



Breaking
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GROWTH MINDSET

TEAMWORK TRAINING MODULE



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Table of Contents

01

Introduction

02

The module in the professional environment

03

Impacts recognized through gender stereotypes

04

Good practices and tips

05

Conclusions

1. Introduction



In this module, we are going to learn about a very important skill connected to teamwork, which is the growth mindset. What is a growth mindset and how does it affect teamwork?

The fixed mindset is the belief that you have a certain amount of an ability or attribute- perhaps high, perhaps low- and that there is little that you can do to change this. The growth mindset on the contrary is the belief that although you may start with a particular level of ability or attribute, you can increase your ability or develop your attribute. Of course, as with some other personal characteristics, people have naturally a more fixed or growth mindset, but a growth mindset can also be learned, causing a shift in the way people think, feel and act. Not only, people can have a fixed mindset in one field, like relationships, and a growth mindset in another, for example, career. To understand the impact that having a growth mindset can have on the atmosphere and results of a company, it could be interesting to evaluate the results of some studies.

Different research has shown that people with a growth mindset take on more challenges, are more resilient in the face of difficulty, and adapt and learn from mistakes. Having said that, it is obvious how teamwork and cooperation will benefit from having employees in growth instead of in a fixed mindset. When coworkers nurture their growth mindset, they are more likely to react to mistakes in an effective way, avoiding, for example, blaming others. Not only: people in a growth mindset use other people as mentors or resources to develop their abilities or attributes. Workplaces, where people have the chance to work on their growth mindset, will be more likely to have meaningful connections among employees.

Also, people with a natural or learned growth mindset can go back to a more fixed mindset from time to time, especially when they are facing some particular situations. These are the most triggering ones:

- Facing a challenging task
- Experiencing the task as effortful and difficult
- Evaluating your progress
- Making mistakes
- Criticism or praise from others, especially authorities
- Hearing about the success or failures from peers

2. The module in the professional environment



Developing a growth mindset in a professional environment may improve not only the overall results but also the relationships at the workplace. If we consider the main situations that trigger a fixed mindset response, we can see that all of them happen on a daily basis at any workplace. In fact, training team members to develop a healthy and growth mindset response to them will improve teamwork. For example, it is crucial for a company to develop a positive error culture. A place where mistakes are an opportunity to learn and not something to be ashamed or scared of. A positive error culture can be developed by modelling positive behaviour- handling mistakes openly, transparently and fast. But coworkers may still find it difficult to adapt to such a positive error culture if they are still in a fixed mindset.

But why can women and especially women in the workplace benefit a lot from a shift to a growth mindset? Women who are in growth instead of in a fixed mindset have increased resilience. They are in fact better equipped to face challenges and handle setbacks because they perceive them as opportunities to grow. Women with a growth mindset have more motivation since they are more likely to set challenging goals for themselves and work hard to achieve them.

Women with a growth mindset show also improved self-esteem, since even if they encounter a failure they are less likely to define themselves by it. And thanks to their self-esteem, they will be able to focus on their strengths and potential for growth. And, not least, women with a growth mindset develop better relationships with others, since they are more open to feedback and constructive criticism. They are more likely to help colleagues and act as mentors for younger employees. Women who come back to work after having taken a step back or even a break in their careers, to take care of a child or of a family member, may feel lost at the beginning. They will benefit a lot from having a mentor to ask for help when needed. And mentor relationships are better off and more effective if the parties are in a growth mindset.

A mentor may be also capable of recognising a fixed mindset in the colleague and helping in shifting it to a growth mindset. Usually, a fixed mindset can be recognised in self-talk, emotions and actions. The mentor can both model a behaviour inspired by a growth mindset, but can also give examples of positive ways to address yourself in self-talk.

3. Impacts recognized through gender stereotypes



Let's look closer at gender stereotypes and their relationship to fixed and growth mindset. Research conducted by the Harvard Business Review showed that women, especially in the early stages of their careers, are more likely than men to have a proving mindset. They are less confident and they find it difficult, generally speaking, to cultivate their growth mindset. This is because women are socialised to be less confident, whereas men are socialised to be overconfident.

The situation gets even worse in the so-called rush hour of life. This is the relatively short phase (5 to 7 years) where people are both starting a family and climbing the ladder at work. Statistics show that women still carry most of the intense burden of work and family.

Gender imbalance plays a big role even in countries where (theoretically) also men would be granted paternity leave for the exact amount of time as mothers. But anyway, women with small children are way more likely to work part-time and pause their careers. What happens then to their mindset? Women who are trying to balance family and work life tend to go back to a more fixed mindset than they used to. This is simply because they are mostly overscheduled and overtired. A study published by the Ohio State University has shown that, after children's birth, even couples who used to be more or less equal become profoundly unequal in the house tasks division. Women working full time often have to finish working after their kids are in bed and just can't focus on career improvement as much as they wish. They have less time to nurture their relationships with colleagues both during the breaks and in occasional after-work social activities.

Having less time and focus can lead to non-excellent performances at work. Women, at this point, may perceive themselves as a failure and get stuck in a toxic fixed mindset. But even when, like everyone, they may make a mistake, they will be less likely to see them as opportunities to grow. Same when they are facing a task that seems too challenging. The growth mindset approach would be a non-judging one, and the best strategy to cope with a challenging task would be to analyse skills that may help overcome it. But a woman in the rush hour of her life, when confronting a difficult task at work, will probably blame herself for not being able to complete it with success. And will probably compare herself with her male colleagues who have more time and focus at work.

4. Good practices and tips



We have seen how a growth mindset has an influence on the way people and especially women work in teams. Here are some good practices and tips to make sure people at every workplace get the chance to improve their growth mindset.

We have learned that some special situations, which are very common at work, are so-called triggers to fixed mindset. The best way to ensure coworkers develop a more growth mindset is to train them to respond to these triggers.

Here are some effective strategies:

- When women face a challenging task, they should be reminded by their mentor or coworker to analyse their current skills and attributes; the all-or-none judgement of self has to be avoided at all cost.
- When women face a difficult task. they should be helped to view every effort positively and not negatively;
- When assessing progress or performance, the correct standard should be any-percent-is-something (in response to 100 percent-or-nothing);
- When women make mistakes, they should be reminded to see them as expected and opportunities for growth (in response to magnification or minification of mistakes)
- Women should view others, especially authorities, as resources (in response to viewing others as judges or mind reading)
- Women should be encouraged to take constructive comparisons with peers when hearing about their successes or failures (in response to competitive comparison with peers).

To create a growth mindset culture at work and thus improve teamwork, it is crucial to create an opportunity for coworkers to get to know and practice growth vs. fixed mindset. A good opportunity could be through dedicated workshops and activities.

5. Conclusions



In a growth mindset, people believe that their most basic abilities can be developed through dedication and hard work, whereas in a fixed mindset, people believe intelligence, talent, and other qualities are innate and unchangeable.

Research has shown that people with a growth mindset take on more challenges, are more resilient in the face of difficulty, and adapt and learn from mistakes. This makes them excellent team members. Women who are in growth instead of in a fixed mindset have increased resilience. They are better equipped to face challenges and handle setbacks because they perceive them as opportunities to grow.

Women with a growth mindset have more motivation since they are more likely to set challenging goals for themselves and work hard to achieve them. Women with a growth mindset show also improved self-esteem, since even if they encounter a failure they are less likely to define themselves by it. And thanks to their self-esteem, they will be able to focus on their strengths and potential for growth. And, not least, women with a growth mindset develop better relationships with others, since they are more open to feedback and constructive criticism. They are more likely to help colleagues and act as mentors for younger employees.

To create a growth mindset culture at work and thus improve teamwork, it is crucial to create an opportunity for coworkers to get to know and practice growth vs. fixed mindset. A good opportunity could be through dedicated workshops and activities about the following strategies to respond to situations that trigger fixed mindset reactions: Analysing current skills and attributions; viewing effort positively and not negatively; assessing with the standard any-per cent-is-something; mistakes as opportunities for growth; viewing others, especially authorities, as resources and not as judges; taking constructive comparison with peers.

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This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication [communication] reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

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© May 2023 – EBB GmnH, Step-by-Step, VAEV R&D, INDEPCIE, Skill-Up Srl., SVERONIS & SIA O.E.

This publication was carried out with the financial support of the European Commission under Erasmus + Project “2022-1-DE02-KA220-VET-000085146”

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