

# “Curious Conversations”

Collaborative learning for teams or groups



## Growth Mindset

Exploring the concept and how to use it to learn  
and handle challenges

Participant Pre-reading

# Curious Conversations

## Growth Mindset

Source: Carol Dweck

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“Smart is something you become not something you are.”

–Carol Dweck

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### The Big Idea

Growth Mindset is a simple idea that focuses on the underlying beliefs people have about learning, intelligence and talent. The early work on this concept was pioneered by Stanford University psychologist Carol Dweck, based on decades of research on achievement and success. It's a simple idea that can make a real difference to the way we see the challenges life and work throws at us.

In a growth mindset, people believe that whatever level of skill, talent or intelligence they currently possess, they can grow, improve and get better. That leads to a willingness to try, experiment, even if they perhaps fail. They see this as helping them get smarter, compared to simply being smart. This mindset requires dedication, resilience and hard work.

In a fixed mindset, people believe their basic qualities, like their intelligence or talent, are fixed traits that they have been born with. They believe that they are either good or bad at something and that anything they are not good at is a fixed state. It won't improve, no matter what they do. People with fixed mindsets will tend to spend their time doing things that they are good at. Mostly they look to succeed because this reinforces the view that they are smart/talented. To make sure they succeed, they avoid activities and tasks where they might fail or struggle to succeed. This narrows their experience of new and limits their ability to learn or develop.

Carol Dweck gives all her new students a task to research someone who they feel is successful (a hero/heroine) in some field and investigate their journey to success. Many start thinking the person they chose had an inevitable journey to success because of their innate talent. Instead they find that every one of them had to work hard to develop their talent. This is true in sport, music, the arts, business, politics, and science.

Carol Dweck's work started with children, tested her theory and then teaching them about growth mindset. The researchers started noticing that teacher behaviour and mindset had a big impact on

student mindset, and the feedback that teachers give their students can either encourage a child to choose a challenge and increase achievement or look for an easy way out.

This has a direct comparison with the behaviour of people in the workplace: managers and their team, how they talk to them, how they challenge them, coach them, what they praise; employees and what they are willing to try and experiment with.

Growth mindset has become a popular concept but like all popular ideas there are some misconceptions. Here are 3:

1. Myth - I already have it, and I always have. Reality - People often confuse a growth mindset with being flexible or open-minded or with having a positive outlook, qualities they believe they've simply always had. This a false growth mindset. Everyone is a mixture of fixed and growth mindsets, and that mixture continually evolves with experience. A "pure" growth mindset doesn't exist, which we must acknowledge in order to attain the benefits we seek.
2. Myth - A growth mindset is just about praising and rewarding effort. Reality - This isn't true for students in schools, and it's not true for employees in organizations. In both settings, outcomes matter. Unproductive effort is never a good thing. However, it is critical to reward not just effort but learning and progress, and to emphasize the processes that yield these things, such as seeking help from others, trying new strategies, and capitalizing on setbacks to move forward effectively. In all the research, the outcome (which is most important) follows from deeply engaging in these processes.
3. Myth - Just espouse a growth mindset, and good things will happen. Reality – Saying things doesn't lead automatically to change. Behaviour change is crucial. Organizations that embody a growth mindset encourage appropriate risk-taking, knowing that some risks won't work out. They reward employees for important and useful lessons learned, even if a project does not meet its original goals. They support collaboration across organizational boundaries rather than competition among employees or units. They are committed to the growth of every member, not just in words but in deeds, such as broadly available development and advancement opportunities. And they continually reinforce growth mindset values with concrete policies.

It's not easy to attain a growth mindset. One reason why is we all have our own fixed-mindset triggers. When we face challenges, receive criticism, or fare poorly compared with others, we can easily fall into insecurity or defensiveness, a response that inhibits growth. Our work environments, too, can be full of fixed-mindset triggers. A company that plays the talent game makes it harder for people to practice growth-mindset thinking and behavior, such as sharing information, collaborating, innovating, seeking feedback, or admitting errors.

The following video explains the concept: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-ogghnxBmY>

The "Curious Conversation" that you will be taking part in will explore how this idea of growth mindset could help the group and you individually.