



IDEA REPORT

Growth Mindset Culture



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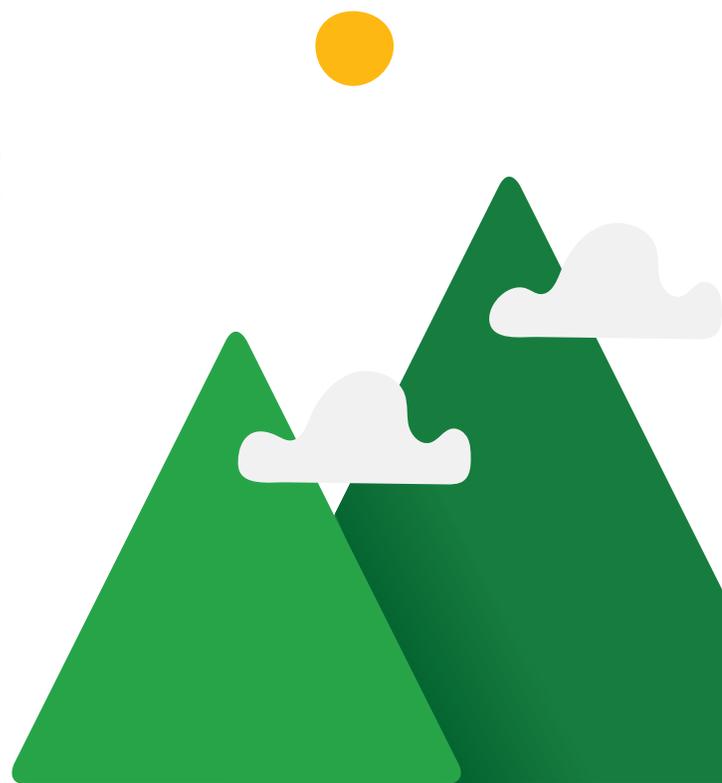


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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Growth Mindset Culture



Growth Mindset Culture (GMC) is key to transformation, engagement, and innovation.

In this Idea Report, we investigate the latest applications of growth mindset through in-depth interviews with 20 organizations in the U.S., Australia, and Europe. We also trace its origins in an in-depth Q&A with Carol Dweck, the Stanford psychologist who discovered it. The result is an expansive look at how the concept of growth mindset has evolved and how organizations are embedding it to support change and transformation efforts.

Key insights:

The top business driver for GMC is to enable digital transformation. Addressing the challenges of digital transformation was the most frequently mentioned reason for organizations to introduce a GMC. Affected industries span from insurance to beverages.

Senior leadership support is critical to implementing GMC. Over two-thirds of our sample employed top leaders to communicate, teach, and role-model growth mindset through their organization.

Growth mindset can be built into various talent processes.

Teaching employees about growth mindset is only the start. More than a third of companies we spoke with embed it in more than five touch points in the talent cycle: from onboarding to performance management to high potential selection and development.

Myths of growth mindset are stubborn. Leaders and employees alike attach personalized meanings to growth mindset, some of which are inaccurate — like that GMC means boundless growth or unlimited productivity.¹ Talent practitioners must work dutifully to ensure the scientific definition is known and abided by.

Implications:

Leaders can use growth mindset to embrace change across industries and organizations.

1 5 Mistakes Companies Make about Growth Mindsets, Heidi Grant, Mary Slaughter, and Andrea Derler, Harvard Business Review, July 23 2018 <https://hbr.org/2018/07/5-mistakes-companies-make-about-growth-mindsets>.



And she said, 'You know, I had recently applied for this job, but I almost didn't apply, because I was sort of taken aback when I saw the job post because I didn't have all of these qualifications. But then the growth mindset approach kicked in and I thought, well, wait, I can do this. I know I can do this job, but I may not meet all these qualifications yet.'

*Performance Management Director,
Global Health Services Company*

A couple of them said, 'I am really nervous. This is outside of my comfort zone.' But in the same breath they said, 'I guess this is that growth mindset, huh? So I have to try.'

*Senior Talent Practitioner,
Petrochemicals Company*



EXPLAINING FIXED MINDSET

FIXED MINDSET = “be good”

- Proving
- Demonstrating skills
- Performing better *than others*

HOW FIXED MINDSETS RESPOND TO DIFFICULTY

**Fixed Mindset
=
Threat**

What if I'm not good?

Maybe I don't have the skills

I could make mistakes

Others may do it better

EXPLAINING GROWTH MINDSET

GROWTH MINDSET = “get better”

- Improving
- Developing skills
- Performing better *than you did before*

Do you believe that attributes are fixed traits that can't be changed or that they are malleable qualities that can be grown?

HOW GROWTH MINDSETS RESPOND TO DIFFICULTY

**Growth Mindset
=
Challenge**

I can get better

I can always improve

A great chance to develop skills

A year ago, I wouldn't have done this well

Source: NeuroLeadership Institute, 2018

INTRODUCTION

Welcome!

The State of Growth Mindset Culture

To say that businesses must navigate shifting landscapes borders on cliché; to say that they must learn from setbacks is obvious; and the need for resilience is as self-evident as the need for oxygen.

Yet how to live up to these demands remains, for many leaders, a mystery. And given culture's nasty habit of eating strategies for breakfast, adapting to our turbulent times requires a set of shared everyday habits and systems that support them, rather than some batch of catchy talking points.

Enter growth mindset. Decades of scientific research into motivation indicate that a growth mindset, which holds that skills and abilities can be improved in ways that shape the purpose of the work that you do, leads to academic achievement, relational fulfillment, and professional success. And while the idea has spread rapidly like wildfire across forward-thinking organizations, it has been criminally understudied in the field — until now.

That is the mission of the Idea Report series from the NeuroLeadership Institute: to investigate the most important concepts cross-pollinating between the academy and enterprise, map where they've been and where they're going, and provide concrete applications that you can apply in your work today.



In this inaugural edition, we premiere our industry research into Growth Mindset Culture and surround those findings with actionable insights, including those drawn from a long-form Q&A with Carol Dweck, the originator of the idea.

Let's begin by defining our terms.

What is growth mindset?

Growth mindset began with an insight into why some schoolchildren got excited about difficult problems while others got anxious. Dweck observed that some kids believed that people were born with a finite amount of intelligence that can't be changed (fixed mindset), while others thought that intelligence is malleable and can be grown and nurtured through practice (growth mindset).

It's since expanded out of the classroom, to athletics, conflict resolution, relationships, and career management. In our work with organizations, we define growth mindset as the belief that skills and abilities can be improved and that the development of skills and abilities is the goal of the work you do.

Like any other culture change, GMC requires alignment between Priorities, Habits, and Systems.



Priorities

**Messaging campaigns
Leader advocacy**



Habits

**Feedback conversations
Risk taking**



Systems

**Performance evaluations
Hiring**

The benefits of growth mindset cultures can be significant:²

- Workers have 47% higher trust in their company
- Workers are 34% more likely to feel a sense of ownership and commitment to the future of their company
- Workers show 65% stronger agreement that their company supports risk-taking

Why growth mindset culture matters

Given the way these self-beliefs shape social interaction, job performance, and personal well-being, the appeal of cultivating a growth mindset culture may seem obvious. Yet finding the many places where you may hold growth or fixed mindsets about your abilities is a life journey on its own — how can you possibly shift the collective mindset across an organization of thousands?

Whether or not organizations are conscious of it, culture is shaped by priorities, habits, and systems.

As such, our extensive interviews across industries have sought to identify elements across these three interconnected vectors that seek to promote a growth mindset. Learning whether or not they are successful will require further work and time, but this research represents the current state of the practice.

Welcome to the frontier of growth. We're happy to have you here.

Growth mindset and the brain

Your mindset shapes the cognitive mechanics of how you deal with things. Growth mindset is characterized by effort and perseverance.³ Research has found that when receiving negative feedback on performance, people who endorse a growth mindset display different patterns of activation in the brain than those who endorse a fixed mindset. In the growth mindset group, attentional resources are engaged in a way that enhances learning from failure, retention of new information, and resilience to setbacks.

2 Dweck, C., Murphy, M., Chatman, J., & Kray, L. (n.d.). Why Fostering a Growth Mindset in Organizations Matters. In Senn Delaney. Retrieved from http://knowledge.sennnelaney.com/docs/thought_papers/pdf/stanford_agilitystudy_hart.pdf.

3 Mangels, J. A., Butterfield, B., Lamb, J., Good, C & Dweck, C. (2006, September). Why do beliefs about intelligence influence learning success? A social cognitive neuroscience model. *Soc Cogn Affect Neurosci*, 1(2), 75-86.



If we want growth mindset to happen in real life, we have to create the conditions for it and modify them as we learn what works and what doesn't. We have found that these conditions differ depending on where we are in the evolution, moving from awareness to adoption to advocacy of growth mindset. This work is iterative, data-informed, and ongoing.

Senior Director, Organizational Development, Technology Company

Relatedly, a recent study found that upon receiving negative career feedback, young adults who more strongly endorsed growth mindset beliefs were less likely to disengage from their career goals.⁴ Teams using growth mindset are better able to openly express disagreements, accept feedback from one another, increase their confidence over trials, and end up setting more challenging goals for themselves in the long run. In contrast, an orientation toward a fixed mindset is characterized by pressure to perform, reduced attentional resources to address mistakes, weaker learning, avoidance of challenging experiences, and increased vulnerability to setbacks.⁵

Your mindset – whether growth or fixed – affects how you respond to feedback and plays a major role in guiding your beliefs, the choices you make, and the goals you pursue. It shapes how you deal with success and failures and has a powerful impact on the neural processing that influences memory, learning, resilience, and performance.

4 Hu, S., Hood, M., & Creed, P. A. (2017). Negative career feedback and career goal disengagement in young adults: The moderating role of mind-set about work. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*.

5 Schroder, H., Moran, T., Donnellan, B., & Moser, J. (2014, December). Mindset induction effects on cognitive control: A neurobehavioral investigation. *Biological Psychology*, 27-37.

Growth Mindset Culture: Key findings

We set out to identify what organizations are doing to embed the concept of growth mindset into their culture, work processes, and talent cycle.



Based on our recent industry research⁶, this report describes:

- What growth mindset really means for employees and organizations
- The business reasons for companies adopting growth mindset
- How companies get people to care, adopt habits and behaviors, and build talent processes with growth mindset concepts
- How they define success using growth mindset at work
- Which stumbling points they experience
- What advice they have for novices
- Examples and best practices

With that said, let's dive into the findings themselves.

6 Appendix: research methodology, and sample information.



FINDING 2

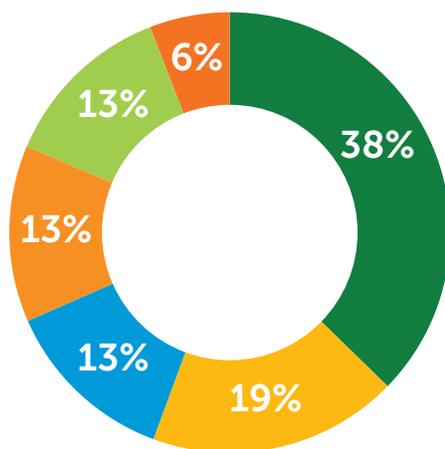
Enabling digital transformation is the top business driver for GMC adoption

In our sample, 38% of companies cited digital transformation as the main driver of growth mindset initiatives.

These organizations are operating in a variety of industries:

- Multinational conglomerate: Finds growth mindset useful to improve operational excellence, to enable lean management, and to foster a more innovative culture
- Global insurance broker: Introduced GMC for high potential employees to enable a newly outlined digital strategy, which focuses on data/analytics, new clientele, and branding
- European telecommunications company: Uses GMC to help employees continue to adapt to the technological changes in the telecommunications industry

- American-Canadian financial services provider: Applies growth mindset to support employees during significant transformation caused by artificial intelligence and other technologies. With nontraditional competitors entering finance, the workforce needs to be adaptive and resilient.
- American technology company: Uses GMC as support for a culture-driven business-growth tool during ongoing digitization of the business that caused a reorientation of the strategy, culture, purpose, and mission, an effort that was driven by the CEO.



Business drivers of growth mindset adoption in organizations*

- Digital transformation
- Business improvement
- Growing up
- Reinvention
- PM transformation
- Quality enhancement

*Percentage of organizations in our sample that adopt growth mindset to fulfill the listed objectives. Percentages add up to 102% due to rounding.

Source: Industry Research, NeuroLeadership Institute, 2018

CASE-IN-POINT:

Global beverage company

- A global beverage company wanted to expand its repertoire and business potential beyond its traditional focus areas. Already heavily invested in big data and artificial intelligence for product development and other work streams, the company put a renewed emphasis on becoming a “growth company.” This meant being more agile and more attuned to feedback in order to adapt. The strategy was twofold: staying true to its well-known brand and building confidence on Wall Street by continuing to be an innovator and market leader.
- From the start, the CEO considered building a growth mindset culture an invaluable part of the strategy for employees at all levels.
- The culture-transformation effort began with the definition of “growth behaviors,” as in curiosity, empowerment, iteration, and inclusiveness. It was implemented with the strong support of business leaders and dedicated change agents. It also involved embedding growth mindset into talent systems, from hiring to performance management and leadership development.



SCIENCE SPOTLIGHT

Growth mindset catalyzes transformation. While change can cause people to fall into a threat response that makes them less able to learn, people with a growth mindset are more adaptable, able to recover from mistakes and begin again.⁸ *Why?*

People with a growth mindset believe that intelligence can evolve through effort; therefore, they are more able to detect their mistakes, recalibrate their behavior, and improve accuracy after making mistakes. One study showed that people who endorsed a growth mindset had electrical activity in areas of the brain believed to be related to the awareness of mistakes and how to adjust to them.⁹

⁸ Grant, H., Cox, C., & Rock, D. (2015, October). Organizational Growth Mindset. *NeuroLeadership Journal*, 6.

⁹ Moser et al (2011): Mind your errors: evidence for a neural mechanism linking growth mind-set to adaptive posterror adjustments. *Psychol Sci*, December 22 (12), p. 1484-9.



Digital transformation absolutely disrupts the culture in every organization as well as places a greater priority on purpose-driven mission and inclusion.

Senior Director, Organizational Development, Technology Company

Other business drivers for growth mindset adoption are:

- **Business Improvement:** Introducing lean or agile methodology into work streams, restructuring teams, implementing a new business strategy, increasing the speed of go-to-market ability
- **Maturation:** Evolution from “start-up to grown-up” company, an expansion often accompanied by turmoil, financial pressure, or other setbacks
- **Reinvention:** Efforts to change culture or reorganize during or after experiencing financial problems such as stock decline or CEO turnover
- **Performance Management Transformation:** Intentional improvement or overhaul of performance-management processes.
- **Quality Enhancement/Accreditation:** Only the university in our sample cited the continuation of the institution’s accreditation status and quality-enhancement efforts as the reason for growth mindset adoption

Organizations have many reasons for embedding growth mindset. They include better adapting to change in their workforce, instilling the belief in continuous learning and development, providing the right environment for risk-taking and learning from failure, and encouraging higher levels of collaboration. Indeed, previous research¹⁰ found that growth mindset cultures helped employees develop and improve with effort.

10 Dweck, C., Murphy, M., Chatman, J., & Kray, L. (n.d.). Why Fostering a Growth Mindset in Organizations Matters. In Senn Delaney. Retrieved from http://knowledge.sennnelaney.com/docs/thought_papers/pdf/stanford_agilitystudy_hart.pdf.



FINDING 3

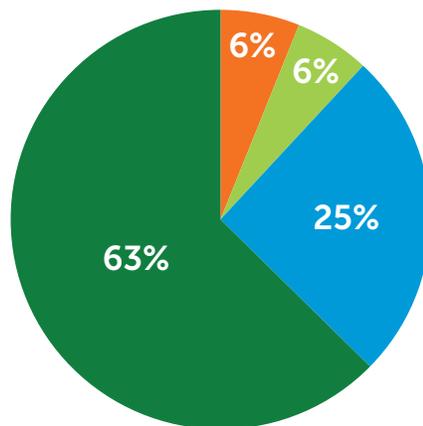
Top leadership support is critical to the success of Growth Mindset Culture initiatives

The support and active engagement from top leaders before and during growth mindset initiatives is the most frequently used method to raise interest and create purpose. In our sample, three-quarters of organizations use top leaders to communicate, teach, and role model growth mindset throughout the company.

Yet fewer than half (37%) of organizations we spoke with use a multipronged approach to set growth mindset as a priority.

Other methods to implement and embed the message around growth mindset are:

- Engaging change agents/champions/ambassadors
- Creating consistent communication channels
- Communicating the business case for growth mindset
- Responding to employee grassroots efforts and preexisting interest in growth mindset and/or development tools
- Inspiration by external scientists to learn about the science of growth mindset



Number of different approaches used for priority setting about growth mindset*

- Four
- Three
- Two
- One

*Percentage of organizations in our sample using one or more ways to set growth mindset as a priority

Source: Industry Research, NeuroLeadership Institute, 2018



A four-pronged approach to GMC in an American tech firm

An American software company used the growth mindset concept to overcome significant internal turmoil and growing pains as it experienced three CEOs in one year, major restructuring, and a new sales and business culture.

After getting the buy-in from the CHRO, the responsible talent practitioner began to set growth mindset as a priority on four fronts: first by gathering employee feedback around the need for support tools during these ongoing changes, then by building a strong business case for the initiative, next by getting business leaders to buy in, and finally by building a consistent communications plan on the usefulness of growth mindset in times of change. These combined efforts helped employees and leaders across the organization find growth mindset more relevant.

SCIENCE SPOTLIGHT

Leaders can inspire change. Organizations use the commitment of their leaders in the growth mindset philosophy to spread the word and engage the workforce. Indeed, this can be a smart thing to do, because, because if leaders are engaged with their workforce through inspirational communication and a sense of “we,” employees are more likely to follow. *Why?*

Leaders who use inclusive language such as “we” and “us” can create the sense that positive change is happening within organizations.¹¹ Research has shown that when followers feel they are part of the same group as the leader, they are more likely to be receptive to the leader’s propositions and ideas.¹² Moreover, for leaders to have a bigger inspirational impact, it would serve them to refer to the collective rather than to themselves. One brain-imaging study showed that study participants paid more attention to messages conveyed by their leaders when the messages were inspirational (“For any one of us to succeed, we must succeed as a nation united”) rather than when they were not (“The nation will not succeed without my personal input in the coming years”).¹³

11 Seyranian, V. (2014): Social identity framing communication strategies for mobilizing social change, *The Leadership Quarterly*, 25, p. 468-486.

12 McGarty et al. (1994): The Effects of Salient Group Memberships on Persuasion, *Small Group Research*, 25 (2), p. 267-293.

13 Molenberghs, P. et al. (2015): The Neuroscience of Inspirational Leadership: The Importance of Collective-Oriented Language and Shared Group Membership. *Journal of Management*, January.



FINDING 4

Implementing an array of habit-building activities helps growth mindset behaviors stick

Managers ask during check-in conversations: "How are you going to move beyond this?" or "What is the next thing you will do?"

Organizations use an array of habit-building activities to help growth mindset behaviors stick, such as:

- Leader role modeling: Top leaders regularly talk about growth mindset, facilitate sessions, share tools, conduct exercises, tell true stories about "what good looks like"
- "In-the-moment" reinforcements: Recognizing and describing behaviors on white boards, celebrating successes, putting up posters along the office walls
- Tools: HR designs conversation guides for managers, self-assessments for individuals
- Performance philosophy: Emphasis in performance conversation lies on goal setting versus evaluation of past performance as well as strength-based conversations; feedback is given and received in all directions

Organizations deploy a range of reminders, from the whimsical to the formal:

- Playing a growth mindset board game
- Lobby has a physical "graveyard of failed ideas"
- Growth mindset lunch-and-learn events

- Wristbands indicating frequency of asking for feedback
- Regular humorous cat memes about growth mindset
- "Failure Fridays" and "Wine with Amy" events (senior leaders share mistakes and learnings)
- Coaches are trained in the growth mindset concept
- Regular growth mindset teleconferences
- Growth mindset reminder cards

Changes in language — in executive speeches, team meetings, one-on-ones, and beyond — help, too.

As in:

- "Developmental" replaces "negative"
- "Win-Learn-Change" term used in daily reflections about what went well in a given day, what they stumbled upon, what they didn't enjoy today, what they will do differently tomorrow
- "What if" and "yet" used in daily work meetings to spur expansive thinking
- Managers ask during check-in conversations: "How are you going to move beyond this?" or "What is the next thing you will do?"

CASE-IN-POINT:

Growth mindset habit building in pharma

An American pharmaceutical company adopted growth mindset as a performance-improvement tool. Since the idea had already been around in pockets of the company, the workforce was open and welcoming toward growth mindset as a continuous development tool, and the idea also enjoyed the CEO's full support.

The talent team leading the training effort learned about creative and personalized ways in which business units around the world tried to set constant reminders and reinforcements of growth mindset behaviors for themselves. For instance:

- The company instituted wristbands as visual reminders to ask for feedback (yellow – asked for feedback in the past week; blue – asked for feedback that day; red – didn't ask for feedback yet)
- Pumpkin seeds as symbols of growth are planted and harvested by team members as a physical embodiment of the growth mindset concept
- Regular "Growth Mindset Breakfasts" where people come into the office to discuss growth mindset
- Posters of what growth mindset means to the company are displayed in window panes

These activities are paired with HR-driven efforts such as embedding growth mindset in performance transformation, carrying out regular training and workshops, and dedicating change agents to embed the growth mindset language in the daily workflow.

SCIENCE SPOTLIGHT

Repetition creates habits. Getting new desirable behaviors to "stick" is often the biggest challenge in the way of organizational change. Habits are performed repeatedly and consistently in certain work situations so that they are performed with little thought, intention, and awareness.¹⁴

Common language is key. A common language provides a new frame with which to look at existing behaviors and facilitates learning. While everyone will have had the experience of both growth- and fixed-mindset thinking, without a language to capture the difference it may go unnoticed. Common language organizes prior experience and enables us to make informed choices about our future behavior. It also allows us to communicate with one another about our experience more effectively, labeling mindset triggers and providing clear guideposts for behavior. The use of a common language also serves as to prime behavior — simply hearing about growth mindset in meetings and hallways serves to unconsciously encourage its adoption.¹⁵

14 Lally, P. et al (2010): How are habits formed: Modeling habit formation in the real world, *European Journal of Social Psychology* 40 (6).

15 Halvorson, Heidi Grant. *Succeed: How we can reach our goals*. Penguin, 2010.



FINDING 5

Growth mindset can be embedded in a variety of talent processes and systems



Adoption is most frequent — 56% of organizations do it — in Learning, Leadership Development and Performance Management. For example:

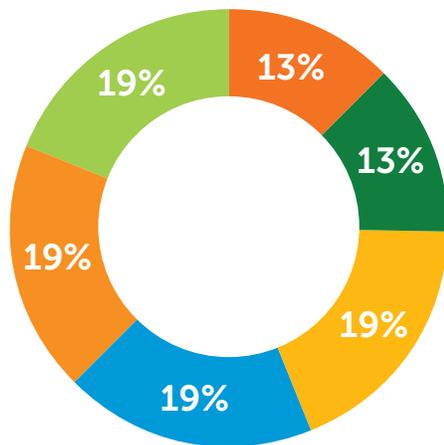
- An American Financial Services Company **hires talent** based on behavioral interview questions meant to identify curiosity and a desire to learn without asking any questions directly related to fixed or growth mindset
- A software company in Silicon Valley already exposes new hires to its strong growth mindset culture in its **onboarding program**, where it spends time defining, clarifying, providing examples of growth mindset behavior, identifying phrases for recognition, and suggesting ways to overcome setbacks
- An Oil Services Company in Europe changed its **talent review process** by talking about perceived potential rather than evaluating performance, and its manager-coaching training provides growth-mindset-oriented coaching lessons, discussion guidelines, and a journal for managers

- A Global Health Services Organization found that the introduction of growth mindset enabled a smoother **performance management transformation** toward the abolishment of ratings
- An Australian global insurance broker began its growth mindset initiatives with its high potential pools and a rehaul of its leadership-development curriculum. It selects its **high-potential** talent based on demonstrated growth mindset behaviors and does not hesitate to challenge candidates on their thinking around growth mindset

In all, 38% of organizations take a comprehensive approach by embedding growth mindset in five or more talent processes (see graphic on next page).

Six talent processes are the maximum any one organization embeds growth mindset in.





*Percentage of organizations in our sample embedding growth mindset in the listed number of talent processes

Percentage of companies embedding growth mindset in various talent processes

- One process
- Two processes
- Three processes
- Four processes
- Five processes
- Six processes

CASE-IN-POINT:

Information technology company embeds growth mindset in six talent processes

An American information technology company with more than 55,000 employees started to embrace the concept of growth mindset after a major restructuring. The company's market performance was declining, and a business turnaround was urgently needed.

To create a culture of performance improvement and innovation, the company launched a growth mindset initiative that was followed up with a holistic approach to embedding the concept into six different talent processes:

1. **Performance Management Revamp:** Reshaped and reframed PM, discontinued ratings
2. **Coaching:** Refocused on coaching with a growth mindset language
3. **Career Conversations:** Encouraged managers to reinforce messages around curiosity and openness to new roles, personal reinvention and considering lateral not just vertical career moves

4. **Talent Reviews:** Reframed its definition of performance and potential based on the idea of growth mindset
5. **Team Management:** Taught managers to think differently about team members and individual development
6. **Leadership Development:** Built growth mindset into the new leadership model and into all leadership development programs



FINDING 6

Employee Engagement is the favored impact metric of growth mindset initiatives



Reported results at the information technology company

Organizations define success with the implementation of growth mindset initiatives in various ways, but employee engagement scores tops the list of specific impact metrics. Growth-mindset-oriented questions are added to regular pulse and engagement surveys to track progress on desired measures. Some of the reported results at the information technology company read:

- 82% of managers demonstrate GM behaviors
- 92% of employees agree that learning is part of the job
- 77% of employees feel as if they're getting the right level of goal-setting conversations with their managers

Other metrics organizations track in relation to their growth mindset initiatives include overall attrition numbers, the perceived quality of performance and check-in conversations, employees' favorability of the growth mindset concept in general, and, in one instance, marks on a scale measuring views on whether intelligence is fixed or malleable. Just 23% of the organizations in our sample track more than three indicators, but talent practitioners reported a slew of qualitative

stories about impact and successes. The strongest emphasis lies on the following:

- **Impact on employees:** positive reception at learning events; people picking up on the concept; increased resilience; positive "can-do" reactions during change and turmoil; a perceived sense of empowerment; visible and observable behavior change and demonstrated growth mindset behaviors; increased levels of collaboration, innovation, prototyping
- **Impact on talent processes:** growth mindset concept influences HR's and talent team's approach to the design of talent processes (including talent acquisition, talent reviews, leadership development, and performance management)
- **Impact on culture:** decrease of internal competition; goal is "getting better not good"; increased values of feedback and continuous learning; employees are more aligned on important business issues



We are exceptionally fortunate in our CEO who uses the terminology. That's really been a big part for us.

*Global Head,
Talent and Learning at a Technology Company*

Some descriptions of observed behavior changes:

"We've seen the growth mindset be successful when things change. So whether it's new software we're bringing out or trying different organizational models — whatever it might be — we've really noticed the people who step up and accept and move this stuff through really quickly versus what we historically did, which was argue over why."

VP of HR, Financial Services Company

"I hear stories from people out in the market of how they are doing a market tour — that's when you go into the market to see how we're doing. It's no longer what you call a 'milk run' where you would go in and make everything perfect. Your leader says, 'Let's go into the market and see what it really looks like so we can really learn and get better.' Those kinds of everyday examples of how people do their jobs with the things that are emerging as best practices."

Talent Consultant at a Global Beverage Company

"There's been tremendous amounts of change and our attrition rate is still under 10%. People are engaged. There is no doom and gloom."

*Director of Training & Development,
Software Company*

CASE-IN-POINT:

Embedding growth mindset in education

An educational institution in the Southeastern U.S. started to embed growth mindset into its student and faculty activities two years ago.

Growth mindset was introduced in an 18-month initiative to enable continuous quality enhancement and maintain the university's accreditation status. With this, the university also began to track certain metrics that would measure progress in the adoption of growth mindset for students, staff, and faculty. These metrics are:

- Decrease of achievement gaps in students
- Higher adoption rates of comments and reviews on reports and projects
- Decrease in number of students changing rooms after conflicts
- Theory of Intelligence scores



FINDING 7

The challenges of growth mindset initiatives are not unique

Painful self-awareness, misunderstanding, and lack of organizational support are frequently mentioned challenges during growth mindset initiatives. Other stumbling points include misinterpretations around what growth mindset really is, lack of organizational support implementing the concept into daily work routines, lack of understanding which metrics to use to track progress, risk-averse cultures, and skepticism about the theory.



If you truly embrace a growth mindset, you never have to have a difficult conversation. You're just having a series of conversations and you're doing them in a way that is authentic and humanistic and growth-oriented. You never get to the point where you're so frustrated that it's a difficult conversation.

*Managing Director, People Development,
Human Capital Consulting Firm*

SCIENCE SPOTLIGHT

The evolution toward a growth mindset can be uncomfortable. Difficult emotions are a natural part of the learning process. Learning about fixed and growth mindsets can — at first — be daunting. In confronting information that may conflict with a person's self-image, they may feel uneasy and uncomfortable.¹⁶ If this self-image clashes with the person's or others' expectations of the person, it may lead to emotions such as agitation, fear, or threat.¹⁷

16 Markus, H. & Wurf, E. (1987) The Dynamic Self-Concept: A Social Psychological Perspective, Annual Review of Psychology, 38 p. 299-337.

17 Higgins, E.T. (1987) Self-Discrepancy: A Theory Relating Self and Affect, Psychological Review, 94 (3), p. 319-340.



Telenor is a Norwegian multinational telecommunications company headquartered near Oslo. As a 160-year-old mobile telecommunications company serving 172 million customers across Scandinavia and Asia,¹⁸ the company found itself in the midst of technological change.

To stay successful in a highly competitive and fast-changing business landscape, Telenor's Leadership Development team introduced growth mindset culture as a way to help its workforce increase self-awareness and learning, challenge existing work processes, and go beyond comfort zones. For Telenor's employees, growth mindset means perseverance in times of change, being curious and asking lots of questions, and achieving more tomorrow than they did today.¹⁹

A group of Telenor's senior managers were the first group to go through the growth mindset training program. After positive feedback from the one-day growth mindset workshop (which was part of a four-

day executive leadership development program) with the 60 leaders, the rollout for the company's 22,000 employees began. Overall, the initiative introduced growth mindset as a way of working at Telenor by revamping the company's performance management process and by introducing a growth-minded language around innovation and performance. Positive reinforcements and role-modeling efforts continue to help embed growth mindset behaviors so they can become habits. For example, the CEO and CHRO make sure to use growth mindset terminology in monthly townhall meetings, and office workers use growth-mindset-related terms in meetings and conversations. Some leaders sit at different desks every day to interact with new colleagues, and managers have growth mindset and strength-based conversations with direct reports.

On the Telenor Campus learning platform, employees can earn a growth mindset learning badge²⁰ and free access to further learning modules or programs as a reward for completing various

18 Telenor Group at a Glance (n.d.). In Telenor Group. Retrieved August 28, 2018, from <https://www.telenor.com/about-us/telenor-at-a-glance/8>.

19 These items were collected in a recent internal employee survey by Telenor, 2018.

20 A digital badge is a validated indicator of accomplishment that can be earned in learning environments. Source: Carey, Kevin (April 8, 2012). "A Future Full of Badges". The Chronicle of Higher Education.



Telenor aims to be a digital frontrunner, taking a clear lead in developing and adapting new technology.

Sigve Brekke, President and CEO, Telenor Group

levels of online self-study. So far, about 8,500 employees worldwide have taken advantage of the six short learning modules that are also accessible on mobile devices, and earned a growth mindset badge, with the average time spent per learner at 1.2 hours.

In addition to learning and habit-formation efforts, Telenor is also embedding growth mindset into team development initiatives, executive leadership programs, talent reviews, and high-potential assessment approaches. For example, team members work to recognize demonstrated fixed or growth mindset behaviors in themselves and others and discuss them with others, they apply growth mindset principles to dilemma and conflict resolution, and they build action plans for how they can better support one another. The executive leadership program includes workshops in which leaders enjoy labeling exercises of fixed and growth mindset behaviors and complete surveys about the topic. Talent reviews for leadership readiness include assessments and questions regarding growth mindset, whereby behavioral questions gauge for demonstrated behaviors of candidates, and evidence for team development and conflict resolution inspired by growth mindset.

Telenor's growth mindset work is most visible in two of the company's work streams: innovation efforts and people dialogue process — the regular and frequent performance management conversations managers have with their employees. First, Telenor's talent team reports that monthly dialogues between managers and employees are perceived as more meaningful by employees and that growth-mindset-related language is being used and practiced regularly. In terms of innovation, the term "working red" was invented, symbolizing the new ways of failing fast and learning from it, rapid prototyping, and focusing on learning rather than just achieving end results.²¹



21 Brekke, S. (n.d.). Changing pace: Gearing up for a digital shift. In Telenor Group. Retrieved October 8, 2018, from <https://www.telenor.com/media/more-than-ceos/sigve-brekke/changing-pace-gearing-up-for-adigital-shift/>.

There is no way back. Nobody is untouched. It is almost incredible that just ten years ago, our phones were primarily used for talking. Glance over your shoulder on the bus and you realize that time has passed: the device most of us keep in our hands for large parts of our day is much more than a phone. For many youth, it's hardly a device for actual talking.

*Sigve Brekke, President and CEO,
Telenor Group, on the rapid pace of digital transformation*





As the foundational culture attribute at Microsoft, growth mindset has been a critical focus of the company's culture transformation. CEO Satya Nadella sparked the tech giant's cultural refresh with a new emphasis on continuous learning four years ago.²² With his sponsorship, the talent team has since worked meticulously on enabling growth-oriented business priorities, employees' behavioral habits, and organizational systems for its workforce of 131,000 employees worldwide.²³

Digital transformation made clear that a state of perpetual learning would be necessary for employees at all levels. In Nadella's words, this strategic reorientation would require going from being a group of "know-it-alls" to a group of "learn-it-alls."

Inspired by Professor Carol Dweck, Nadella and Kathleen Hogan, Microsoft CHRO, along with the senior leadership team, determined that growth mindset would become the foundation

of Microsoft's desired-toward culture. A range of approaches have since been taken to initiate and drive efforts for long-term change, starting with engaging senior leaders to talk about and role model growth mindset, employee-awareness campaigns to drive growth mindset adoption, and ongoing measurement of how the employees experience growth mindset in the company.

For example, interactive online modules with rich storytelling and multimedia were created for employees to learn about growth mindset. Conversation guides were built for managers to enable meaningful exchanges about what growth mindset behaviors look like in team settings. Leaders also engage in storytelling to give examples for growth mindset behaviors. Successes with demonstrated growth mindset behaviors are celebrated as reinforcements of growth mindset habits in the workplace. Various employee engagement and training solutions like games, quizzes, lending libraries with curated books, mobile empathy museum, and environmental creative assets were developed to engage employees around growth mindset behaviors.

22 Vander Ark, T. (2018, April 18). Hit Refresh: How A Growth Mindset Culture Tripled Microsoft's Value. In Forbes. Retrieved from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/tomvanderark/2018/04/18/hit-refresh-how-a-growth-mindset-culture-tripled-microsofts-value/>.

23 Facts About Microsoft (n.d.). In Microsoft. Retrieved September 17, 2018, from <https://news.microsoft.com/facts-about-microsoft/>.

Is this a...

Fixed
mindset
meeting

Growth
mindset
meeting



Source: Microsoft, 2018

One of the most essential efforts was developing Microsoft leadership principles, in partnership with NLI, with the intent of engaging everyone in the company – from senior executives to new hires – in building growth mindset habits, processes, and environment into everyday culture experience at Microsoft.²⁴

The talent team also operationalized growth mindset in processes and practices. Growth mindset principles have been embedded in learning, team development and performance management processes,²⁵ and have expanded to talent review and succession planning practices.²⁶ For example, in addition to creating clarity on meaning of growth mindset, managers also are operationalizing growth mindset during business

reviews, as well as through goal setting with their teams. Since Microsoft no longer has a system of ratings and rankings, the current performance and development process focuses on providing clarity around what employees are now being rewarded for: the demonstrated abilities to build on and to contribute to the success of others are now equally essential to attaining performance goals.

Last but certainly not least, Microsoft sees continuous measurement as invaluable to its culture change. Daily pulse surveys constantly collect metrics of employee experiences of growth mindset all together, more detailed items such levels of risk aversion, visibly recognizing and learning from failure, or support in unlocking one's ability. Favorability of growth mindset experience measurement has been trending between 78% and 80%, and it has been proven as the primary driver of the rest of the Microsoft culture attributes of customer obsessed, diverse and inclusive, one Microsoft, and making a difference.

24 Rock, D. (2018, February 22). Tell Employees What You Want Them to Strive for (in as Few Words as Possible). In Harvard Business Review. Retrieved September 17, 2018, from <https://hbr.org/2018/02/tell-employees-what-you-want-them-to-strive-for-in-as-few-words-as-possible>.

25 Derler, A. (In press.) NeuroLeadership Institute.

26 Emond, L. (2018, July 16). Microsoft CHRO: A Conversation About Succession Management. In Gallup Workplace. Retrieved September 17, 2018, from https://www.gallup.com/workplace/237113/microsoft-chro-conversation-succession-management.aspx?utm_source=workplace-newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=WorkplaceNewsletter_CRM_July_072418&utm_con.

If we want the growth mindset to happen in real life, we have to create the conditions for it and modify them as we learn what works and what doesn't. We have found that these conditions differ depending on where we are in the evolution, moving from awareness to adoption to advocacy of growth mindset. This work is iterative, data-informed, and ongoing.

*Senior Director,
Organizational Development at Microsoft*





When Carol Dweck was studying grade schoolers in the 1980s, she noticed a startling contrast between how kids reacted to difficulties. Some shrank from them, while others jumped at them. She recalls one animated 10-year-old who, when faced with a particularly demanding puzzle, smacked his lips, rubbed his hands together, and declared, “I love a challenge!” It was a strange experience for Dweck — she had always thought people either could or couldn’t cope with failure. Yet among these kids, some loved it. How strange!

Since then, Dweck, has become perhaps the most influential motivation scientist of her generation. In 2014, NLI started working with Heidi Grant, a protégé of Dweck’s who is now our Chief Science Officer. NLI published the first paper on the organizational applications of growth mindset in 2016. With this interview, the edited transcript of which you’ll find below, Grant and NLI are going back to the source.

Read on to discover the biggest obstacles leaders have for putting the mindset into practice, how to resolve the tension between being growth- and results-oriented, and which popular figure best exemplifies growth mindset to Dweck. Spoiler alert: It might get revolutionary.

NLI: *What’s the largest obstacle you see people — and especially leaders — have in regard to implementing growth mindset?*

Carol: There are several roadblocks. First and foremost, the leaders have to understand a growth mindset fully, deeply, and accurately. It’s not just about effort. It’s not just about telling people to have a growth mindset. It’s not just about people declaring they have a growth mindset when they don’t fully understand it.

The leaders have to really ask themselves, do they believe in their own growth — not just other people’s need to grow. Then, do they believe that everyone in their organization has the capacity to grow? Do they believe there’s talent everywhere in the organization that needs to be fostered and needs to be acknowledged as it emerges?

So, do they really hold a growth mindset? That’s step number one. Step number two is how do they disseminate it throughout the organization. That’s critical. It’s not just about words or about teaching it or holding a workshop. It’s about having practices and policies that embody a growth mindset and that really tell people in the organization, “We mean this.”

A lot of people say, "Oh yeah, my organization talks about a growth mindset, but if someone fails, they get the ax." These organizations don't really believe it — they talk it. The practices are what really tell people: "We mean business. Our business is about growth for individuals, growth for teams."

How will the organization, in turn, change?

If the change is successful, it will no longer be a culture of genius where the pre-identified geniuses get all the perks and everyone else is just support staff.

I'd like to see an honest, constructive evaluation process where the manager and the employee talk together as frequently as possible about what they're really happy with and what needs to be improved — and how they're going to work together to do that. It's about both parties understanding the growth mindset concept deeply and creating practices that bring it to life within the organization.

What else?

Another practice is the emphasis on collaboration. In the lone-genius model you want the credit. You don't want your team to get the credit. That doesn't make you a genius. But in a more growth mindset organization, then there can be a real team process that leads to breakthroughs — with less concern about ownership.

I think it's so fascinating that this insight about how some children approach challenges has generalized into adulthood. And many phases of adulthood: from romantic satisfaction to conflict resolution to, of course, professional success. How did you think of the growth of growth mindset?

I credit my graduate students. We worked together feverishly to develop the idea, to study the idea rigorously, and then to look at all of the implications and consequences of it. We found that the mindsets fostered different beliefs about effort and different beliefs about setbacks; we saw how a growth mindset could foster more challenge-seeking and persistence. We called this whole framework a "meaning system". Growth mindset was at the core of these different beliefs and action tendencies and could really orient you toward effective achievement or not.

Then we said, wait a minute. You don't just have mindsets about your own intelligence; you could have mindsets about any attribute of yourself. You can have mindsets about other people, you can have mindsets about groups. Do groups have an inherent fixed nature? Or, can their characteristics be changed and develop?

Over time, starting with the really well-established core that we researched extensively, we built it out. Slowly but surely the tentacles reached out in many, many new directions. None of it was me alone. It was all with my amazing students. We, as a group, believed we could figure out anything if we really worked at it and discussed it and did the research and then discussed some more and did more research.



Frankly, one of the most striking or poignant findings is how having a fixed mindset about others is linked to stereotyping and endorsing more prejudice. That's kind of a hard message to deliver, right?

It's one thing to say people may be holding themselves back, but it's another thing to suggest that they may be holding other people back. That's really hard.

However, some of my former students who are creating a program for teachers noticed that after they taught a growth mindset, then the teachers were more open to talking about inclusion and exploring some of the ways in which they might not have been as inclusive in the past.

It can give permission for more sensitive conversations.

Some diversity training appropriately gets people to recognize that they have implicit biases, but then — this is another line of research we've done — it becomes very important for people to know that their prejudice can be addressed and decreased. They can do this by associating with other groups and learning more about them by asking questions, sharing experiences, and so on. People may need to learn not just that they are biased but also that their prejudice can be reduced in order to reach out and feel comfortable in interactions with members of other groups.

Is there a public figure that, to you, epitomizes growth mindset?

There are many, but my favorite at the moment is George Washington.

Why's that?

He embodied a focus on learning. He was not highly educated, but he read everything. He did everything to increase his military experience and expertise and to lead the revolution effectively in the face of overwhelming odds. He learned everything he could to guide the country through those early, uncertain years when there was lots of contention and no precedents. He cared about his reputation and his legacy, to be sure, but above all he was focused on the greater good and the survival of the country.

He embodied great leadership in the following way: He didn't just develop himself — he set the stage for developing everyone around him and developing a country that was based on an idea, an idea about liberty and equality.

How can you encourage a growth mindset in employees while still expecting results? I think when you think about it philosophically there's a fundamental dissonance there. How do you think about that?

I don't think there has to be a dissonance there. It's the same in education. You want kids to learn deeply and effectively and be able to demonstrate their learning. It's not about just sitting around and expending effort and enjoying a process. It's got to move; it's got to lead to some result. And so too in business you don't want everyone



having such a great learning experience but nothing is happening in terms of innovations, successful implementation of innovation, and the bottom line.

So, I don't see any necessary conflict. A growth mindset can be used in the pursuit of innovation and the success of the company. The idea is that with people open-mindedly learning, collaborating, and experimenting, a company can move more effectively into the future, compared to, say, a company where you have a cadre of people competing with each other to be the genius.

Let's say you have a team of five people, some of whom exhibit growth mindset and others fixed. Do you think it's OK to reward somebody demonstrating a growth mindset?

I think a growth mindset could be one factor that's taken into account if it shows itself in important ways — for example, if you feel that the people who have demonstrated a growth mindset have really led the team, have really infused the team with energy and direction.

You're not rewarding their "having" a growth mindset; you're rewarding the fact that they implemented it in a way that benefited the team and led to good business practice or outcomes.

If other members of the team lean toward more of a fixed mindset, you certainly don't want to penalize them for having this belief. But you may be concerned if they are not good team members — if they want to take undue credit, if they put other people down, so they can feel smart, if they cut corners to get ahead and in other ways are not contributing to the success of the team.

What I hear you saying repeatedly is helping other people succeed.

Yes, absolutely. Believing that others can develop their abilities, and helping them do that, is a core feature of a growth mindset. And it's very important for talent development within a company.

We see that a lot with companies. Where they say, We want to be more innovative. We want to be more agile. We're going to introduce growth mindset. We're going to make it a priority. We're going to have leaders talking about it. We're going to introduce this vocabulary and encourage it, and by some miracle the culture will shift. But there's very little emphasis on what are the behaviors of a person with a growth mindset. Right?

Right. And also, what does it mean for company practices and policies?

What do you actually do differently, right?

What do you do differently as an organization? And what do you want your people to do differently? In education and business, growth mindset talk is not going to create much when all the policies, all the reward systems, stay the same.



Can you tell me about what led you to studying motivation. Where did you think this research was going to lead you?

My first work examined how kids coped with setbacks. If I really trace it back, it was a personal interest. Because although I had always been pretty successful as a student, I didn't want to do anything too hard or too challenging because it was so important for me to be and look "smart."

I trace it back to my sixth-grade teacher, Mrs. Wilson, who seated us around the room in IQ order. So the whole goal of your life was to be smart — to succeed and keep your top seat. One day a new girl walked into the room in the middle of the year. And instead of saying, oh, she looks nice — maybe she'll be a great friend — I thought, if she takes my seat, I'll be very unhappy.

A world was created in which being smart meant you were a person of value. And yet, at some level, even in this classroom I knew this didn't make sense. I knew the people in the other seats and they were great students and great people, but the teacher treated them as though they weren't worthy. I think I was researching, at some level, the legacy of Mrs. Wilson — her negative effects on students at the top and students not at the top.

Are there other mindsets that you think about and that you think are important professionally or even personally? We, in this conversation, have talked a lot about growth mindset and fixed mindset of course. But are there other sorts of mindsets that you think are germane and we should be cognizant of?

Yes, I do think there are other important mindsets. For example, is the world basically a good place with well-meaning people? Or is the world basically a bad place full of danger? That is a general stance toward the world and the people in it that can have a profound effect on what you think, feel, and do. That's just one example.

I'm struck by the parallels in developmental and organizational psychology. Do you see similar patterns in upbringing or management style between people with growth mindset in a family setting or company culture?

I think that's a very important analogy. And I think what happens is that authority figures tell people how to think about the "organization" they're in — whether it's a family, classroom, or company. How it operates. What is valued and important. What your place in that organization is. So yes, I think there are patterns of interactions that can be echoed at each of these levels that are telling people vital things about the world they're in and about themselves in that world.





If you're doing growth mindset right, things are going to get uncomfortable

Science has repeatedly shown us that brains like fluency: the sensation of readily understanding an idea, smoothly performing an exercise, or otherwise comfortably “being good at” what needs to get done.

But here's the thing: Doing only what you're already good at is classic fixed mindset. Staying within your comfort zone feels fluent, but it inhibits growth. That's how the comforts of fixed mindset can keep us stuck in place — we avoid the stretch goal or the sensitive conversation that would enable growth.

We saw how easy it is to have a fixed mindset about growth mindset itself in our interviews. On hearing about the idea, people immediately want to know how “good at” growth mindset they are, rather than recognizing that there's always room for improvement. The journey will often turn into something of a roller coaster: Learners will buy in to growth mindset, get excited about the new concept, and then realize that there are parts of their lives where they hold a fixed mindset. Then they realize that their mindsets, too, can be remolded.

Growth mindset asks you to become an expert in leaving your comfort zone, again and again. If it feels uncomfortable, you're most likely doing it right.

What to do when you spot a fixed mindset

We all carry fixed and growth mindsets about all sorts of abilities, from cooking to public speaking.

When you stumble over a fixed mindset in your thinking, you can take action.

Here's a simple plan:

- Understand that this is normal. It's virtually impossible to not care about proving that you have ability — to yourself and others. It's human.
- Recognize the good news. You have a choice: You can choose to think differently and focus more on your growth. But habits take time to break.
- Be patient with yourself when trying to build this new habit. It won't be an overnight change.
- Shift your thinking. A phrase that you can rely on — a mantra of sorts — can help. Remind yourself that “It's not about being good — it's about getting better.” Or that this uncomfortable experience is “an experiment, an opportunity to be creative.”

Remember: It's not about proving yourself to others. Instead, improve yourself.

Here are some first steps to get growth mindset culture going



Make certain that your systems enable the right behaviors

Creating awareness through teaching and learning about growth mindset is insufficient to create a growth mindset culture in organizations. To enable employees to develop and sustain growth mindset behaviors in their daily work, organizations need to create continuity supporting these behaviors.

Systems and processes cannot stand in contrast to the desirable growth mindset behaviors. Ideally, growth mindset components can be seen and felt by employees throughout the talent cycle, which also requires continuous improvements of existing systems.

Takeaway: Align your priorities, habits, and systems. Like a head of talent planning and performance at an American retailer told us: "You've got to find where the principles of growth mindset fit into your HR infrastructures and embed them."

Ensure top leaders' engagement and commitment

Gaining support from top leaders is a critical component of sustainable growth mindset initiatives. To employees, this shows commitment

for change from the top and creates additional meaning for how growth mindset can support an important strategic change effort.

And of course, HR and talent practitioners who are supported by top leaders can implement the new growth mindset culture components more easily.

Takeaway: Figure out who stands behind growth mindset and be persistent with the rest. A founder and CEO of a management consultancy observed as much: "If you can find a leader that's truly passionate about this, and truly good at this, then come alongside that leader and help them figure it out."

Measure, track, and measure again

Starting with the end in mind is invaluable with any initiative, including growth mindset. Once you have your growth mindset goals in mind, then you can establish the metrics that measure their implementation.

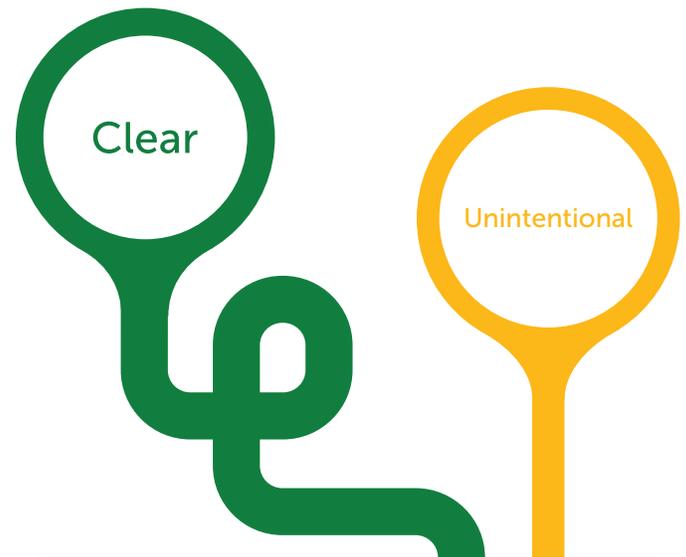
Tracking of behavioral changes and how they relate to strategic change objectives can be done only if it's known what is important to track and improve. Ideally, the talent metrics that are determined to track the impact of growth mindset efforts are tied

to the organization's overall strategy. Regardless of content, continual measurement that can serve improvement and course correction is most important.

Be clear and intentional about growth mindset

Once the concept of a growth mindset has been taught and people are adopting and using it in their daily work, they begin to attach their own meaning to it. Depending on their organization's guidance for this process, the meaning-making process can more or less be aligned with overall objectives and expectations.

Since organizations introduce growth mindset to enable and support specific strategic change objectives in mind, and the meaning-making process can be an important impact accelerator, guiding it is important. Research participants of our study suggest providing a vision and direction for the workforce as to what growth mindset can mean for their organization.



Takeaway: Make time to personalize the meaning of growth mindset to your organization. For example, Satya Nadella's comment on Microsoft: "We want to be not a 'know-it-all' but 'learn-it-all' organization."²⁷

27 Majdan, K., & Wasowski, M. (2017, April 20). We sat down with Microsoft's CEO to discuss the past, present and future of the company. In Business Insider. Retrieved October 8, 2018, from <https://www.businessinsider.com/satya-nadella-microsoft-ceo-qa-2017-4>.

APPENDIX

Research methodology

Between May 1st and June 8th of 2018, a team consisting of an industry researcher and an NLI consultant conducted 21 60-minute interviews with talent practitioners. The companies were identified by internal client-facing colleagues, and by self-identification based on a LinkedIn post describing the research program. All interviews were highly structured and lasted 60 minutes per interviewee.

Interviews were all recorded, and confidentiality about shared content guaranteed to interviewees. Five interviews were removed from final quantitative data analysis as they didn't meet the standards of information that was sought. The final sample (n) for the data analysis was 16 organizations. A total of 13 public companies, two private companies, and one university were represented. Revenue ranged from \$2.5 billion to \$122 billion USD, with workforces ranging from 2,800 to 313,000 employees. Industries included energy, pharmaceuticals, food processing, health care, beverages, retail, higher education, technology, insurance, financial services, telecommunications, and a conglomerate.



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