

Embrace a Growth Mindset

Research Summary

Mindsets are ways of thinking about the goals you pursue in your professional and personal lives, and they determine how you experience change and challenge. At the level of the brain, you can see the impact of mindsets in three ways.

1. Your mindset determines what kinds of information you pay attention to in a given situation.
2. Mindsets determine how your brain handles errors and mistakes—either by activating learning and planning centers or by activating negative emotional responses.
3. Mindsets influence how you interpret your successes and failures and how you record those events in your long-term memory.



Fixed mindset

People with a fixed mindset focus more—often unconsciously—on proving that they have a lot of ability, and already know exactly what they are doing. Their experiences are dictated by an internal monologue of constant judging and evaluation, and using information as evidence either for or against assessments like whether they're successful or 'good' at something. They see their performance as a test of their competence and worth.



Growth mindset

Those with a growth mindset believe that skills and abilities can be improved, and that developing your skills and abilities is the goal of the work you do. With a growth mindset the internal monologue is not one of judgment but one of scanning for opportunities to learn. These individuals are likely to adapt to change and find new ways to take constructive action. An organizational growth mindset, therefore, is a culture in which all employees are seen as possessing potential. Individuals are encouraged to develop, and are acknowledged and rewarded for improvement.

Bad stress = Distress

Mindsets do all this, in large part, by changing the way your brain perceives any change that may impact you personally. A fixed mindset makes you more likely to see change as a **threat**, which leads to the bad kind of stress—**distress**. This means that you experience highly negative emotions and an inadequate or disorganized mobilization of physiological resources. Over time, this will lead you to feel less focused, and less able to retain ideas in your mind. It may also feel increasingly difficult to learn new things, or find solutions to problems. **Distress** saps your energy, and over the long term, can undermine your mental and physical health.



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Research Summary *continued*

Good stress = Eustress

Studies show that when you see change as a **challenge**, you experience **eustress**, the good stress. You experience an efficient and organized mobilization of physiological resources—your heart rate and cardiac output go up highly, and your heart is more easily able to push blood through your circulatory system. Your ability to focus increases. You can think more deeply, encode new knowledge, and find new solutions.



Signs of a fixed mindset

Fixed mindset thinking:

- ♥ Feeling threatened by the success of others
- ♥ Anxiety about one's own performance
- ♥ Feeling concerned about how you "appear" to others
- ♥ Fear of asking questions or admitting what you don't know
- ♥ Avoiding challenges
- ♥ Sticking to what you already know

Fixed mindset responses to setbacks:

- ♥ Seeing feedback as a personal attack
- ♥ Feeling helpless or unmotivated after a setback
- ♥ Giving up quickly
- ♥ Hiding mistakes
- ♥ Being self-critical



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Tomaka, J., Blascovich, J., Kibler, J., & Ernst, J. M. (1997). Cognitive and physiological antecedents of threat and challenge appraisal. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 73(1), 63-72.



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