

1. Carol Dweck on Growth-Mindset Organizations

In this interview in *Harvard Business Review*, Sarah Green asks Stanford professor Carol Dweck about how her ideas apply to corporations. In her early research, Dweck realized that different people have widely divergent reactions to failure. “For some people,” she says, “failure is the end of the world – but for others, it’s this exciting new opportunity.” The key difference, her subsequent work showed, was that people in the latter group usually have a “growth” mindset that helps them thrive on challenges, whereas those with a “fixed” mindset, even if they’ve been very successful, tend to stay within their comfort zone and, when they encounter frustration and difficulty, falter and sometimes go to pieces. They’re worried, *Will I look good? Will I live up to my reputation? Will people think I’m brilliant?*

Can an organization, like a person, have a fixed or growth mindset? Dweck and her colleagues explored this question by asking people to respond to statements like:

- When it comes to being successful, this organization seems to believe that people have a certain amount of talent, and they really can’t do much to change it.

Agreement with statements like this indicated a fixed mindset; disagreement was a sign of a growth mindset. The researchers then looked at people’s job satisfaction, perceptions of organizational culture, levels of collaboration, innovation, and ethical behavior.

“In broad strokes,” says Dweck, “we learned that in each company, there was a real consensus about the mindset. We also learned that a whole constellation of characteristics went with each mindset.” Fixed-mindset companies tended to have a small handful of “star” workers who were highly valued. The rest of the workers worried about failing, pursued fewer innovative projects, kept secrets, cut corners, cheated to try to get ahead, and didn’t feel that superiors had their backs. Supervisors in growth-mindset companies, on the other hand, thought more positively about their employees, rating them as more innovative, willing to take risks, collaborative, and committed to learning and growing, and were more likely to believe people had management potential.

How can an organization promote a growth mindset? There are several key leadership messages, says Dweck:

- We value passion, dedication, growth, and learning, not genius.
- We don’t expect that you’ve arrived here fully formed. We care more that you’re ready to learn.
- We expect that you’ll stretch beyond your comfort zone and take reasonable risks.
- We value process and we reward process – taking on big but reasonable challenges.
- We reward tenacity and grit.
- We reward teamwork.

“So the companies that are thriving are the ones that give this message,” Dweck reports. “And also, my research has shown, contrary to popular opinion, you don’t praise talent. You don’t praise ability. You praise process... People who are praised for talent now worry about doing the next thing, about taking on the hard task, and not looking talented, tarnishing that reputation for brilliance.”

Hiring is obviously crucial – looking less at pedigree than potential, passion for learning, and ability to collaborate. This often means hiring from within. Mentoring and support are also important – putting considerable resources into helping employees grow and develop.

“Talent: How Companies Can Profit from a ‘Growth Mindset’” in *Harvard Business Review*, November 2014 (Vol. 92, #11, p. 28-29); this link contains an interview with Carol Dweck:

<http://hbr.org/2014/11/how-companies-can-profit-from-a-growth-mindset/ar/1>