

PSYCHOLOGY

5 Mistakes Companies Make About Growth Mindsets

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Like any psychological concept that booms in popularity, growth mindset – the dual belief that skills and abilities can be improved, and that developing your skills and abilities is the purpose of the work you do – is ripe for misinterpretation.

Hoping to learn how organizations put growth mindset to use in a rapidly changing work environment, the NeuroLeadership Institute has spent the last two months interviewing HR practitioners at more than 20 major organizations around the world. Our goal is to find out what, exactly, leaders are doing when they implement growth mindset around their organization.

Preliminary analyses have revealed that some of the top organizations in the world have been working the growth mindset concept into their work and talent processes for years. Those that stick closely to the science of growth mindset are weaving it into the employee experience across on-boarding to talent acquisition and succession planning, to leadership development and career development.

However, our research team also identified a startling trend: In organizations that have not spent adequate time studying the science behind growth mindset, leaders and employees are misusing and misunderstanding the concept. We're calling these misconstruals "myths of growth mindset."

Here are some of those myths:

Myth #1: Growth mindset means striving for business growth. Our most common finding is that some leaders believe growth mindset means keeping an eye toward profits. In reality, growth mindset is the continuous belief that improvement is possible and that failures are opportunities to learn. It is much larger than the objective of improving earnings.

Myth #2: Businesses, rather than people, can have a growth mindset. Growth mindset is a frame of mind held inside one person's brain. Since businesses cannot "think" about their own performance and potential, they can't adopt their own growth mindset. Leaders in organizations can certainly help people adopt a growth

mindset by fostering a culture around specific habits and practices, but abstract entities that don't have minds (like a business or a brand) can't have a growth mindset. But individuals can have them personally, and organizations as well – in the sense that all people involved have it.

Myth #3: Growth is unbounded – or, anyone can become an opera singer. We often hear that growth mindset registers as “Anyone can do anything, so long as they put their mind to it.” In fact, this feeling of limitlessness may distract employees from pursuing what they were hired for, or from what they excel at most. The result is often demotivation and confusion.

Myth #4: Growth mindset is binary. Some falsely believe that growth mindset is something you either have, or you don't. In reality, people aren't confined to one mindset or the other. People can have a fixed mindset about their cooking abilities but a growth mindset about their public-speaking skills. Many arenas do correlate with one another, but each lives on its own spectrum. And while it is possible to spot your own fixed mindset thinking and reframe into a growth orientation, you can't expect to change a chronic, habitual mindset in a moment.

Myth #5: Growth mindset means having a positive, can-do attitude no matter what. We hear a lot that leaders are using growth mindset to chastise employees who say they have too much on their plate. This is counter-productive. Growth mindset must always take people's cognitive capacity in mind. No one has infinite resources.

When people really do have too much on their plate, attacking their mindset is counter-productive. Because the problem isn't their attitude – it's that they can't bend the laws of space and time.

What growth mindset really means

Our ongoing industry study and further research into the nature of work and leadership styles suggest that growth mindset is only becoming more relevant for organizations. However, we also find that many companies still have a long way to go if they want to foster a growth mindset among their employees.

The first step is getting clear on how we define these things. Again, we define a growth mindset as both *the belief that skills and abilities can be improved*, and that developing your skills and abilities *is the purpose of the work you do*. A culture that fosters a growth mindset, then, is a culture in which all employees are seen as possessing potential, are encouraged to develop, and are acknowledged and rewarded for improvement.

In the short term, leaders should consider whether their current approaches actually help people see their own potential on a regular basis, and if team members view failures as threats or opportunities. Measuring these factors – starting with everyday conversations – can help guide leaders foster a genuine growth mindset.



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Andrew Chege 4 hours ago

Insightful article....waiting for the final research finding... In my scenerio the African context...Many locally owned firms' struggle with #myth 1...to have a top level discussion (Excom/BOD/shareholder etc) on a change management process that envision a scenario where ".failure is seen as learning to do better..." is an almost impossible 'sell' for stakeholder approval...Employees are conditioned to

focus on 'numbers'... and lose sight of the bigger long-term 'picture'... I think Jack Welch implemented this concept very well at GE helm.

Andrew Chege

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