

# **Adaptive Managerial Aid (AMA Leadership)**

*-A Framework for Accelerating Managers' Autonomy  
and Performance -*

Step by Step Guide

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## 1. ADAPTIVE MANAGERIAL AID (AMA)

### **Challenge:**

When new managers are promoted, they face a long learning curve. Many times, it takes more than six months, but often more than one year after promotion, to become autonomous performers capable of making independent decisions. Some new managers never make this leap and find themselves constantly seeking guidance from their managers or postponing decisions, leading to significant bottlenecks and operational inefficiencies.

### **Solution:**

AMA is a method that embeds elements inspired by experiential learning, coaching, and cognitive behavioural therapy, intended to accelerate the learning curve of new managers while unblocking them. It essentially assigns a Development Partner (committing 1-2 hours per week) to new managers who can assess their weekly obstacles and apply, on the spot, the most effective unblocking and learning method, called intervention, within a framework defined by this setup. There are 3 types of interventions, each with specific guidelines:

1. Experiential Modelling: Used for issues that are completely new for the new manager and they have not experienced before.
2. Focused Coaching: Applied in situations where the new manager has some basic ideas but feels overwhelmed by possibilities and consequences.
3. Cognitive Resilience: Applied to overcome psychological barriers.

The recommended duration for using the AMA framework is three months.

## **2. DEVELOPMENT PARTNER (DP)**

### ***Assigning Development Partner (DP):***

The Development Partner (DP) should be an existing manager who understands the mission and job description of the role undertaken by the new manager. While the current manager of the new manager may fulfil this role, their perceived authority may diminish some of the learning benefits.

### ***Setup:***

The recommended duration for this intervention is 3 months, after which the new leader should be encouraged to operate fully independently. During this three-month period, the initial phase would entail 2 hours per week for the first four to six weeks, followed by 1 hour per week for the remaining period. The Development Partner (DP) has the flexibility to adapt the period.

The DP should establish the routine, schedule meetings, and determine the location, which could include a meeting room, office, online platform, or informal setting such as a cafeteria.

### ***Development Partner Mindset:***

The DP shall act as a partner rather than an almighty figure who knows everything. The other person will trust in the DP with their career and future, and the DP is the first one to influence how this person will develop in the years to come. It has to be recognised that tasks which may seem effortless to the DP could be new and sometimes difficult for a new manager. Ultimately, the DP shall be prepared for spontaneous situations. But, as long as the guiding principle remains, "How will my actions or advice contribute to this person's growth as a manager within three months?" the plan will be on the right track.

### 3. INTRODUCTION IN FIRST SESSION

In the first session, the DP will set the scene by explaining the setup, framework, and objectives aimed at supporting the new manager in quickly becoming autonomous. The DP will then explain how they will assist using the three intervention channels. These intervention channels are:

**Experiential Modelling:** This channel is designed for addressing problems or blockages where the new manager cannot find a solution with their current knowledge and abilities because they have not encountered a similar situation before. DP demonstrates how to solve these problems, providing clear guidance and examples, then will engage the new manager to explain their understanding and how they will apply it.

**Focused Coaching:** This channel will be used for situations where the new manager has some basic ideas but is overwhelmed by possibilities and consequences. It involves listening, questioning, reflecting, and encouraging managers step by step to make their own decisions while fully assuming the consequences.

**Cognitive Resilience:** This channel is aimed at overcoming psychological barriers. Through this channel, the DP helps new managers build resilience, recognise counterproductive thinking, and break negative thought patterns.

DP will then describe the organisation's expectations for the new manager's performance over various timeframes: one year, six months, and the next month. If time permits, the DP may introduce additional topics for discussion, although this is not mandatory. This serves as more of a kick-off, setting the stage for the sessions to follow.

#### **4. REGULAR SESSIONS:**

This moment signifies the true beginning, where everyone places their hopes. As the Development Partner (DP), start casually and easily transition into the topic. Begin with open questions:

- How was your week?
- What were the top challenges you faced?
- Can you tell me the main areas where I can support you moving forward?

Choose 3-5 topics per session. Determine if AMA is suitable for each topic using the following table as a reference. If in certain sessions there are no topics that are suitable for AMA, then the DP can use the time at their discretion. Otherwise, select the topics suitable for AMA.

<b>Potential Topic</b>	<b>Most suitable method</b>
How do I negotiate with John who is brilliant but demotivate his colleagues	AMA
How do I make my first department strategy?	AMA
How to facilitate this decision knowing that the stakeholder X is blocking me	AMA
I obtained that (bad) result, what am I doing wrong?	AMA
How do I negotiate with stubborn people in general	Soft skills training
I don't know how to use our ERP system	Training on the job

## 5. QUICK INTAKE:

Take topics one by one. For each topic, address preliminary questions to understand the type of problem and the best intervention channel. We will refer to this process as “quick-intake.” Below is a recommendation for quick-intake:

- *Can you articulate the problem you are trying to solve?*
- *Have you experienced similar situations before? Can you describe them?*
- *Do you have some ideas on how to solve the situation, and would you like me to assist you, or would you prefer me to demonstrate?*

Based on the answers, the DP shall determine, on the spot, if:

- The new manager has never faced this kind of problem before, so they should apply **Experiential Modelling**. An **indicator** for using this type of intervention is the usage of expressions like “this is the first time I’ve encountered this” during the quick intake.
- The new manager encounters a problem where they have some ideas on how to solve it. Therefore, the DP shall use **Focused Coaching**. An **indicator** for using this type of intervention is that during the quick intake, the new manager explains having dealt with similar situations before or expresses a desire to validate ideas with the DP.

The manager faces psychological barriers. Therefore, the DP shall assist using **Cognitive Resilience**. An **indicator** for using this type of intervention is the presence of unhelpful or irrational thoughts (see description in the next chapter).

\*\*\* Pay attention to the new managers who need to voice frustrations. It's quite common for people in new roles to feel overwhelmed and need to express themselves in a safe environment. After voicing frustrations, many of them recharge with energy and are able to solve their issues. So, wait a bit, let them voice their frustrations, and be attentive to their message. If you sense they've finished and stopped, allow the conversation to flow naturally. If you feel they're stuck in a loop, repeating the same complaints in different words, politely interrupt and ask specifically how you can help. When it's about voicing frustrations, people need more to be heard and not particularly to be supported.

## **6. LEARNING INTERVENTIONS:**

Once the category of intervention has been identified by the DP, they shall continue with the respective one. Below is a step-by-step guideline:

### **6.1.Experiential Modelling Intervention:**

#### **Why:**

When someone has never experienced a topic, it's not the most efficient approach to start with the "come up with three proposals and I will choose one" game. While occasionally this may lead to an innovative solution, more often it results in poor solutions that reinvent the wheel. When a person has no clue how to approach a task, the right approach is to demonstrate how to do it. But demonstration itself is not enough because adults learn best when they experiment themselves. So this intervention blends demonstration with a part where the new manager is engaged and asked to simulate what they just learned.

#### **How:**

1. DP explains the context for the topic that is new for the manager and needs to be demonstrated. For example, assuming the new manager has to communicate a new cost control program, the DP starts by introducing the context: like financial results of the company, yearly targets accomplishment, new targets
2. DP explain how they are doing that. For example, explain how they collect the objective arguments, how they structure the message, what

channels they use (email and verbal and why), and how they allow questions

3. DP ask the new manager to take this approach and imagine they will use it with their team

4. DP will ask new manager to demonstrate how they will do it. Demonstration can be either verbally, or by simulation.

5. DP provides feedback to improve their approach.

## **6.2. Focused Coaching:**

### **Why:**

When someone already has ideas, this is the perfect starting point to work towards fostering autonomy. It's essential for them to refine their ideas, receive support in doing so, and be guided in making the best decisions from their options. When a new manager makes their own decisions, it's a triple win:

- Because the decisions are their own, they will strongly pursue their completion
- Because they made the decision, they will feel more confident in making similar decisions in the future
- The organisation benefits from a well-informed decision that has just been made.

**How:**

Coaching involves listening, questioning, reflecting, and encouraging. While there are multiple ways of coaching and methods, think of "focused coaching" as very pragmatic, condensed, and results-oriented mini-sessions. In a one-hour intervention, the new manager may bring up 3-5 issues, so the session needs to be supportive and empowering, yet equally fast and pragmatic.

The approach for this intervention channel will adhere to the following sequence: Scope -> Paths -> Advantages/Disadvantages. The DP will guide the new manager to define the scope first, then list the alternative paths to reach the scope, and finally encourage weighing the advantages/disadvantages for each. The approach is to guide the new manager with questions to help them reach their conclusions. Here is the step by step guideline:

Step	Guidance from DP	Action for DP, Based on Response
1	Ask: "If you were to assume we could solve your problem right now, how would the end result look for you?" Wait for their answer.	1.1 If the new manager is able to articulate the end result effectively, proceed to the next point. 1.2 If their end result could be improved, politely say, "That could be one end result. I also see this one. What do you think?" Continue until a satisfactory formulation of the end result is achieved.

Step	Guidance from DP	Action for DP, Based on Response
2.	<p>Ask: "If we assume there are no blockages, and we don't consider constraints, how many ways do you see to achieve the end result?" Wait for their answer.</p>	<p>2.1 If the new manager has envisioned most of the ways, proceed to the next point.</p> <p>2.2 If they have missed essential ways, continue asking if they see any other ways.</p> <p>2.3 If they are unable, then assist: "The paths you found are good. I will also add this path because I have seen it work in the past."</p>
3.	<p>Continue: "Okay, we have several options, which is good. Can you briefly tell me the advantages and disadvantages you see for each?"</p>	<p>3.1 If the new manager was able to articulate advantages and disadvantages, move to the next point.</p> <p>3.2 If they have some blind spots, continue asking from different angles to help them see other advantages and disadvantages.</p> <p>3.3 If they are unable, help: "You have pointed out most of the advantages and disadvantages. I would just add this to complete the picture."</p>

Step	Guidance from DP	Action for DP, Based on Response
4.	Conclude: "There are multiple options that lead to the result, what would you choose and why? "	Encourage the new manager to explain their choice and implementation.

As DP you should aim for decisions that are good enough, not perfect. If the new manager chooses a path that is good enough to solve the issue but not perfect, let them proceed with it.

*\*\*\* The exception is, of course, when the new manager may make a wrong or dangerous decision. In this case, use common sense to guide them back on track.*

Show that you are glad they made the decision, assure them you will support them if needed, and gently move on to the next issue.

The natural progression is that after this exercise is run a couple of times, the new manager will be able to set their mind to work in this way. In many sessions, they will directly present options, advantages, and disadvantages and ask for validation.

### 6.3 Cognitive Resilience:

Many times, the blockages that prevent a new manager from performing are internal and psychological. Fear of failure, avoiding risks, perfectionism, being overwhelmed by new tasks, decision-making anxiety, and imposter syndrome are elements that may hinder their current activities. The common ground of all these blockages is irrational negative thoughts or negative thinking patterns.

Irrational beliefs are distorted ways of thinking that contribute to negative emotions and counterproductive behaviours. Below is a list of irrational fears, also known as cognitive distortions, initially developed by Aaron T. Beck and evolved over time in formulation.

Irrational Thinking	Brief Explanation	Example
All-or-Nothing Thinking	Seeing situations in extreme, black-and-white terms.	"If my first assignment isn't flawless, I'll be a complete failure."
Catastrophizing	Exaggerating the importance of events, imagining worst outcomes.	"If I make a mistake, I'll get fired and ruin my career."
Overgeneralization	Drawing broad conclusions from limited evidence or single events.	"I messed up one meeting, so I'm always going to be a bad manager."
Personalization	Blaming oneself for external events beyond control.	"My team member's disagreement is because I'm not a good leader."
Mind Reading	Assuming knowledge of others' thoughts or feelings without evidence.	"My team probably thinks I'm incompetent because of my lack of experience."
Discounting the Positive	Ignoring positive aspects, focusing solely on negatives.	"Even though my team completed the project on time, it's only because they worked extra hard, not because of my leadership."

Irrational Thinking	Brief Explanation	Example
Emotional Reasoning	Believing emotions accurately reflect reality, despite irrationality.	"I feel overwhelmed, so I must be incapable of handling my responsibilities."
Should Statements	Imposing rigid expectations, leading to guilt or inadequacy.	"I should know how to handle every situation perfectly; anything less is unacceptable."
Labeling	Assigning harsh labels to oneself or others without context.	"I made a mistake; I'm such an incompetent manager."
Fortune Telling	Predicting negative outcomes without evidence or consideration.	"I'll never gain the respect of my team; they'll see me as a failure."

To understand the full picture, we will use the ABC model, developed by Albert Ellis. In this model, external events, known as Activating events, trigger thoughts (Beliefs), which then affect our behaviour (Consequences).

*Example:*

- A (Activating Event): New manager misses an important meeting
- B (Belief): They think, "I'm incompetent and will be seen as unreliable"
- C (Consequence): They feel anxious and worry about reputation, going into a loop of distress.

The basic application of this method suggests that by examining and challenging irrational beliefs, individuals can change their emotional responses and behaviours, leading to improved psychological well-being. The initial example will appear like this after challenging negative beliefs (or irrational thoughts):

- **A** (Activating Event): New manager misses an important meeting
- **B** (Belief, Revised, rational): “Missing the meeting was a mistake, but I can learn from this”
- **C** (Consequence): They feel determined to make up for it, focusing on developing better time management skills.

**Step-by-step guide:**

1. Observe the usage of irrational thoughts by the new manager
2. Explain the list of irrational thinking and show which category their thoughts fall into (e.g., catastrophizing)
3. Ask the new manager if they have objective evidence that validates their negative thoughts
4. Ask the new manager if they would recommend to a friend, in a similar situation, to have similar (irrational) thoughts
5. Ask the new manager to rank the probability of their irrational thought becoming reality.
6. Ask the new manager to reformulate this thought using rational thinking.
7. Encourage the new manager to use this framework whenever they have similar thoughts.

To sum up, Cognitive Resilience deals with inner obstacles that hold back new managers. By recognising and questioning irrational beliefs, they can change how they feel and act, improving their well-being. The ABC model helps understand and change negative thoughts. With simple steps, new managers can build resilience and make better decisions in tough times

## **7. LIMITATIONS AND DISCLAIMER:**

This method is not intended to serve as a substitute for professional psychological treatment or therapy. It is designed solely for the purpose of accelerating the learning process for new managers within a professional context. While this framework may address common job-related challenges and barriers, it is not equipped to handle complex psychological issues or mental health conditions.

By using this framework, you acknowledge and accept that it is not a solution for psychological or mental health-related issues.

Its effectiveness may vary depending on individual circumstances, and its implementation should be guided by discretion and professional judgment.

Furthermore, you understand that there may be inherent limitations and potential risks associated with utilising this framework incorrectly. While it aims to support new managers in overcoming obstacles, there is a possibility that it may not fully address their needs or achieve desired outcomes. In such cases, it is advisable to seek additional guidance from qualified professionals who can provide personalised support and interventions.