



The Power of an Agile Mindset

Linda Rising

linda@lindarising.org

www.lindarising.org



Disclaimer: This provocative presentation is ideally the beginning of a conversation. It won't take long for me to tell you everything I know about cognitive psychology, although I have been reading in the area for several years now. I'm an amateur who has sufficient interest in weird topics and a strange way of connecting ideas that might or might not be of interest to you. Thank you for your tolerance and understanding of my meanderings and I hope you learn a little that might help you in your life.

This is not an “academic” presentation, but those interested in more information are invited to ask me for



Do you mostly agree or mostly disagree with the following

- (1) Intelligence is something very basic that you really can't change much. You're born with it or not. Yes, you can learn new things, but you can't really change how intelligent you are.**
- (2) No matter how intelligent you are, you can always get better, sometimes you can improve a lot.**

Substitute any ability or talent for “intelligence.”



Interesting experiments

Phase I:

Students were given a very easy set of questions

Then they were categorized into “effort” or “fixed” groups (about 50-50)



Phase II

All students allowed to choose between:

(1) a more difficult test (where they would learn a lot) or

(2) another easy test (similar to Phase I)

Most (~90%) “effort” kids chose (1)

Most (~80%) “fixed” kids chose (2)



Phase III

Very difficult exam given to both groups

“Effort” kids worked hard, enjoyed the challenge

“Fixed” kids easily discouraged



Phase IV

All students allowed to choose between:

**(1) seeing exams of those who did better
or**

(2) exams of those who did worse

“Effort” kids chose (1)

“Fixed” kids chose (2)



Phase V

All students given easy test (similar to Phase I)

“Effort” kids improved (by ~30%)

“Fixed” kids’ were worse (by ~20%)



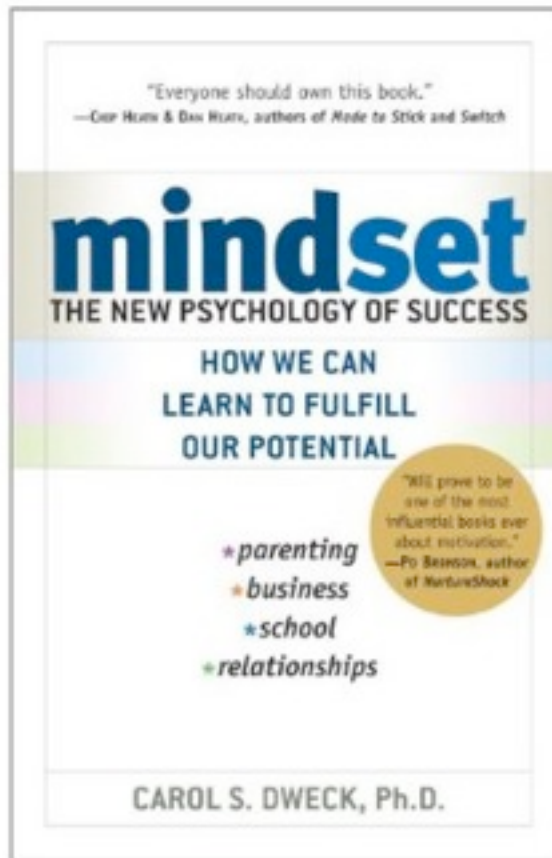
Phase VI

All students asked to give advice to other students and include their scores

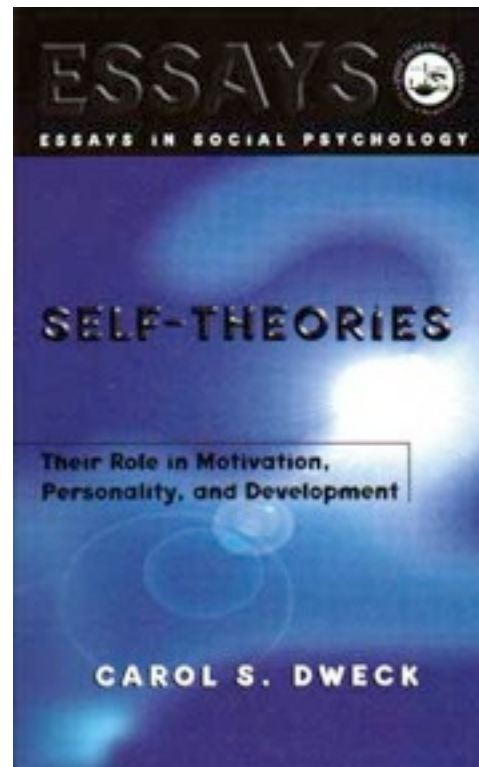
“Effort” kids: Lots of advice and encouragement.

“Fixed” kids: Very little or no advice and ~40% lied about their scores

Mindset – Carol Dweck



Self-Theories – Carol Dweck





Free on the web

New Yorker – “The Talent Myth,”
gladwell.com

New York Magazine – “How not to talk to
your kids,” Po Bronson

TIME magazine – “How to help them
succeed”



Two mindsets: Fixed & Agile

Research shows that mindset:

Determines goals

Reactions to failure

Belief about effort and strategies

Attitudes toward others' successes



Two mindsets

Fixed vs. Agile

Ability – static, like height

Goal - look good

Challenge - avoid

Failure - defines your identity

**Effort - for those with no
talent**

**Reaction to challenge -
helplessness**

Ability – can grow, like muscle

Goal - to learn

Challenge - embrace

Failure – provides information

Effort - path to mastery

**Reaction to challenge –
resilience**



Belief about yourself affects belief about others

**Those with a fixed mindset are quick to
judge others based on little information
and quick to stereotype**

**Those with an agile mindset don't ignore
information about others but are less
negative/positive**

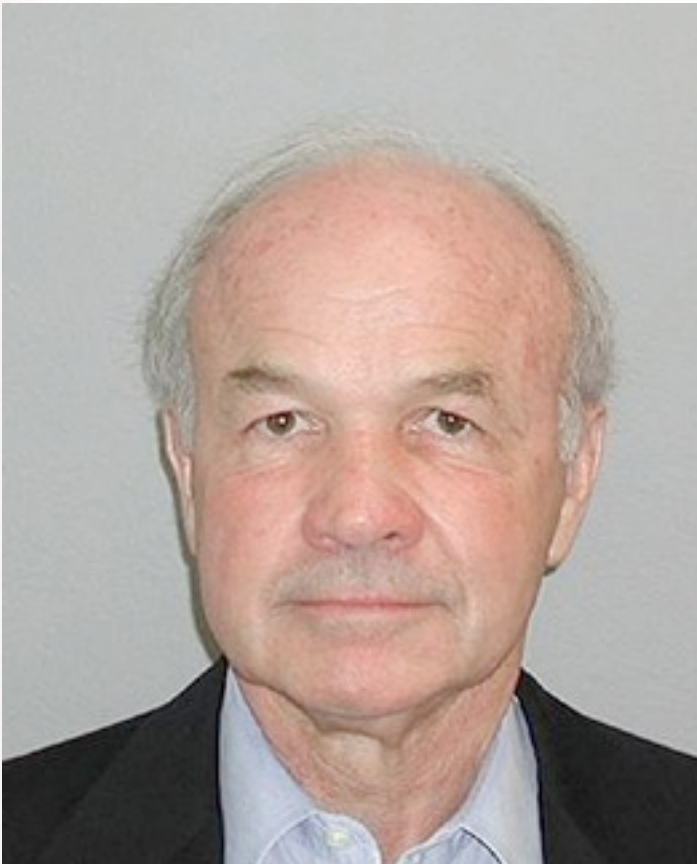
Bright little girls



Bright little boys



Smartest guys in the room





Enron's fixed mindset

Identify and hire “the best talent”

**Then continuously and ruthlessly grade,
sort, fire, and promote – a process called
“rank and yank”**

We are a company of people, not planes. That is what distinguishes us from other airlines.

A Southwest Airlines aircraft is shown from a side-on perspective, flying through a layer of white, fluffy clouds against a light blue sky. The plane's tail is prominent, featuring the word "SOUTHWEST" in yellow capital letters on a blue background. The fuselage is primarily blue with red and yellow accents. The wings are also blue with red and yellow tips. The overall image conveys a sense of flight and service.

Great Value.
Excellent Service.
Our Mission.

Fly Southwest Airlines because you want to be treated like a person.



The Southwest Culture

Hire for attitude

Establish a culture of community, trust, and the “Southwest spirit”

Then provide learning opportunities and continually grow people

Southwest seems to have an “agile” mindset



Managers have a mindset

“Pygmalion in Management,” J. Sterling
Livingston, Sept/Oct 1988 *Harvard
Business Review*.



The good news is...

Mindset is not “fixed”

We encourage one or the other in each other

We develop one or the other in our children

Research has shown that small experimental manipulations, e.g. feedback or reading an article can produce one or the other

Simply learning about the mindsets causes changes in people’s belief systems so they are more likely to accept a growth mindset.

**You mean I don't have to
be stupid?**





Effort is good!

Praise effort, strategies, process

Ask about the work

**Instead of ignoring failure, teach others
that it's a way to learn and improve**



Agile software development

Fail early, fail often.

Fail fast, learn constantly.

Failure *IS* an option.

Without failure how can learning happen?

“Make mistakes faster.”

Rich

Sheridan, CEO, Menlo Innovations

“Perfect is a verb.” Kent Beck

“Those that fail fastest grow strongest.”

Roy Singham, Founder and Chair, Thoughtworks



Better estimations!

Typically we tend to overestimate our performance, even in the face of data from previous deliveries. Research shows that those with a fixed mindset are more prone to this tendency than agile thinkers.



Agile is agile

The agile mindset believes that we are *ALL* a work in progress.

The agile software development process isn't fixed. It continues to change and grow as we learn more about it. If we are lucky, this will never end because it will never be perfect.

We will continue to improve as we age—just like me 😊!

Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better. Samuel Beckett, Irish poet (1906-1989)

Thanks for listening!