

Growth Mindset



Intro

When something goes wrong, do you see it as a fault, or a learning opportunity? For many people, their approach to this question can define the opportunities that are available to them in life. Carol Dweck's best-seller, *Mindset*, argues that there are two fundamental mindsets people bring to learning: fixed mindsets and

growth mindsets. People with a fixed mindset view talent as a fixed, innate gift that generally cannot be changed. People with a growth mindset believe that talent can be developed in everyone and see failure as a learning opportunity. Dweck has argued – with support from Microsoft's Satya Nadella – that organisations which embrace growth

mindsets are more successful, forward-thinking, and open to possibilities. Perhaps most significantly, Dweck links the idea of a growth mindset to productive outcomes: it is not enough to believe you can achieve anything, you have to actually follow through!

What's the evidence?

While there is some evidence in support of links between mindset and achievement, many scholars now argue that the claims made by the theory are far stronger than the research base can support. Perhaps more significantly, there hasn't been a strong result from real-world studies demonstrating that a growth mindset can actually lead to improved outcomes. The few studies that have been

conducted seem to indicate a weak or negligible impact – far less than the impact of other major traits such as intelligence and personality, or related educational concepts like self-efficacy (a person's belief in their ability to complete a task). In fact, significant early research in the field of educational psychology on self-efficacy has a much longer and larger evidence base than growth mindset. A number

of meta-analyses show that educational interventions focused on mindsets have such a low effect-size when compared to other interventions that they are almost not worth using. While they may be cheap and easy to implement, and can have an impact in specific groups such as low-SES, alternative interventions can have a far greater impact¹.

EVIDENCE BASE
Moderate

Why unlearn growth mindset?

Is the 'growth mindset' really that bad? That depends on how it is deployed within an organisation. For some companies, buying consultancy services like intervention programs, or investing in growth mindset research, can involve significant capital which might be better directed to higher quality programs. If there is a widespread cultural push for having a 'growth mindset', colleagues who feel like they have a

fixed mindset – and fail to recognise that people can shift between the two mindsets in different situations – may feel like they will never succeed, running counter to self-efficacy studies. Similarly, colleagues for whom there are specific difficulties, such as disability or environmental factors outside of their control, may feel like they are personally responsible for these circumstances. The opposite

of this may also be true: it is possible that people who believe they have a growth mindset will fail to recognise the actual limits that will prevent them achieving outcomes. Organisations which subscribe to mindset theory may find leaders attributing success or failure to mindset, when other, more complex factors are at play.

HARM LEVEL
Low

ADAPTABILITY
Moderate

Want to know more?

<https://www.wired.co.uk/article/growth-mindset-education-psychological-theory-children-mirage>

¹ Burgoyne, A. P., Hambrick, D. Z., & Macnamara, B. N. (2020). How firm are the foundations of mind-set theory? The claims appear stronger than the evidence. *Psychological Science*, 31(3), 258-267 <https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797619897588>.