

The Power of an Agile Mindset

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Disclaimer: This provocative presentation is ideally the beginning of a conversation. It won't take long for me to tell you everything I know about cognitive psychology, although I have been reading in the area for several years now. I'm an amateur who has sufficient interest in weird topics and a strange way of connecting ideas that might or might not be of interest to you. Thank you for your tolerance and understanding of my meanderings and I hope you learn a little that might help you in your life.

This is not an "academic" presentation, but those interested in more information are invited to ask me for references for any part of this talk and I will be happy to make them available.

Do you mostly agree or mostly disagree with the following

- (1) Intelligence is something very basic that you really can't change much. You're born with it or not. Yes, you can learn new things, but you can't really change how intelligent you are.
- (2) No matter how intelligent you are, you can always get better, sometimes you can improve a lot.

Substitute any ability or talent for "intelligence."

Interesting experiments

Phase I:

Students were given a very easy set of questions

Then they were categorized into "effort" or "fixed" groups (about 50-50)

Phase II

All students allowed to choose between:

- (1) a more difficult test (where they would learn a lot) or
- (2) another easy test (similar to Phase I)

Most (~90%) "effort" kids chose (1)

Most (~80%) "fixed" kids chose (2)

Phase III

Very difficult exam given to both groups

"Effort" kids worked hard, enjoyed the challenge

"Fixed" kids easily discouraged

Phase IV

All students allowed to choose between:
(1) seeing exams of those who did better
or
(2) exams of those who did worse

“Effort” kids chose (1)

“Fixed” kids chose (2)

Phase V

All students given easy test (similar to Phase I)

“Effort” kids improved (by ~30%)

“Fixed” kids’ were worse (by ~20%)

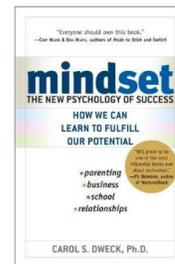
Phase VI

All students asked to give advice to other students and include their scores

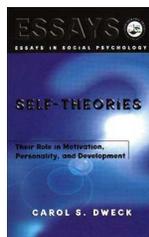
“Effort” kids: Lots of advice and encouragement.

“Fixed” kids: Very little or no advice and ~40% lied about their scores

Mindset – Carol Dweck



Self-Theories – Carol Dweck



Free on the web

New Yorker – “The Talent Myth,”
gladwell.com

New York Magazine – “How not to talk to your kids,” Po Bronson

TIME magazine – “How to help them succeed”

Two mindsets: Fixed & Agile

Research shows that mindset:
Determines goals
Reactions to failure
Belief about effort and strategies
Attitudes toward others' successes

Two mindsets Fixed vs. Agile

| | |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Ability – static, like height | Ability – can grow, like muscle |
| Goal - look good | Goal - to learn |
| Challenge - avoid | Challenge - embrace |
| Failure - defines your identity | Failure – provides information |
| Effort - for those with no talent | Effort - path to mastery |
| Reaction to challenge - helplessness | Reaction to challenge – resilience |

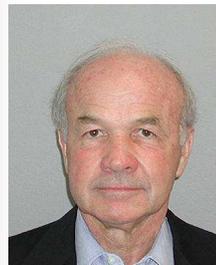
Belief about yourself affects belief about others

Those with a fixed mindset are quick to judge others based on little information and quick to stereotype
Those with an agile mindset don't ignore information about others but are less negative/positive

Bright little girls

Bright little boys

Smartest guys in the room



Enron's fixed mindset

Identify and hire "the best talent"
Then continuously and ruthlessly grade, sort, fire, and promote – a process called "rank and yank"

We are a company of people, not planes. That is what distinguishes us from other airlines.



The Southwest Culture

Hire for attitude
Establish a culture of community, trust, and the "Southwest spirit"
Then provide learning opportunities and continually grow people
Southwest seems to have an "agile" mindset

Managers have a mindset

"Pygmalion in Management," J. Sterling Livingston, Sept/Oct 1988 *Harvard Business Review*.

The good news is...

Mindset is not "fixed"
We encourage one or the other in each other
We develop one or the other in our children
Research has shown that small experimental manipulations, e.g. feedback or reading an article can produce one or the other
Simply learning about the mindsets causes changes in people's belief systems so they are more likely to accept a growth mindset.

You mean I don't have to be stupid?

Effort is good!

Praise effort, strategies, process

Ask about the work

Instead of ignoring failure, teach others
that it's a way to learn and improve

Agile software development

Fail early, fail often.

Fail fast, learn constantly.

Failure *IS* an option.

Without failure how can learning happen?

“Make mistakes faster.”

Rich Sheridan, CEO, Menlo Innovations

“Perfect is a verb.” Kent Beck

“Those that fail fastest grow strongest.”

Roy Singham, Founder and Chair, Thoughtworks

Agile is agile

The agile mindset believes that we are *ALL* a work in progress.

The agile software development process isn't fixed. It continues to change and grow as we learn more about it. If we are lucky, this will never end because it will never be perfect.

We will continue to improve as we age—just like me ☺!

Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again.

Fail better. Samuel Beckett, Irish poet (1906-1989)

Thanks for listening!