From Decision-maker to Decision Architect: Generative AI and the Changing Role of Leadership

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Abstract: Generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) is becoming an integral part of managerial work, changing how leaders analyse information, communicate, coordinate, and decide. Much of the existing leadership literature emphasizes productivity effects or debates substitution versus augmentation. We argue that the more fundamental leadership challenge is the reconfiguration of decision authority and the design of decision processes across human–AI arrangements. As GenAI systems become more capable, context-aware, and agentic, leadership becomes less about individual judgement and more about structuring how judgement is distributed across human and AI actors. This conceptual paper asks how GenAI changes leadership decision-making in contemporary organizations. Drawing on research on algorithmic management, the automation–augmentation paradox, AI-mediated leadership, and principal–agent perspectives on AI agents, we develop a framework that positions leaders as decision architects, i.e., actors who deliberately design and govern decision processes rather than merely participate in them. The main contribution of the paper is a typology of four roles GenAI can have in leadership decision making, distinguished by the degree of AI autonomy and the locus of decision authority: AI as assistant, AI as advisor, AI as oversight partner, and AI as delegated actor. For each role, we discuss implications for decision rights, employee autonomy, and managerial expertise. We further argue that the agentic AI highlights classical delegation problems of goal alignment, information asymmetries, and control, turning governance decisions into a core leadership concern. By focusing on design of human–AI decision architectures, the paper contributes to leadership and organization literature by clarifying how GenAI can change concepts of authority, control, and legitimacy in contemporary organizations. We outline a research agenda on AI-augmented leadership capabilities, responsible delegation to AI agents, and the conditions under which GenAI can improve leadership legitimacy.

Keywords: Generative artificial intelligence, Leadership, Decision making, Decision architecture, Governance, Human–AI collaboration

1. Introduction

Generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) is rapidly becoming part of everyday managerial work, influencing how information is processed, decisions are prepared, and organisational coordination takes place (Feuerriegel et al. 2024; Bankins et al. 2024). Generative AI has been adopted rapidly, suggesting that its effects on managerial work are also diffusing at a great speed across organisations (Bick et al. 2026). Tools that draft, summarise, retrieve, analyse and increasingly act on behalf of users are entering management exceeds earlier waves of business analytics or expert systems. Generative AI can significantly affect highly skilled professional work, which suggests that its organisational implications extend well beyond routine or low-complexity tasks (Cui et al. 2026). A growing strategy and management literature has begun to take stock of these changes, debating whether AI primarily automates or augments managerial work (Raisch and Krakowski 2021; Krakowski et al. 2023), how it changes the sources of competitive advantage (Krakowski et al. 2023; Ruokonen and Ritala 2023, 2025), and how it changes the practice of leadership (De Cremer 2020; Van Quaquebeke and Gerpott 2023, 2024; Bankins et al. 2024).

Within these debates, much of the leadership-focused extant literature emphasises individual-level effects, for instance how leaders use AI to become more productive and how AI may substitute for some aspects of human judgement. While those debates are important, they tend to leave the underlying decision architecture in the background. The effects of adopting AI are determined not only by tool availability but also by managerial clarity, communication, and trust, highlighting the leader's role in transmitting and legitimising AI use across the organisation (Makridis 2026). To respond to this omission, we argue that the more fundamental implication of GenAI for leadership lies in how it reconfigures decision authority across human–AI arrangements. As GenAI systems become more capable, context-aware, and agentic, including being able to invoke tools, plan multi-step actions, and operate over extended time horizons (Jarrahi and Ritala 2025), leadership increasingly becomes less about making individual decisions and more about designing the processes through which decisions are made.

Building on this premise, we ask: How can generative AI change leadership decision-making in contemporary organisations? Rather than treating leadership and AI as separate domains of research, we conceptualise leadership work itself as the design and governance of human–AI decision architectures. To develop this argument, we integrate research on algorithmic management and algorithmic authority (Kellogg et al. 2020;

Jarrahi et al. 2021; Parent-Rocheleau and Parker 2022; Keegan and Meijerink 2025), the automation–augmentation paradox (Raisch and Krakowski 2021; Raisch and Fomina 2025), AI-mediated leadership and workplace communication (Van Quaquebeke and Gerpott 2023, 2024; Bankins et al. 2024), and emerging principal–agent perspectives on AI agents (Jarrahi and Ritala 2025).

The paper contributes by reframing GenAI-era leadership as decision-architecture design, developing a typology of four roles that GenAI in leadership work, and specifying how agentic AI turns delegation and governance into core leadership tasks. The paper proceeds as follows. Section 2 develops the theoretical framework. Section 3 introduces our typology of AI roles in leadership decision-making and the underlying conceptual model. Section 4 discusses the theoretical implications and contributions arising from the framework. Section 5 discusses the limitations, and Section 6 concludes with a research agenda.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Generative AI in Managerial Work

GenAI differs from earlier waves of enterprise AI both in capability and in mode of use. Where earlier business analytics typically required dedicated infrastructure and specialist users, generative models are accessed through natural-language interfaces, embedded in everyday tools, and applied to weakly structured tasks that previously resisted automation (Feuerriegel et al., 2024). Recent literature suggests that knowledge workers using such tools experience substantial gains on tasks inside the system's competence but risk quality losses when tasks fall outside what Dell'Acqua et al. (2023) describe as a jagged frontier of capability. Generative AI may reform organisational knowledge creation processes by transforming how knowledge is generated, combined, and applied (He et al. 2026). For management, this implies that GenAI is not simply a productivity tool on top existing decision processes, but also a partial substitute and partial complement whose effects depend on how decision processes are designed around it (Zhang et al. 2026).

A second feature distinguishing the current wave is the move from chat-based assistance toward agentic systems capable of planning, invoking tools, and executing multi-step tasks on behalf of users (Jarrahi and Ritala, 2025). Such agents shift the relevant unit of analysis from "AI as input" to "AI as actor" and surface a principal–agent problem inside the firm: leaders need to specify goals, monitor execution, and assign responsibility for outcomes produced by semi-autonomous systems whose actions they did not directly perform (Jarrahi and Ritala, 2025). Strategy scholarship has begun to focus on what an AI-first orientation requires of organizations, emphasizing deliberate phased change rather than fragmented pilots (Ruokonen and Ritala, 2023, 2025), and treating AI as a strategic priority that alters processes and capabilities rather than as an isolated tool. The process-innovation benefits of generative AI depend on organisational conditions such as IT culture and organisational flexibility, strengthening the notion that generative AI adoption is affected by broader managerial and structural attributes rather than by technology itself (Marolla et al. 2026).

A review of the literature also suggests that generative AI has innovation potential, but realising these benefits requires attention to organizational, managerial, and implementation-related challenges (Sedkaoui and Benaichouba 2026). Organisational use depends on how barriers to adoption, such as perceived usefulness, compatibility, and social influence, are addressed (Albishri et al. 2026).

2.2 The Automation–Augmentation Paradox

A long-standing debate frames AI either as automating human work or as augmenting it (De Cremer, 2020; De Cremer and Kasparov, 2021). Raisch and Krakowski (2021) reformulate this as a paradox: organizations face the dual demand of automating routine tasks while simultaneously augmenting human judgement on novel ones, and these strategies are interdependent rather than substitutes. Subsequent work shows how hybrid problem-solving combines human and AI cognition under different task structures (Raisch and Fomina, 2025), and how AI shifts the basis of competitive advantage from data scale toward learning, integration, and orchestration capabilities (Krakowski et al., 2023). Murray, Rhymer and Sirmon (2021) further specify that humans and technology can be combined in qualitatively different forms of conjoined agency, with consequences for how authority, accountability, and skill are distributed.

For leadership, the paradox is consequential in that automation choices for one set of tasks change the augmentation conditions for adjacent tasks, including managerial ones. A team whose routine work is automated faces a different mix of exceptions, novel cases, and coordination challenges, which in turn changes what its leader actually does (Beane, 2022). Augmentation is therefore increasingly a result of automation decisions that also impact cognitive and relational structure of work in general.

2.3 Algorithmic Management and Algorithmic Authority

Parallel to the automation–augmentation debate, research on algorithmic management has examined how algorithms are increasingly used to direct, evaluate, and discipline workers (Kellogg et al., 2020; Parent-Rocheleau and Parker, 2022). Originally studied in platform contexts and gig work (Jarrahi et al., 2021), algorithmic management has now moved toward the "main stage" of organizational practice (Keegan and Meijerink, 2025). Kellogg et al (2020) identify six mechanisms through which algorithms exercise managerial control, and overall, this literature stream emphasizes that algorithms are vehicles of authority whose legitimacy depends on social acceptance, transparency, and contestability (Jarrahi et al., 2021).

GenAI extends and complicates this trajectory: While earlier algorithmic management relied on optimization over structured signals, GenAI generates text, plans, and recommendations that can directly influence subordinates' work without being recognized as managerial decisions. The decision thus becomes harder to locate, since it is partly in the prompt, partly in the model, and partly in the leader's selective use of the output. This diffusion of decision making across human and algorithmic actors raises the question of where authority resides and how its legitimacy is sustained (Grote et al., 2024; Cornelissen et al., 2024). Emerging research on manager clone agents suggests that AI systems may increasingly embody and enact managerial functions, thereby creating new opportunities for scale and consistency but also raising concerns about authority, legitimacy, and employee perceptions in AI-mediated workplaces (Hu et al. 2026).

2.4 From Decision-maker to Decision Architect

A complementary stream of research has proposed that leaders increasingly act as designers of decision processes rather than only as decision makers (Shrestha et al., 2019; Schrage and Kiron, 2025). Shrestha, Ben-Menahem and von Krogh (2019) distinguish full human-to-AI delegation, hybrid sequential and aggregated decision-making, and human–AI collaboration, arguing that the choice among them is itself a leadership decision. Schrage and Kiron (2025) extend this view, contending that intelligent choice architectures rewrite decision rights across the organization by determining which options humans see, in what order, with what defaults, and under what review. This view is also consistent with the findings on human-machine collaboration in strategy foresight, suggesting that generative AI can support strategic sensemaking without replacing the leader's role in framing, interpretation and judgement (Picavet et al. 2026).

We synthesize these streams of literature into a framework of AI-mediated leadership as decision-architecture design. The framework sees the leaders' primary task as the deliberate design and governance of human–AI decision processes, i.e. deciding which decisions to retain, which to delegate, which to share, and under what conditions of transparency, escalation and review. This reframing connects to research on trust in AI (Glikson and Woolley 2020), the ethical implications of AI for meaningful work (Bankins and Formosa, 2023), and the legitimacy of algorithmically mediated authority (Jarrahi et al., 2021; Cornelissen et al., 2024).

Ethical and governance considerations therefore form an integral part of decision architecture itself. As AI moves from assisting to advising, monitoring or acting, leaders should design safeguards for accountability, explainability, fairness as well as human oversight in particular when making decisions affecting employees, customers, the public or fall under regulatory requirements (Grote et al., 2024; Jarrahi et al., 2021; Bankins and Formosa, 2023; Van Quaquebeke and Gerpott, 2024).

3. Conceptual Model: A Typology of AI Roles in Leadership Decision-making

Building on the framework developed above, we propose a typology of four roles GenAI can occupy in leadership decision-making. The typology is organized along two dimensions. The first is the *degree of AI autonomy*, that is, the extent to which the AI system can act without human initiation or step-by-step direction, ranging from prompted, single-turn response generation to multi-step, tool-using, goal-pursuing operation. The second is the *locus of decision authority*, that is, the extent to which final decision rights for the focal task remain with the human leader, are shared with the AI, or are effectively transferred to the AI within delegated bounds. Crossing these dimensions yields four ideal-typical roles: AI as assistant, AI as advisor, AI as oversight partner, and AI as delegated actor (see Figure 1).

Figure 1 illustrates the four ideal-typical roles that GenAI can take in leadership decision-making across AI autonomy and the locus of decision authority. The typology also suggests that greater AI autonomy increases the need for governance intensity, accountability, human oversight and organisational risk management.

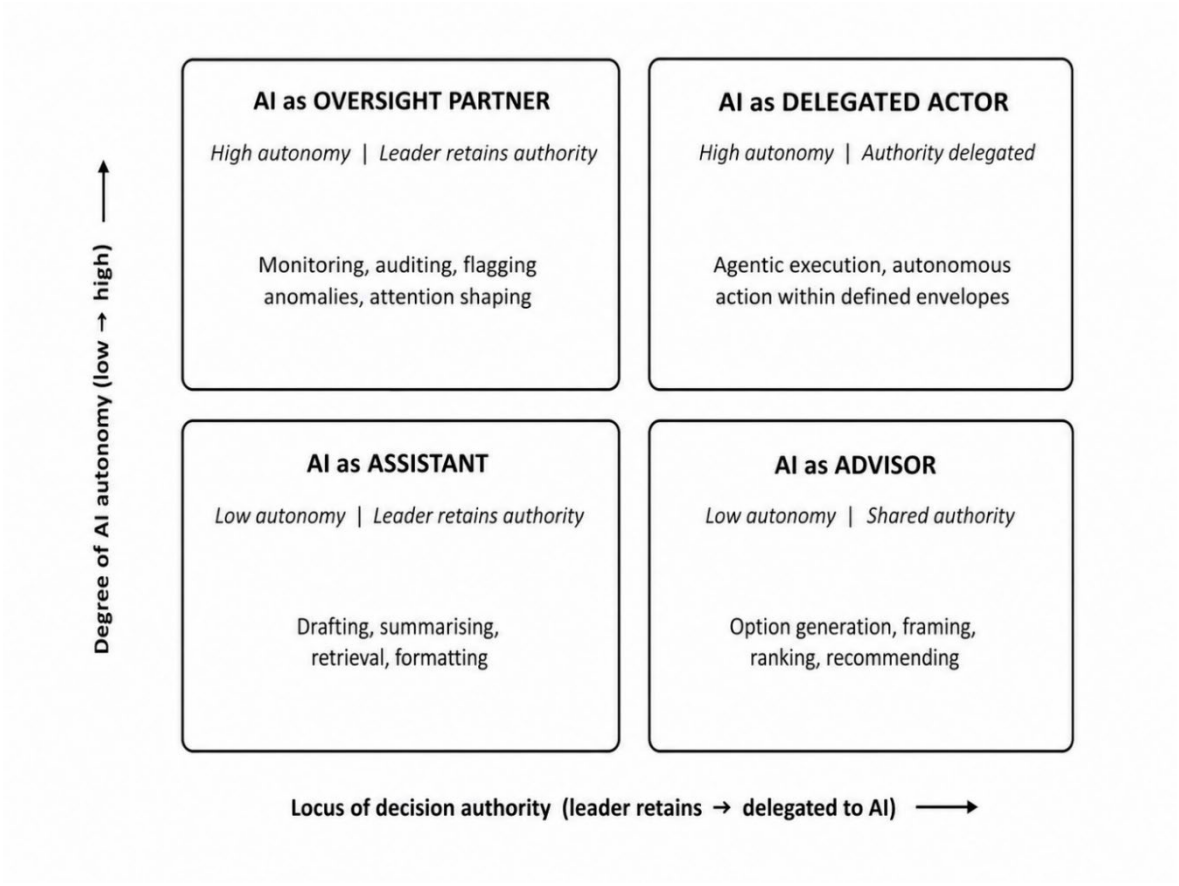


Figure 1: Typology of AI roles in leadership decision-making

3.1 AI as Assistant

In the assistant role, AI autonomy is low and decision authority remains squarely with the leader. The system drafts, summarizes, retrieves, translates, or formats on demand. Its outputs feed into the leader's existing judgement process, i.e., the leader inspects and edits before any externally visible decision is made. This role mirrors the experience of most current GenAI deployments in management, where chat-based tools support analysis, communication, and ideation. The benefit is augmentation of individual capacity, while the risk is that productivity gains on tractable tasks crowd out attention to the parts of leadership work that remain genuinely judgement-intensive (Dell'Acqua et al., 2023).

3.2 AI as Advisor

In the advisor role, AI autonomy remains relatively low, but decision authority is partially shared. In addition to the system producing material on demand, it also explicitly recommends options, courses of action, or risk assessments that frame the leader's choice. Formal authority is still with the leader, but the locus of consequential cognitive work (e.g., option generation, framing, and ranking) changes toward the AI. Echoing Schrage and Kiron's (2025) observation about intelligent choice architectures, the design of the AI's presentation of options becomes itself a decision-rights issue. The advisor role increases risks of anchoring on AI-generated framings and of competence erosion in option generation (Beane, 2022; Dell'Acqua et al., 2023). However, on the other hand it also offers leverage for more systematic, evidence-informed deliberation when used with appropriate counter-framings.

3.3 AI as Oversight Partner

In the oversight partner role, AI autonomy is high while decision authority for the focal task remains, by design, with humans. The system continuously monitors processes, flags anomalies, audits human decisions, and surfaces exceptions for human attention. Common examples include AI systems that screen documents for compliance issues, monitor team workload for risk of overload, or audit decision logs for bias. Here AI does not act in place of the leader as such, but it impacts the leader's perception by deciding what is worth attention. The role connects to algorithmic management's recording and rating mechanisms (Kellogg et al 2020) and brings

forward concerns about surveillance, privacy, and the legitimacy of algorithmic attention (cf. Parent-Rocheleau and Parker 2022; Keegan and Meijerink 2025).

3.4 AI as Delegated Actor

In the delegated actor role, AI autonomy is high and decision authority for a bounded class of decisions is effectively transferred to the AI. Within specified boundaries (e.g. budget or time constraints) the agent acts on behalf of the leader, executing tasks, sending communications, or making operational decisions. This is the role most directly implicated in the rise of agentic AI (Jarrahi and Ritala, 2025) and most distant from traditional models of leadership. The leader's role becomes to specify objectives, constraints, and escalation conditions and to review the overall outcomes generated by the AI. The notion of AI acting on behalf of managers is further reinforced by findings from research on manager clone agents, which suggests that delegated AI may replicate certain aspects of managerial communication and decision execution while introducing risks related to misrepresentation and reduced employee trust (Hu et al. 2026). Classical delegation problems of goal alignment, information asymmetry, and control are seen in a new form: the agent's preferences are model behaviours, and monitoring must operate over volumes of action that exceed human inspection (Grote et al., 2024).

Overall, the main implication of the typology is that governance decisions, such as escalation rules, transparency requirements, and responsibility allocation, are constitutive of the role itself. Whether a given system acts as assistant or as delegated actor often depends less on the underlying model and more on how the surrounding organizational architecture specifies authority, oversight, and accountability. What we mean by this is that two organizations deploying the same model may operate in different cells of the typology depending on their governance choices. This builds on, but differs from, prior work on AI-based decision structures, automation-augmentation tensions, AI leadership and intelligent choice architectures by shifting the focus from individual decisions and tools to distributed authority, accountability and judgement (Shrestha et al., 2019; Raisch and Krakowski, 2021; De Cremer, 2020; Schrage and Kiron, 2025).

4. Theoretical Implications

The typology has three main implications for leadership and organization theory. First, for *decision rights and authority*: The framework changes the unit of analysis from the leader's decision to the decision architecture in which the leader is embedded. This has theoretical consequences, since decision rights become endogenous to AI deployment, in that introducing an advisor role redistributes consequential cognitive labor even when formal authority is unchanged (Schrage and Kiron, 2025). Another theoretical implication is that organizational authority can no longer be cleanly determined to specific human positions, since the social acceptance of algorithmic outputs as binding or near-binding (Jarrahi et al., 2021; Cornelissen et al., 2024) now resides alongside positional authority, and the two may align or conflict.

The second implication relates to *employee autonomy and meaningfulness*: Each role has distinct implications for the autonomy of those whose work is mediated by AI. Assistant and advisor roles concentrate AI effects on the leader's own work while oversight partner roles extend AI's reach into the perceptual environment of subordinates, and delegated actor roles directly intervene in subordinates' workflows. Bankins and Formosa (2023) argued that meaningful work depends on conditions of autonomy, competence, and relatedness that can be undermined by indiscriminate AI mediation. Furthermore, the effects of generative AI on work are not limited to productivity and actually extend to job satisfaction while varying by the type of work involved (Bosek-Rak and Kaszyński 2026). Employees may not view AI-mediated collaboration as equivalent to working with human coworkers, which makes the implications of GenAI for job satisfaction and work experience especially important (Zahs and Schmodde 2026). The framework suggests that leaders, in choosing which role AI occupies for which decision, are also choosing which conditions of meaningful work to preserve or erode.

Finally, a reoccurring concern in the literature is that AI augmentation may erode the very expertise it relies on. Beane (2022) for instance shows how robotic surgery turns trainees into spectators, and Dell'Acqua et al. (2023) show that AI-assisted workers may stop developing judgement for problems near the jagged frontier. Translated to leadership, the typology implies that different role configurations train, or de-train, different managerial capabilities. Assistant roles preserve the leader's framing capability while improving execution, while delegated actor roles develop the leader's capability for objective specification and oversight design, potentially at the expense of operations. Seeing these as design choices, rather than emergent properties, is a defining task of decision-architecture leadership.

In practical terms, becoming a decision architect requires leaders to move from using GenAI as an individual productivity tool to deliberately designing how, where and under what conditions AI enters decision processes.

This includes identifying decisions suitable for assistance, advice, oversight or delegation; defining human review points; clarifying accountability for AI-mediated outcomes; and monitoring how AI use affect employee autonomy, organisational culture trust and managerial expertise.

5. Discussion

We acknowledge several limitations. First, the typology describes ideal types rather than stable assignments. Real systems and roles can change as capabilities evolve, as organizational confidence grows, or as market or industry conditions change. A model used as advisor in normal times may become a delegated actor for routine subsets and revert to advisor when anomalies arise. Managing such role transitions becomes part of the leader's work, including deciding when authority can be shared with AI, delegated under explicit safeguards or retained by human.

The typology is al context-sensitive: In highly regulated or safety-critical sectors such as finance, health care, education, government and public administration, AI roles are likely to require stronger human oversight, explainability and accountability. In contrast, manufacturing and platform organisations are often faced with more routine and data-intensive decisions, which may allow for greater delegation. Organisational size, culture, regulatory exposure and digital maturity therefore shape which AI roles are feasible in leadership decision-making.

Second, we note that the framework focuses specifically on decision making, not on the full range of leadership activities. Leadership involves identity work, sense-giving, and relational labour that GenAI does not directly substitute for or augment, even when it can imitate their surface forms (Van Quaquebeke and Gerpott, 2023, 2024). The typology is most informative for the cognitive-administrative lens of leadership and least so for its symbolic and relational dimensions.

Third, we acknowledge also that the legitimacy of any given configuration is socially negotiated. Algorithmic outputs that are in technical terms defensible may nonetheless lack legitimacy if subordinates perceive them as non-transparent, arbitrary, or unaccountable (Cornelissen et al., 2024; Jarrahi et al., 2021). Conversely, non-transparent human decisions are sometimes tolerated under conditions of trusted authority. Leaders therefore design not only the technical architecture but also the social arrangements through which AI-mediated decisions become trusted (Glikson and Woolley, 2020).

6. Conclusion

This conceptual paper has argued that generative AI's most consequential effect on leadership is not the automation or augmentation of individual decisions, but the rise of decision-architecture design as a main leadership task. We have positioned leaders as decision architects who deliberately structure how judgement is distributed across human and AI actors, and we have offered a typology of four AI roles in leadership decision-making (assistant, advisor, oversight partner, and delegated actor) distinguished by the degree of AI autonomy and the locus of decision authority. We have further argued that governance decisions about escalation, transparency, auditability, and responsibility are constitutive of these roles, and that the rise of agentic AI emphasizes classical delegation problems in new forms.

Future research should examine how organizations distribute decisions across the typology and which configurations shape decision equality, employee autonomy, and leadership legitimacy. Theoretically, the framework suggests integration with work on accountability and control (Grote et al 2024), trust in AI (Glikson and Woolley, 2020), conjoined agency (Murray et al., 2021), and strategic GenAI transformations (Ruokonen and Ritala, 2025). Methodologically, rapidly developing AI capabilities and dynamic role assignments call for longitudinal and process-oriented designs. Taking decision architecture seriously as a unit of analysis (rather than the individual leader or the individual AI tool only) opens leadership and governance research to questions that the current technological developments in GenAI is making unavoidable.

Ethics Declaration: This paper is conceptual and does not involve human subjects, identifiable individuals, or empirical data collection. Ethical clearance was therefore not required.

AI Declaration: In preparing this paper, the authors used generative AI to help organize the conceptual argument across sections, to proof-read the text, and to check the internal consistency of citations against the reference list. ChatGPT was used to improve the visual clarity of the figure, including image quality, layout readability, and font legibility. All theoretical positions, the choice of literature, the framing of the typology, and the final wording were determined by the authors, who reviewed, edited, and verified all AI-assisted suggestions.

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