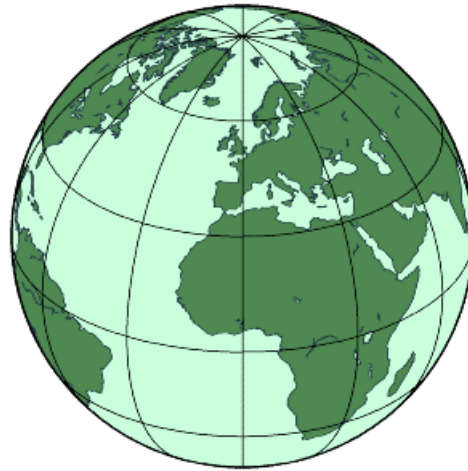


Mindset



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Introduction

- Carol S. Dweck:
 - Is a professor of psychology at Stanford University in the USA
 - Conducts research in several areas, including motivation
- One experiment early in her career was as follows:
 - Children were given simple puzzles to work on (so they could experience success initially)
 - Afterwards, they were given harder puzzles to work on (so they could then experience failure)
 - What tactics would the children use to cope with failure?
- The reactions of some children surprised her:
 - Some seemed to *enjoy* the likelihood of failure
 - “I love a challenge”, “I was *hoping* this would be informative!”

Introduction (cont')

- Over time, Carol S. Dweck developed a theory to explain this and other aspects of human behaviour
- The theory is very simple, but it has implications for many aspects of life:
 - Education, work, sports, relationships, ...
- This chapter explains the theory and some of its implications
- You can read details in the book, *Mindset* by Carol S. Dweck

1. A simple theory

Two mindsets: fixed and growth

- Dictionary definition of *mindset*:
 - A mental attitude that predetermines a person's responses to an interpretation of situations
- Carol Dweck identified two important mindsets
- Growth mindset:
 - “No matter what my skill level currently is, I can improve through continued practice”
 - “I do not worry about making mistakes or failing because they provide opportunities for learning”
- Fixed mindset:
 - “My skill level is fixed; I am either good or bad at something and there is not much, if anything, I can do to change my skill level”
 - “My self-esteem is based on whether I am better or worse than other people”

Miscellaneous notes

- Having a growth mindset is good
- Having a fixed mindset can result in many types of dysfunctional behaviour
 - The next section contains some examples
- Most people have a mixture of both mindsets:
 - Example: you might have a growth mindset for learning foreign languages and a fixed mindset for mathematics or relationships
- Your mindset can change:
 - Becoming aware of the concept of mindsets can help you change
 - People can be taught to have a particular mindset
 - How you are treated by others can influence which mindset you have (this has implications for parents, teachers, coaches and managers)

2. Dysfunctional behaviour arising from a fixed mindset

Identities arising from a fixed mindset

- A fixed mindset can transform an action into an identity

Action	Identity
I succeeded	I am a success
I failed	I am a failure

- An “I am a failure” identity can be bad for your mental health
- When you make a mistake:
 - You might sink into depression
 - Or, you might make excuses or assign blame to others
 - By denying responsibility, you deny yourself the opportunity to learn from mistakes or failure
 - Blaming others unfairly is a form of verbal abuse

Identities arising from a fixed mindset (cont')

- An “I am a success” identity can also be bad:
 - It encourages a feeling of superiority over other people
(This can cause you to mistreat others)
 - Even when currently successful, you might be fearful of future failure
- People with a fixed mindset are more likely to try to look good by comparison with others:
 - By putting other people down
 - By agreeing with derogatory stereotypes of other groups
- People with a fixed mindset are also more likely to begrudge the success of others:
 - Somebody being more successful than you can make you feel like a failure

Fixed mindsets in education

- Consider two students who have fixed mindsets
- Fred has poor mathematical skills. He thinks:
 - “I’m no good, and can never be any good, at this. Therefore, there is no point in me even trying.”
 - This becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Without studying, he will fail
- John has excellent mathematical skills. He thinks:
 - “People who are poor at mathematics have to study hard to improve. Mathematics comes naturally to be, so I don’t have to work at it.”
 - “I must not put effort into studying mathematics because doing that would suggest I *need* to study hard, and only people who are poor at mathematics need to study hard.”
 - “I am the best in the school at mathematics. I must not enter a national competition because if I lose then I would no longer be ‘the best’”.

Fixed mindsets in education (cont')

- John's fixed mindset can result in problems:
 - Eventually, he will encounter a mathematical topic beyond his natural ability
 - At this point, his refusal to study hard will stunt his education
 - He might cheat or lie to maintain his reputation for being “the best” at mathematics
(in one experiment, 40% of fixed-mindset students who viewed themselves as having high abilities lied about poor test results)
 - His refusal to take part in competitions (due to fear of failure) limits his opportunities in life
- So a fixed mindset can cause you problems in education, regardless of your skill level

Fixed mindsets in education (cont')

- Recall that people with a fixed mindset are more likely to try to look good by comparison with others
- This was verified by the following experiment:
 - Students who did poorly on a test were given the chance to look at the test papers of other students
 - Students with a growth mindset looked at tests of students who did much better to find inspiration
 - Students with a fixed mindset looked at tests of students who did much worse, so they could feel better about themselves

Self sabotage

- A person with a growth mindset is comfortable admitting ignorance or limitations and seeking help
- In contrast, a person with a fixed mindset:
 - Does not like admitting ignorance or limitations for fear of people judging him or her
 - Might reject offers of help (because that would be admitting a problem)
- One experiment concerned Chinese students attending an English-language university:
 - Some of the new students were not fluent in English
 - Those with a growth mindset accepted the offer of a free English course
 - Those with a fixed mindset rejected the offer:
 - They did not want to admit to any deficiencies
 - In this way, they sabotaged their own education

Prejudice

- The concept of a stereotype is closely related to a fixed mindset
- Research shows that people with a fixed mindset are more likely to believe derogatory stereotypes:
 - About *other* groups
 - About *their own* group
- This suggests that you can reduce prejudice indirectly:
 - Teaching a growth mindset to a population will have the side-effect of reducing prejudice in the population

Bullying

- Bullying comes from a fixed mindset.
It involves passing judgement on others to:
 - Boost your own self-esteem (“I’m better than the victim”)
 - Increase your social standing
(others may think you are cool, funny or powerful, or at least fear you)
- Victims of bullying cope better if they have a growth mindset:
 - They reject the bully’s judgement
 - They seek to end the bullying through peaceful means
- Victims of bullying with a fixed mindset:
 - Accept the bully’s judgement (“I am worthless”)
 - Are more likely to dream of violent revenge

Bullying (cont')

- One school tackled bullying by teaching students a growth mindset
- Within a few years:
 - Physical bullying decreased 93%
 - Verbal teasing decreased 53%

Leadership

- A fixed mindset in a leader or manager can cause problems
- He may spend an organization's money foolishly:
 - Growing the organization is not a high priority
 - Making himself look good to the world is a higher priority
 - Luxurious office, company car (or jet airplane), ...
- He may humiliate subordinates who make mistakes
- He may try to sabotage the careers or projects of talented subordinates
 - Because they threaten his "I'm the best" identity

Relationships

- Some examples of fixed-mindset thinking:
 - Fairy tales that end with two people falling in love and “they lived happily ever after”
 - Looking for “Mr. Right” or “Miss Right”
 - “Love means never having to say you’re sorry”
(a famous quote from the book and 1970 movie *Love Story*)
- The assumption is that when you meet the “right” person:
 - You will be a perfect match (without even trying)
 - You will always get along perfectly

Problems with a fixed mindset in relationships

- Fixed-mindset thinking in relationships brings problems due to two assumptions
- Assumption 1:
 - “If you have to work at the relationship, it wasn’t meant to be”
 - This means you are likely to end the relationship when problems arise
- Assumption 2:
 - “Problems are a sign of permanent personality flaws”
 - You are likely to blame your partner when problems occur in the relationship
 - Over time, you will grow to feel contempt for your partner’s personality flaws

A growth mindset in relationships

- A growth mindset says everything, including relationships, can improve with continued effort
- Instead of
 - “And we lived happily ever after”,
 - the attitude is
 - “And we worked (at the relationship) happily ever after”
- Communication is vitally important for:
 - Resetting each other's expectations about roles and responsibilities
 - Resolving problems (instead of assuming they indicate character flaws)
- Offer support rather than judgement. Example:
 - You come home and find the house is messy because your partner is swamped with work
 - Support your partner by clearing up rather than criticizing the mess

The ending of a relationship

- If your partner ends their relationship with you, your reaction depends on your mindset
- If you have a growth mindset, you will be hurt but:
 - Forgive your former partner for the hurt and wish them well
 - Try to learn from mistakes in the relationship so you can have better relationships in the future
- If you have a fixed mindset, you will:
 - Interpret this as your partner judging you to be unlovable
 - Want to seek revenge for this humiliation

3. How to create a particular mindset in others

Creating a mindset in others

- You can create a fixed mindset by praising ability. Examples:
 - “You learned that so quickly; you’re so smart.”
 - “You’re a genius; you got an A without even studying.”
 - “That’s a great drawing. You’re going to be the next Picasso.”
- You can create a growth mindset by praising persistence in practice or study, and good strategies. Examples:
 - “You did well on that test; you must have worked hard”
 - “You put so much thought into that essay. It really makes me understand Shakespeare in a new way.”
 - “The passion you put into that piano piece gives me a real feeling of joy. How do you feel when you play it?”

Genius

- “Genius” is commonly thought to mean a superior ability that comes *naturally* to a person:
 - In other words, either you are born a genius or you are not
 - If you are not born with the relevant abilities then:
 - You will never be as intelligent as Albert Einstein
 - You will never play basketball as well as Michael Jordan
- This commonly held understanding of “genius” is full of fixed-mindset thinking. It is also wrong
- Thomas Edison offered a more accurate definition, which comes from a growth-mindset thinking:
 - “Genius is 1% inspiration and 99% perspiration”
- A later chapter of slides (*Curse of the Genius Label*) discusses genius in more detail

4. Summary

Summary

- A fixed mindset causes dysfunctional behaviour that harms you and others
- A growth mindset avoids such dysfunctional behaviour
- It *is* possible to learn and teach a growth mindset
 - See *Mindset* by Carol S. Dweck
- You can improve your ability to change the world by:
 - Eradicating fixed-mindset thinking within yourself
 - Introducing a growth mindset to people and organizations you work with