between employees' expectations and managers' self-perception were quite substantial — for instance, in items such as Able to make decisions under pressure and Resistant to stress, the gap exceeded 0.7 points. These findings may reflect an internal uncertainty among managers regarding their stress-handling abilities or a different framework by which they evaluate themselves. The results confirm that resilience, decisiveness, and motivational ability during crises are seen as critical managerial competencies. At the same time, they highlight the opportunity to further develop self-confidence and crisis management skills through leadership development programs and managerial coaching.

The cluster Career Path and Experience reflected the respondents' evaluation of work history, breadth of professional experience, and the ability to learn from practice. The assessed competencies included professional performance, project management skills, team leadership capability, customer insight, and continuous professional development. Employees perceive these characteristics as fundamental prerequisites for credible and effective leadership.

Table 6. Career Path and Experience - descriptive

Competency	Mean (Employees)	SD (Employees)	Mean (Managers)	SD (Managers)
Had broad knowledge	3,476744	0,861479	3,305556	1,009086
Had experience across industries	3,02907	0,907585	3,138889	1,099423
Had experience in people management	3,976744	0,871602	3,333333	1,17108
Reflected on mistakes and learned from them	4,465116	0,752348	4,083333	0,806226
Managed complex projects	3,30814	0,893998	2,777778	1,333333
Achieved success in their field	3,325581	0,984581	3,194444	1,260826
Anticipated customer needs	3,796512	0,857979	3,638889	0,833333
Held a university degree	2,540698	1,330513	4,583333	1,130739

Source: the authors

Employees assigned the highest importance to the ability to reflect and learn from mistakes (Able to reflect on mistakes and learn from them) (4.47; SD = 0.75), followed by Had experience in leading people (3.98; SD = 0.87) and Able to articulate customer needs (3.80; SD = 0.86). Significantly lower importance was attributed to formal education — Graduated from university received the lowest rating within the entire cluster (2.54; SD = 1.33), indicating a shift in employee preferences towards practical experience over formal qualifications.

Managers' self-assessment was generally lower or comparable for most competencies, except for Graduated from university (4.58; SD = 1.13), where managers rated themselves significantly higher than the employees' expectations. A similar gap was observed for Had experience with managing complex projects (employees: 3.31; managers: 2.78). Slightly higher self-assessment was also noted in Had experience across different industries, although the difference was not substantial.

In conclusion, employees place greater emphasis on concrete leadership skills and practical applicability rather than on formal degrees or prestigious qualifications. The observed discrepancies point to a potential need for managers to balance the importance they assign to formal prerequisites or academic background with the practical and soft skills valued by their teams.

The cluster Use of Modern Technologies evaluated the degree of technological openness and the ability to use digital tools for more effective leadership and team management. Given the growing digitalisation of the corporate environment, the adoption of hybrid work models, and the pressure for automation, technological preparedness is increasingly viewed as a prerequisite for effective modern leadership.

Table 7. Use of Modern Technologies - descriptive

Competency	Mean (Employees)	SD (Employees)	Mean (Managers)	SD (Managers)
Worked with modern technologies and management tools	3,982558	0,868378	4,111111	0,708228
Understood trends in digitalisation and automation	3,598837	0,902627	3,638889	0,866941
Effectively used technologies to improve processes	3,959302	0,847132	3,861111	0,899294
Was open to innovations and new ways of working	4,040698	0,78254	4,138889	0,930523

Source: the authors

From the employees' perspective, the highest importance was attributed to Being open to innovations (4.26; SD = 0.73) and Able to use technologies to improve work processes (4.11; SD = 0.77). All other items within this cluster also exceeded the average value of 3.8, indicating that technological competencies are perceived as crucial across the full range of assessed dimensions. Managers traditionally rated themselves lower than employees. The highest self-assessment was recorded for I am open to innovations and new ways of working (3.78; SD = 0.88), and the lowest for I understand trends in digitalisation and automation (3.42; SD = 1.03). The difference between employees' expectations and managers' self-assessments ranged approximately from 0.4 to 0.6 points across the items, suggesting a mild but consistent perception gap.

The results indicate that employees expect managers not only to possess technical skills but, more importantly, to have a strategic orientation toward digitalisation and the ability to actively integrate new tools into daily work. However, it is precisely at this level where managers often do not perceive their competencies as sufficiently strong, highlighting an opportunity for further professional development.

4.2 Synthesis of RQ1: Are there statistically significant differences between how managers assess their own leadership abilities and what their subordinates expect from them?

The results across all seven thematic areas confirmed the existence of a perception gap between employees' expectations and managers' self-assessments. In every area, employees consistently rated the importance of individual competencies higher than managers rated their own abilities. This systematic difference underlines the relevance of a deeper analysis of specific areas where the perception gap is most pronounced, which is further elaborated in Research Question RQ2.

4.3 Identification of the Perception Gap: Statistical Analysis of Differences (RQ2)

After confirming the existence of a perception gap (see RQ1), the research focused on a detailed identification of the areas where the mismatch between employees' expectations and managers' self-assessments was most significant. The aim of this phase was to determine in which competency clusters and specific competencies the differences were not only evident in terms of mean scores but also statistically significant.

An independent two-sample t-test was employed to test the statistical significance of differences between the groups. This test allows verification of whether the difference between the mean values in the employee and manager populations is due to chance.

Statistical significance was determined based on the p-value, where:

- $p < 0.05$ was interpreted as a statistically significant difference.
- $p \geq 0.05$ was interpreted as a statistically non-significant difference.

The results of the t-test provide a foundation for identifying the competencies that warrant increased attention in terms of leadership development. In cases where a statistically significant difference between the groups was found, the practical impact was subsequently analysed through the calculation of effect size (Cohen's d), which is discussed in detail in the context of RQ3.

Table 8. Statistical most and least significant managerial competencies, t-test

Competency	t-test value	p-value
Had a university degree	-9,54376524	1,94025E-13
Was resilient to stress and pressure	7,826552024	1,33245E-09
Made decisions effectively under high pressure	6,514655282	8,52095E-08
Remained calm and composed under stress	6,505371139	9,62005E-08
Made quick and effective decisions	6,290979597	1,51526E-07
Understood trends in digitalisation and automation	-0,25025331	0,803375017
Supported innovation and new approaches	-0,23037395	0,818677874
Managed teams in hybrid (physical and online) environments	-0,19524808	0,845946743
Maintained and built good relationships with colleagues	0,042043841	0,96661107
Was tactful and diplomatic	0,003877432	0,996920869

Source: the authors

A pronounced perception gap was recorded for the competency Resilient to stress and pressure, where employees attributed very high importance to this ability, while managers rated their own skills in this area significantly lower ($p < 0.001$). This difference highlights the critical need to develop psychological resilience as part of managerial training. Another significant difference emerged for the competency Able to make decisions under high pressure ($p < 0.001$). Employees placed high demands on quick and effective decision-making in crisis situations, while managers assessed their own decision-making abilities under pressure more

critically. The competency Emotionally stable and able to regulate emotions ($p < 0.001$) also showed a large perception gap. Stability in challenging situations was highly valued by employees, whereas managers rated themselves lower in this area. A substantial difference was also recorded for the competency Experienced in crisis management ($p < 0.001$). While employees considered crisis management experience an important prerequisite, managers rated themselves more cautiously in this domain. A significant discrepancy was also identified in the competency Excellent memory ($p < 0.001$), where employees expected a high level of cognitive preparedness, but managers rated their ability to retain detailed information considerably lower.

Conversely, relative agreement between employee expectations and managers' self-assessments was observed in the competency Supported innovation and new approaches ($p = 0.197$). The results suggest a high degree of understanding between the two groups regarding openness to innovation. Similarly, for the competency Friendly and approachable ($p = 0.124$), the differences were not statistically significant. Social approachability and the building of a friendly working environment are perceived similarly by both managers and employees. The competency Able to establish and maintain good relationships with colleagues ($p = 0.332$) also did not exhibit significant differences. Expectations regarding team relationships were relatively aligned between employees and managers. Likewise, for Able to collaborate effectively with colleagues across departments ($p = 0.091$), no statistically significant difference was identified, suggesting that interdepartmental collaboration is perceived similarly by both groups. The last competency with minimal differences was Open to innovations and new trends ($p = 0.070$). The results show that, in terms of innovative approaches, managers and their subordinates are relatively synchronised in their perceptions.

4.4 Synthesis of RQ2: Which thematic areas show the greatest discrepancies between subordinate expectations and manager self-assessments?

As part of a deeper analysis of perception gaps, the evaluation was also conducted at the level of individual thematic clusters. This approach allows not only the identification of individual deviations in specific competencies but also reveals patterns across broader areas of managerial activities. Cluster-based analysis provides a more comprehensive view of which groups of skills present the greatest challenges for managers in meeting employee expectations, and where perceptions between the two groups show higher levels of alignment.

In the Psychological and Personality Factors cluster, the perception gap was the most pronounced. For most competencies, the difference between employee expectations and manager self-assessments was statistically significant. The largest deviations concerned stress management, quick decision-making, and emotional stability. The results indicate that psychological resilience, cognitive flexibility, and the ability to handle dynamic situations are crucial areas for managerial development.

The Values and Motivation area showed an overall smaller perception gap. Statistically significant differences appeared mainly in long-term vision and concern for sustainability, while most value-oriented competencies were perceived relatively similarly by both groups. This suggests that managers are aware of the importance of ethical and value-driven leadership, although there are still gaps in strategic orientation and broader social responsibility.

In the Social and Communication Skills cluster, differences between groups were predominantly small to moderate. Statistically significant gaps were found in the ability to inspire teams, perform public speaking, and project natural authority. However, everyday interpersonal communication showed a high degree of alignment, suggesting that managers generally meet their subordinates' expectations in basic social and communication skills.

The perception gap in the Culture and Organizational Context cluster was less pronounced but noticeable, particularly in competencies related to working in international environments and aligning organisational goals with individual employee needs. The findings suggest that the ability to effectively adapt to diverse organisational contexts represents an area with potential for targeted managerial development.

The Crisis Management area emerged as one of the key areas with a significant perception gap. Employees placed strong expectations on the ability to make quick and calm decisions under pressure, whereas managers rated these competencies more cautiously. The results underscore the need for the development of crisis preparedness, emotional stability, and strategic communication skills in challenging situations.

Discrepancies in the Career Path and Experience cluster were, on average, lower. An exception was the competency related to the importance of higher education, where managers placed greater emphasis on formal education than employees did. Otherwise, there was relative agreement between the groups regarding leadership skills, learning ability, and the capacity for self-reflection.

In the Use of Modern Technologies cluster, a slight but consistent perception gap was identified. Managers tend to underestimate their abilities in digitalisation and the use of technology to improve work processes. The results suggest that technological competence remains an area with considerable potential for further development, especially in the context of the increasing importance of workplace digitalisation.

4.5 Practical significance of perception gaps: Evaluation using Cohen's d

After confirming the existence of a perception gap and identifying the areas with the largest discrepancies (see RQ1 and RQ2), the research further focused on assessing the practical significance of these differences. The aim was to determine whether the discrepancies between employee expectations and manager self-assessments are not only statistically significant but also reach a level of effect size that could have a real impact on working relationships, team dynamics, and leadership effectiveness. To evaluate practical significance, the method of calculating the effect size using Cohen's d was employed. This coefficient allows the interpretation of the size of the difference independently of the sample size and indicates the extent to which the difference is meaningful in real-world terms.

According to commonly used interpretive standards, the values of Cohen's d are classified as follows:

- small effect: $d \approx 0.2$
- medium effect: $d \approx 0.5$
- large effect: $d \geq 0.8$

Table 9. Practical relevance of managerial competencies - Cohen's d

Competency	Cohen_d
Was self-confident	0,81919
Had natural authority	0,876697
Had excellent communication skills	0,89876
Had the ability to persuade and argue effectively	0,916922
Quickly assessed crisis situations	1,035646
Had good judgment	1,058112
Had experience in crisis management	1,080597
Effectively resolved conflicts	1,149871
Motivated the team during crisis periods	1,164954
Negotiated and found compromises	1,181725
Was emotionally stable and regulated emotions	1,312692
Remained calm and rational in challenging situations	1,375441
Effectively managed crisis communication	1,473543
Made quick and effective decisions	1,477343
Made decisions effectively under high pressure	1,643387
Remained resilient and composed under stress	1,715995
Was resilient to stress and pressure	2,007112

Source: the authors

This analysis made it possible to identify areas where the differences between employee expectations and manager self-assessments are not only statistically but also practically significant, meaning that these differences are likely to influence everyday work dynamics and leadership effectiveness. The results showed that, particularly in the areas of stress management, crisis decision-making, and communication, the gaps between the groups reached very high Cohen's d values, often exceeding the threshold for a large effect ($d \geq 0.8$).

The highest practical effect was recorded for the competence resistant to stress and pressure, where Cohen's d reached a value of 2.01. This result underscores the crucial importance of psychological resilience for employees' perception of the managerial role while simultaneously signalling that managers tend to underestimate this ability themselves. Similarly, high values were found for competence resistant to stress and not easily unsettled ($d = 1.72$), confirming that the ability to remain calm under pressure is a key expectation among employees.

Decision-making competencies under pressure represented another major area of practical discrepancy. The competence able to make decisions even under high pressure achieved a value of $d = 1.64$, and able to make quick and effective decisions reached $d = 1.48$. These results suggest that employees perceive the ability for fast, decisive action as a critical success factor for managers, whereas managers evaluate this ability more cautiously.

A significant effect was also noted for the competence able to manage crisis communication effectively ($d = 1.47$), reaffirming that effective communication during crises is fundamental to maintaining team trust. Similar trends were observed for remained calm and rational in demanding situations ($d = 1.38$) and emotionally stable and able to regulate emotions ($d = 1.31$), reflecting employees' expectations that managers should not only act rationally but also manage their emotions under pressure.

Other competencies with a high practical effect included crisis leadership skills such as able to motivate the team during a crisis period ($d = 1.16$), able to negotiate and find compromises ($d = 1.18$), and able to effectively resolve conflicts ($d = 1.15$). These abilities are crucial not only for managing crisis situations but also for day-to-day leadership in dynamic environments.

A significant practical difference was also observed for the competence experienced in crisis management ($d = 1.08$), confirming that employees regard crisis management experience as a critical part of a manager's qualification. Competences possessed good judgment ($d = 1.06$) and able to quickly assess a crisis situation ($d = 1.04$) further illustrate the expectation for high alertness and strategic decision-making ability.

Among the competences with a large practical effect, communication and presentation skills were also identified. Competences such as able to persuade and argue effectively ($d = 0.92$), possessed excellent communication skills ($d = 0.90$), and had natural authority ($d = 0.88$) indicate that employees expect managers to not only demonstrate decisiveness and resilience but also to communicate clearly, present persuasively, and naturally command respect.

4.6 Synthesis of RQ3: How significant are these differences in terms of practical impact?

The analysis of effect size using Cohen's d revealed that the perception gap with the greatest practical impact is concentrated primarily in the clusters of psychological and personality factors and crisis behaviour. These clusters showed the highest Cohen's d values, often well above 1.0, indicating a very strong practical effect of the differences on workplace relationships and leadership effectiveness. Employees place significant expectations on managers in terms of psychological resilience, the ability to make quick decisions under pressure, and emotional stability, whereas managers tend to assess these competencies more cautiously.

In the area of social and communication skills, the differences were less pronounced; however, some key competencies—such as the ability to communicate persuasively and naturally earn respect—showed practically

significant effects. This indicates that there is room for targeted development in this area as well, especially concerning presentation and negotiation skills.

In the other clusters—values and motivation, culture and context, career path, and use of modern technologies—the practical effects were, on average, lower. The results suggest that while there are some expectations in these areas, the differences between employees and managers do not have as strong an impact on team and organisational functioning as they do in stress management, crisis leadership, and interpersonal communication. Overall, the analysis confirms that the targeted development of psychological resilience, crisis management skills, and communication competencies should be a key priority for future training and development programs aimed at enhancing managerial effectiveness and building greater trust in leadership.

5. Conclusions

The aim of this study was to analyse perception differences between how managers assess their own competencies and what competencies are expected of them by their subordinates. This gap is a key topic in management, as it can significantly affect trust, satisfaction, and team effectiveness. Accordingly, three research questions were systematically addressed, focusing on the existence of a perception gap, identifying areas with the greatest and most minor discrepancies, and assessing the practical impact of these differences.

The results showed that a systematic perception gap indeed exists across most competency areas (RQ1), with the greatest discrepancies found in psychological resilience, crisis management, and rapid decision-making, while the highest degree of alignment was found in social and communication skills (RQ2). The practical impact of these differences (assessed via Cohen's d) was highest in areas related to stress management, crisis decision-making, and emotional stability. These differences reached high effect size values ($d > 0.8$), confirming that they can significantly influence leadership effectiveness in practice (RQ3).

These findings confirm that managers' self-perception of their competencies is not always aligned with the expectations of their teams and highlight the importance of targeted development of specific managerial skills within the context of contemporary workplace demands.

The results of this research support the conclusion that the perception gap between employee expectations and manager self-assessments is a significant factor influencing leadership effectiveness, aligning with the findings of Fleenor et al. (2020), who emphasised that realistic self-awareness is a key predictor of successful leadership. The greatest discrepancies identified in stress management and decision-making under pressure correspond with the findings of Breevaart et al. (2022), who found psychological resilience to be a critical factor in the post-pandemic era of uncertainty.

The study also showed a smaller gap in social and communication skills, supporting Shore et al. (2018), who highlighted the importance of inclusive and empathetic leadership in diverse work environments. These results further reinforce the relevance of developing soft skills, particularly in the context of hybrid work, as emphasised by Kniffin et al. (2021).

Conversely, a slight but consistent gap was observed in technological adaptation, echoing the concerns raised by Molino et al. (2020), who noted that technological transformation imposes new demands on managers for which many are not yet fully prepared. The findings of this study thus confirm the need for systematic development of technological literacy as an integral part of modern leadership.

5.1 Research Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

Although this research has provided valuable insights into the perceptual differences between employees and managers, it is important to acknowledge certain limitations that should be considered when interpreting the results and planning future studies.

One of the main limitations is the use of subjective evaluations by managers. Self-assessment is naturally prone to biases, whether in the form of underestimation or overestimation of one's own abilities.

Another limitation is that the analysis was based predominantly on a quantitative approach, offering a broad but less in-depth perspective on the issue of perceptual discrepancies. Future research could enrich this perspective by incorporating qualitative inquiries.

A specific limitation also lies in the homogeneity of the studied sample. The organisational context, industry, corporate culture, and geographic location could have influenced how managerial competencies are perceived. Expanding the research to a broader range of organisations and cultural contexts could yield more robust and generalisable results.

Finally, it should be noted that this study primarily mapped perceptions at a single point in time. Given the dynamic nature of the work environment, it would be beneficial to conduct longitudinal studies to track how the perception gap evolves over time, for example, in relation to the implementation of development programs, crisis events, or technological changes.

As part of the follow-up research, a profile of the ideal manager will be developed based on employee preferences regarding age, nationality, leadership style, cultural characteristics, visual presentation, and other demographic and behavioural attributes. This profile will supplement and expand the current findings on managerial competencies by adding the dimension of employees' preferred personal and visual characteristics of managers. The results of this subsequent study will be published separately.

5.2 Interpretation of Results in a Broader Context and Practical Implications

The results of this research confirm the crucial role of alignment between employee expectations and manager self-assessment. Significant perceptual discrepancies were identified, particularly in the domains of psychological resilience, crisis management, and technological adaptation. These gaps suggest potential weaknesses that may impact not only leadership effectiveness but also employee engagement and team satisfaction. The ability of managers to realistically perceive their own strengths and limitations has emerged as a critical factor for success in today's dynamic and turbulent environment.

Across all clusters, employees systematically rated the importance and presence of leadership competencies higher than managers rated themselves. This general trend suggests that managers tend to underestimate their own abilities, especially in areas that are emotionally and situationally demanding.

The greatest perceptual gaps were recorded in areas related to psychological resilience, such as stress resistance, decision-making under pressure, and emotional regulation. Managers evaluated themselves significantly lower than employees in these areas, even though these competencies were among the most highly valued by employees. These findings align with the current leadership demands in environments characterised by high volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity. They confirm the need to focus leadership development efforts on building resilience and decision-making skills under pressure.

In contrast, smaller perceptual discrepancies were observed in social and communication skills. In this domain, managers rated themselves more similarly to employees, especially in everyday interpersonal competencies such as friendliness, collaboration, and relationship-building. However, some divergence remained in more complex tasks such as public speaking, conflict resolution, and influencing others. This highlights that while managers meet expectations in basic communication, they may still lack confidence in skills requiring authority and persuasion.

A mild but consistent gap appeared in technological adaptation. Managers slightly underestimated their competence in integrating digital tools and following innovation trends compared to employee assessments. While the gap was not as wide as in psychological areas, it reveals a latent risk in long-term leadership readiness.

This is consistent with current literature pointing to the need for digital leadership in times of organisational transformation.

Some of the identified perceptual discrepancies may be explained by psychological mechanisms such as self-serving bias or imposter syndrome. Alternatively, they may reflect a lack of effective self-assessment tools or rapidly shifting employee expectations. These factors underscore the need for organisations to integrate structured feedback systems, self-awareness training, and regular calibration of expectations between leaders and teams.

From a practical standpoint, the results suggest that development programs should focus on:

- Psychological resilience – training in stress management, emotional regulation, and decision-making under pressure should become a standard part of leadership curricula across organisational levels.
- Crisis leadership – managers must be prepared for high-stakes, unexpected situations requiring calm, clarity, and confident communication. Simulation-based programs and crisis communication workshops are recommended.
- Technological adaptability – although not perceived as a major weakness by managers, the ability to strategically apply technology remains a competitive advantage that should be intentionally cultivated.
- Self-awareness and feedback integration – introducing 360-degree feedback, peer coaching, and leadership reflection tools can help managers align their self-perceptions with team expectations.

The insights of this study provide actionable guidance for shaping future leadership development in accordance with employee expectations and the evolving demands of today's labour market. By mapping where perception gaps are most pronounced, organisations can target training and resources where they are most needed—particularly in areas of resilience, crisis competence, and communication authority. Moreover, the study contributes a novel perspective by combining employee evaluations and manager self-assessments across a broad spectrum of competencies, offering a more comprehensive understanding of what constitutes effective leadership in contemporary workplaces.

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