



GROWTH MINDSET and the FUTURE OF WORK



The research of Prof Carol Dweck (Stanford University) has demonstrated that a growth mindset is essential to a person's learning and development.

In this article we explore how growth mindset interventions can accelerate and deepen upskilling programs in a future of work context.

In the past, the choice to upskill was one that people made as a normal part of their career path. One was not forced to change, but rather one elected to change. This process of self-selection ensured that most workers seeking a career change or wanting to upskill were prepared for the uncertainty and challenge ahead of them. Now, workers are being forced to change and this has created an entirely new type of challenge. How do we prepare a large labour force to have the psychological framework to undertake change willingly?

The future of work (FOW) is being shaped by increased levels of automation and artificial intelligence eliminating large numbers of existing job roles creating a chasm between existing skills and the skills required in the new economy. There is no doubt that the way we work is changing, requiring businesses to upskill large groups of workers. Businesses need to recognise that many of these workers are underprepared and unconfident in their ability to succeed in making this transition.



- Deloitte announce \$2 billion investment to upskill 4,000 workers for the future of work.

Business Insider January 2020

- 'If you opt in, we will not leave you behind' — PwC's global chairman announces a \$3 billion investment in job training.

Business Insider October 2019

- By 2022, no less than 54% of all employees will require significant re- and upskilling.

World Economic Forum 2018



Businesses are investing billions in upskilling programs without considering people's psychological resistance to change. By spending a small fraction of their overall investment in preparing people to embrace the future as a world of possibility, businesses can accelerate and de-risk their future of work programs.

Transitioning from a role where you are competent to a role where you are consciously incompetent is a stressful event for most people. Research has demonstrated that for those doubtful of their ability to succeed and afraid of failure, the experience is extremely anxiety provoking. Unfortunately, this means that some workers will give up before attempting to learn a new role and others, who are fearful of failure but decide to upskill, will find ways to navigate through the experience without realizing their full potential. As a result, fear of failure can undermine a company's effort to develop the skills and talents required for the future.



When asked about what they think about the future world of work, office workers said they are mostly excited (37%) and see a world of possibilities.



There is a strong correlation between a fear of failure and perceived competency (McCaffrey 2012). The research suggests that people that perceive themselves to have low competence are more likely to procrastinate or abandon their goals due to a fear of failure. While those that perceive themselves as competent tend not to procrastinate and exhibit greater motivation and goal pursuit.

Believe in your own ability

The research suggests that one must address a person's beliefs about their ability to develop

new skills and knowledge in order for them to engage in their learning. Failure to develop this belief in people will undermine any investment in upskilling. Yet, few businesses invest time or resources in getting people to be change ready. There is this belief that businesses simply need to make the training available and people will embrace the challenge. This is why most FOW programs are failing to deliver the benefits businesses are so keen to realise. Businesses need to build the psychological foundations that underpin a learner's belief that they can be competent in the future, even if they aren't competent today.

Two thirds of the work force aren't ready for the changes facing them.

A PwC report on the future of work states that only 37% of office workers see the future of work as a world full of possibility and believe they will be successful. Our experience is consistent with this finding. Remarkably, this means two thirds of the work force are ill prepared for the demands of upskilling.

Developing self-efficacy, a belief that one has some control over future events, is essential for workers being asked to develop new capabilities. Without self-efficacy individuals are less likely to be successful in building new capabilities. Conversely, should these individuals do well, they build greater self-efficacy and can apply this to future challenges (Bandura, 1977).

Fixed verses growth mindset

One proven concept for helping individuals to increase their self-efficacy, overcome a fear of failure and instil in them a belief that they can become competent in the future is Prof. Carol Dweck's work on growth mindset. A person with a growth mindset believes that their talents, skills, abilities and personality can be developed through hard work, good strategies, learning from mistakes and getting input from others.

A person with a fixed mindset believes that their basic qualities like their intelligence, their talents and their abilities, are fixed traits. They have a certain amount of talent or intelligence and that is that.

In short, a person with a fixed mindset about their ability to become competent in a subject area is very unlikely to even start the process of upskilling let alone navigate through the challenges they will encounter. However, a person with a growth mindset in a subject area will believe that they can become competent over time and will persist even when they have a setback. Research has demonstrated that people with a growth mindset have greater self-efficacy in goal pursuit (Dweck 2008).

While this may sound like a dichotomy, a person is either one or the other, current research indicates that we are all a mixture of both mindsets. We have areas where we believe we have high potential and areas where we believe that our potential is limited. When a person applies a growth mindset to a new challenge, they are more resilient and see setbacks as a necessary part of getting better. Whereas, when a person applies a fixed mindset to a new challenge they are defined by their failures and their motivation diminishes with each setback.

Prof. Blackwell and Prof. Dweck worked closely with students that were struggling with maths. These students were disengaged and underperforming. The students had developed a fixed mindset about their maths ability. They believed that they weren't good at maths and never would be. When these students encountered new material that was challenging it reinforced this belief about their fixed maths ability (Blackwell, Dweck 2007).

They gave one group of students training on study skills, tips for how to learn maths better, and the other group received training about growth mindset designed to change their belief about their maths ability. Students in the first group continued to underperform in maths and their maths scores continued to decline putting them at a much greater risk of not graduating. The students that received the growth mindset training became more

engaged in maths subjects and their performance continued to improve over time.

This study demonstrates that investing in training programs when people have a fixed mindset about their ability will be ineffective. The good news is that it is possible to develop in people a new belief system through growth mindset interventions, thus preparing them for the challenges ahead. If someone believes "I am just not good at computer programming," then sending them to a code camp to learn to code without first addressing their mindset is wasted effort.

Focus on the fixed mindset

It turns out that simply telling people about the growth mindset and its benefits doesn't actually change their underlying mindset. Helping someone to change their mindset isn't about giving them knowledge, it is about changing their beliefs and behaviours. This requires FOW programs to change a person's core psychological framework toward upskilling. The ability to do this at scale has enormous implications for FOW programs.

Prof. Dweck and the Growth Mindset Institute have identified eight core mental models that tend to trigger a fixed mindset response in people.

Current research suggests that in order to create a change in people it is more effective to make them aware of their fixed mindset beliefs and behaviours. Prof. Dweck and the Growth Mindset Institute have identified eight core mental models that tend to trigger a fixed mindset response in people.

They termed these eight mental models fixed mindset triggers because they consistently invoke a fixed mindset response in people. A fixed mindset trigger is a pattern of thought that leads to maladaptive behaviours such as procrastination, avoidance and giving up. Most people have at least one dominant fixed mindset trigger.

8 Fixed Mindset Triggers

- Mindset Beliefs
- High Effort
- Challenges
- Setbacks
- Success of Others
- Comfort Zone
- Feedback
- Grit

5,000 people assessed

Dweck and Growth Mindset Institute assessed 5,000 people to identify and validated eight fixed mindset triggers in 2018/19. A brief description of each trigger is as follows:

1. Mindset Beliefs – If one believes that their intelligence, talents and personality, and that of others, can't change very much then their willingness to learn new skills is lower than those who believe these aspects of who they are can be developed. If one has a belief that their ability in a subject area is limited, then they have a perception of low competence and hence will exhibit avoidance and procrastination behaviours. Their fear of failure will rule them.

2. High Effort – A person with a high effort trigger believes that things should come easily for them and that success should be quick and effortless. If one has to work hard at something, then it means they will never be good at it. This also leads to avoiding high effort tasks and procrastination.

3. Challenges – This trigger appears when one doesn't like tasks where the outcome is uncertain or where they perceive a risk of failure. This trigger is closely associated with a fear of failure and is correlated with lower self-efficacy. This results in avoidance behaviour. If they don't try, then they can't fail.

4. Setbacks and Failure – Someone that has a setback trigger can be disproportionately affected by a setback or failure. This can lead to a lack of confidence

in one's abilities, which in turn leads to a drop in motivation, and in some cases giving up. They may be fine working hard and embracing uncertainty, but when the actual setback occurs their self-doubt holds them back.

5. Success of Others – This trigger occurs when a person wants to be perceived as being more competent than those around them. They would prefer to be the star of the team and tend to need more recognition than others. Their goal is to look good as opposed to getting better.

This can lead to avoiding tasks that threaten to expose their weaknesses and hiding their deficiencies.

6. Comfort Zone – A person with a comfort zone trigger gets anxious about unfamiliar situations or tasks that demand them to develop new skills. Especially, when they perceive they are being judged and may be embarrassed if they don't perform well. The more divergent the task is from their current skills and abilities, the stronger is their fixed mindset response. This trigger leads to getting stuck in a rut and avoiding new situations.

7. Feedback – Those with a feedback trigger experience anxiousness in feedback situations. They tend to avoid feedback or seek to invalidate feedback. They perceive feedback to be criticism about their abilities versus knowledge about how they could improve. They can sometimes get defensive, angry or over sensitive when getting feedback. Research demonstrates that a fixed mindset toward feedback impedes their progress as they have less ability to identify errors and correct them (Moser 2011).

8. Grit – People with a grit trigger suffer a drop in motivation when they have to manage tasks that require a long time to complete or tasks in which they have little interest. They start off new projects full of enthusiasm, but over time their motivation wanes and they struggle to maintain their effort. They can leave tasks unfinished or the quality of their work can suffer under these circumstances (Duckworth 2007).

People's triggers play out in different ways when faced with the need to upskill. Fear of failure is commonly associated with a challenge trigger, but people with a grit, high effort or comfort zone trigger are also prone to having a fixed mindset response to these situations. While those with a feedback trigger may become anxious and avoid opportunities to learn or fail to recognise what they need to do to improve. Especially, when they feel that their abilities are being judged.

A person with a setback trigger will find it difficult to maintain momentum if they make too many mistakes while developing a new competency. If someone believes that a particular skill requires a certain level of natural talent, and they judge themselves to lack that talent, their self-efficacy will be low. Imagine trying to teach someone complex math skills if they believe that they are no good at math and never will be.

Fixed mindset triggers act as psychological barriers to learning.

A person's fixed mindset triggers affect the choices they make by influencing their perceptions about their competency, leading to lower self-efficacy and a fear of failure. Gone unrecognised and unmanaged, a person's future potential can be severely limited by their fixed mindset responses.

This can have a significant impact on the success of FOW programs. Research demonstrates that a growth mindset is essential for learning and development (Dweck 2008). A fixed mindset undermines attempts to upskill by creating a psychological barrier to learning. Overcoming this barrier is critical to developing people's capacity to change and have the self-efficacy to persist through a challenging transition.

Evidence mindsets can be changed

Fortunately, there is strong evidence that mindsets can be changed by developing self-

awareness in people about their fixed mindset triggers and assisting them to recognise when they are at play. Once a person recognises their fixed mindset triggers, they are able to develop strategies to manage back toward growth. This accelerates performance and acts as a multiplier for investment in upskilling people.

It is not enough to provide people with new knowledge without addressing the psychological barriers that will prevent them from applying that knowledge effectively. This is where many FOW programs fall short and fail to achieve the large-scale change that is required. Change at an enterprise level is the sum of change at an individual level. Unfortunately, most businesses fail to develop a strategy for how to achieve this at scale.

People with a growth mindset develop a thrive mentality believing that the future holds greater potential to learn and grow their skills.

Research into this aspect of FOW is still developing, but we know that a fixed mindset hinders people's ability to adapt and change. When confronted with uncertainty about the future and challenging environments, people with a fixed mindset adopt a survive at all cost mentality. They seek to maintain the status quo and resist change. People with a growth mindset develop a thrive mentality believing that the future holds greater potential to learn and grow their skills. They are optimistic about the future and see the greater opportunities made possible by a changing world.

Change at an enterprise level is the sum of change at an individual level.

Mindset interventions can scale

Developing a more persistent growth mindset in people has the potential to increase the effectiveness of upskilling programs. Mindset interventions have demonstrated that they can overcome a fear of failure by increasing a person's belief that they can become competent in new areas of learning. This improves their self-efficacy leading to greater tenacity when they encounter a challenge or setback (Yeager 2013).

Research indicates that a growth mindset can be developed at scale.

FOW programs would benefit by helping people to recognise their fixed mindset beliefs and develop strategies to manage them as a precursor to upskilling. Fortunately, there is evidence that this type of program can be delivered at scale making it a viable approach for businesses (Paunesku, Dweck, Yeager 2015).

Growth Mindset Institute has developed a validated online assessment that helps people to recognise their fixed mindset triggers. This is a valuable step in creating awareness and identifying the strategies required to develop a more persistent growth mindset. The Mindset Profiler can help businesses to scale their growth mindset programs.

For more information on growth mindset programs for your business visit us at:

www.growthmindsetinstitute.org



Contact the authors:

susan@growthmindsetinstitute.org

john@growthmindsetinstitute.org