MODULE OVERVIEW

Leading through contradictions: Paradoxes today, AI tomorrow

Adaptive module | ~20 min

The manager's role has gained one layer per decade—boss, supervisor, leader, coach, facilitator—with none ever removed. Hence four paradoxes that never resolve: doing more with less, innovating in a fixed framework, giving autonomy without a right to make mistakes, and being demanding while protecting. The module gives three principles to hold them, then three documented scenarios on what AI will do to the role.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

01 Name the four structural paradoxes of the manager's job: resources; innovation; autonomy; performance and well-being.

02 Openly raise a tension with your team instead of acting as if everything were consistent.

03 Make the call for a set period, accepting the side you leave out, rather than promising both.

04 Place your role in three AI scenarios: augmented manager, flatter structures, orchestrator of teams of people and AI agents.

WHO IT'S FOR

Managers who want to work with the contradictions of their job rather than absorb them in silence.

- **Prerequisite:** none

HOW THE MODULE WORKS

Self-paced, with practice tailored to each learner.

1 **Self-assessment**: on 9 dimensions, to gauge current habits and guide the practice.

2 **Expert video**: 10 minutes, with 3 pauses for reflection.

3 **Practice scenarios**: the first 2 chosen from the self-assessment, then 16 optional ones. Every answer gets feedback: what it leads to, and one way to improve.

4 **Dated commitment**: one action to try, written by the learner or picked from the suggestions.

5 **Memo to download**: key takeaways, questions, commitment, personal notes and checklists.

A SAMPLE PRACTICE SCENARIO

You manage the five IT technicians at a hospital. In March, the team has to migrate the appointment software before the 30th, after which the old software stops working, and train four new technicians. The team can't do both properly. Dimitri, a technician, asks you what comes first. What do you do?

ASSESSMENT AND COMPLETION

Pass mark: 80%

The score takes into account your answers to the practice scenarios, your commitment and, where relevant, any additional learning activities. Passing requires a commitment and a score of at least 80%.

METHODS & MODELS

- Typology of the manager's four structural paradoxes – developed by Afthonios
- Polarity management: handling paradoxes rather than resolving them – Barry Johnson (1992)
- Three principles for handling paradoxes – INSEAD & Center for Creative Leadership
- The augmented manager scenario – Microsoft, Frontier Firms (2025)

SOURCES & REFERENCES

- Gartner – by 2026, 20% of organizations will use AI to flatten their structure, eliminating up to half of middle management positions in some organizations
- Microsoft – research on "Frontier Firms" (Work Trend Index 2025)
- INSEAD and Center for Creative Leadership – recognized research on managing organizational paradoxes
- World Economic Forum – 2025–2026 publications on how leadership is changing

Module created by Afthonios.com.

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