

Cultivate a growth mindset to thrive in digital business

 By [Lauren Hartzenberg](#)

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"The future is uncertain. IT leaders need to understand that they will no longer have all the answers and can't relentlessly pursue one fixed direction. We need a new way of thinking to grapple with digital business and an uncertain global economy." These were the words of Gartner's research vice president Elise Olding, marking the beginning of another insightful talk at last week's Gartner Symposium/ITxpo in Cape Town.



Elise Olding, Gartner.

According to Olding, cultivating a growth mindset in your organisation is critical to building an innovative culture that will prosper in the era of digital business. A growth mindset enables an enterprise to thrive when encountering challenges, use failure as a way to move forward and embrace continuous learning. Pervasive in Silicon Valley, this mindset has generated millions of dollars owing to its innovation-boosting benefits.

Advantages of a growth mindset

She says that a growth mindset believes that intelligence and talent can be learned, leads to a desire to try, helps employees seek to adapt to their environment, and importantly, it trusts that effort leads to improvement.

Unleashes creativity: It disrupts the unrealistic expectation of perfection and embraces uncertainty by encouraging employees to try many solutions instead of just 'the right one'. Focus is placed on an employee's growth rather than pressuring them into proving themselves to others. "Success is measured by the number of ideas and the amount of

learning."

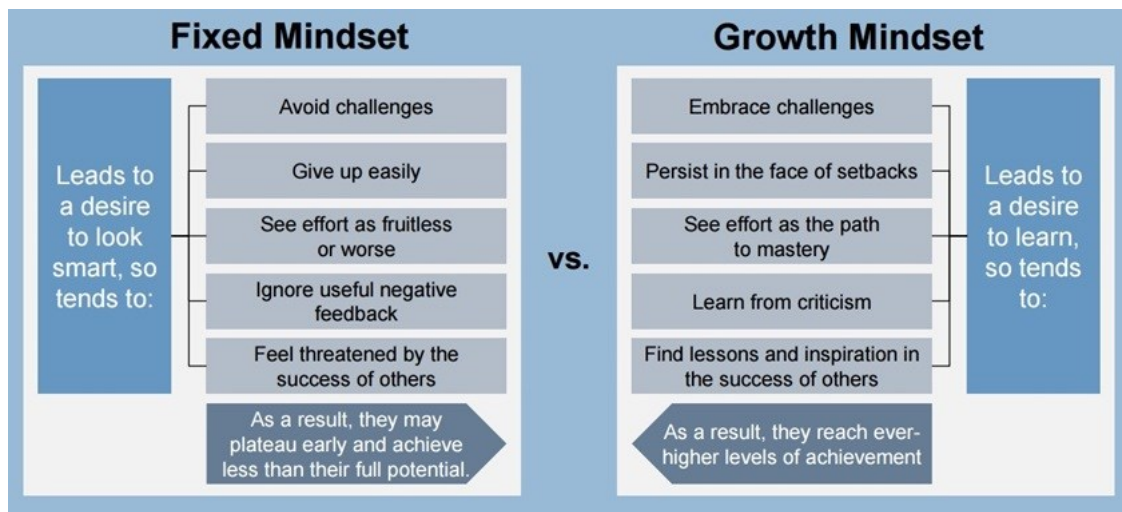
Fuels adaptability: It solicits and considers ideas from everybody, encouraging openness to them and discouraging ownership. This constant stream of ideas stimulates innovation, aimed at continuously increasing the quality of products and services; and focus is placed on long-term goals instead of short-term results. This all leads to an organisation that will be more resilient in the face of change.

"The more you try various things, the more opportunity you have to succeed. Success is measured by improvement, not by what has been completed," states Olding.

The fixed mindset

The antithesis of this is a fixed mindset, prevalent in the majority of corporates. This mindset considers innate abilities as set and unable to change, and it blames the environment or peers in event of failure. An environment is created in which people value appearing smart and being right, but signs of effort are perceived as displaying a lack of ability.

Just as the benefits of a growth mindset are bountiful, so are the negative implications of a fixed one. Due to the competitive environment it creates, employees become afraid to try new things in fear of failure. Only employees with a 'proven record' get hired, leading to a lack of diversity in the talent pool. Additionally, this type of mindset assumes all leaders have the answers and it fosters consensus and groupthink. Ultimately, it limits achievement. "A fixed mindset says 'Come to me with a solution, and not a problem!'"



Source: Gartner Inc. via Educational.com

Leading for growth

A growth mindset leader will survive in times of uncertainty, and the business world is indeed in a state of flux. Olding offered the following actions that leaders can put into practice to foster a growth mindset in their organisation.

Challenge beliefs and change perspectives: Find and challenge your own fixed mindset thinking. Educate yourself about the growth mindset and practise it as a leadership team. Olding also says to actively banish the blame mindset.

“Don’t ask somebody why something happened, ask them what they’ve learnt.”

Be open and vulnerable: Don’t be afraid to admit that you don’t have all the answers. Book calendar time to walk around the office and ask questions. Use phrases like “I need help,” “I don’t know,” “tell me more,” and “I want to learn.”

“Humility and vulnerability are some of the most important leadership traits for the future,” she says.

Have high expectations of all employees: Ensure team diversity by not relying solely on ‘go-to employees’. Challenge your performance management methods and reward not improvement, not perfection.

“All employees are high potential employees. We create biases and self-fulfilling prophecies when we work with HR and define a couple of our employees as high potential. It’s a very bad practice. When we make assumptions about our employees and what they can and can’t do, it limits them.”

When to apply a growth mindset

Olding points out that a growth mindset it is not a panacea for everything. It shouldn’t be applied in situations of a critical or time-sensitive nature. But it can be highly beneficial when uncertainty abounds and there is a great need to think outside of the box, and when 10 times the change is needed in an organisation, not 10%.

It will increase overall organisational skills over time, along with employee and business resilience. But remember, teamwork is essential.

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