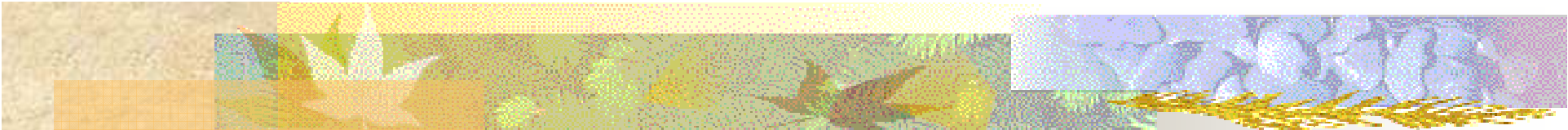# The Agile Mindset

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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 references for any part of this talk and I will be happy to make them available.

Do you mostly agree or mostly disagree with the following

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.

No matter how intelligent you are, you can always get better, sometimes you can improve a lot.

You can 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 "smart" 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%) "smart" kids chose (2)

Phase III

Very difficult exam given to both groups

"Effort" kids worked hard, enjoyed the challenge

"Smart" 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)

"Smart" kids chose (2)

Phase V

All students given easy test (similar to Phase I)

"Effort" kids improved (by ~30%)
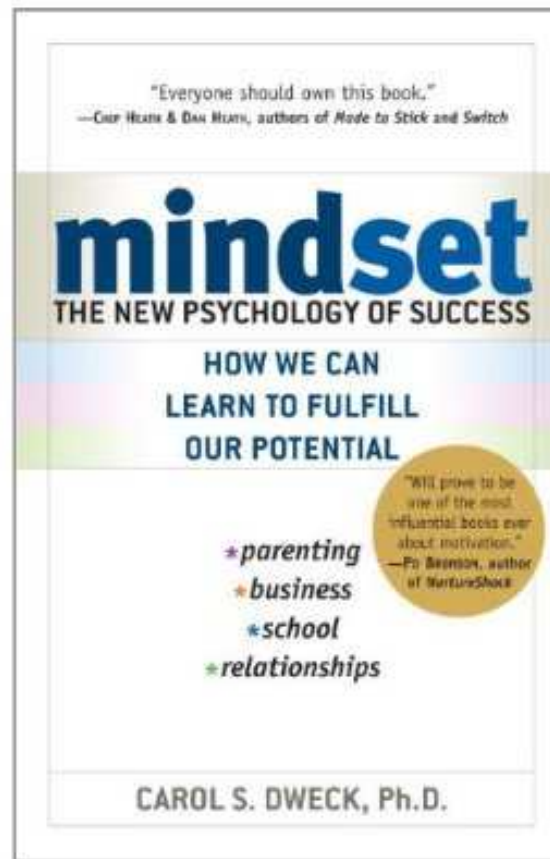
"Smart" kids' were worse (by ~20%)

Phase VI

All students asked to give advice to other students and include their scores
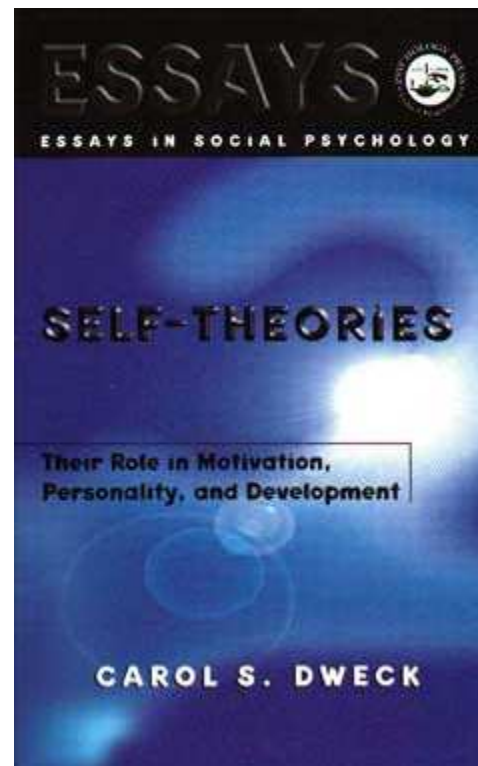
"Effort" kids: Lots of advice and encouragement.

"Smart" kids: Very little or no advice and ~40% lied about their scores

Mindset – Carol Dweck

Self-Theories – Carol Dweck

PR 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

Mindsets in an MRI

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

Organizations have a mindset

Amy Edmondson, Harvard Business School, studied how hospitals implemented a new technique for open-heart surgery.

Those who were successful saw a steep learning curve and realized it would be challenging, but worth it for quicker, easier patient.

Those who were not successful saw the change as "cool" new technology, a marketing opportunity, a way to show other hospitals that they "had it."

Smartest guys in the room
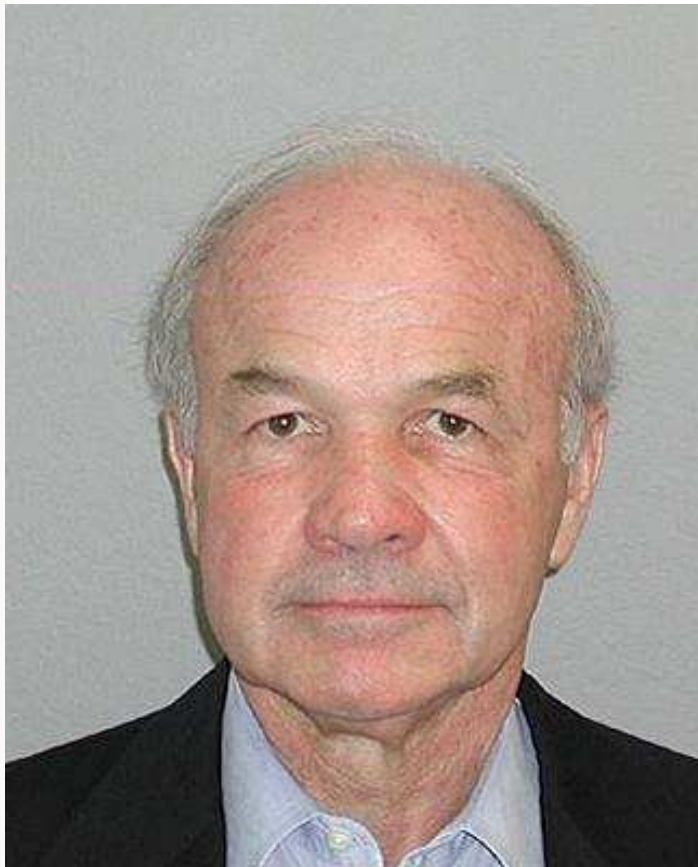
Enron's fixed mindset

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.

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

"Keen to Help? Managers' implicit person theories and their subsequent employee coaching," Peter Heslin, Don Vandewalle, Gary Latham, Personnel Psych., 2006.

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

Hard Facts – Pfeffer & Sutton
http://www.evidence-basedmanagement.com/books/
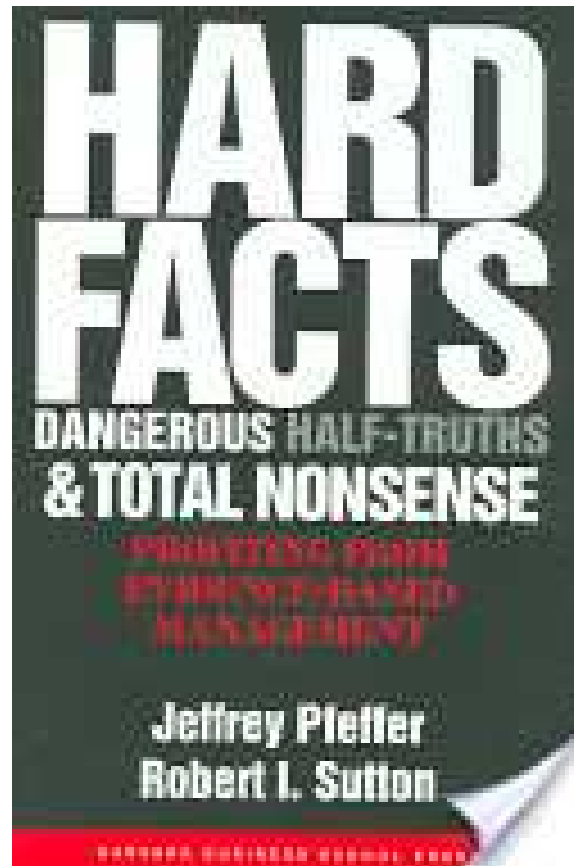
Agile organizations

Scott Forstall, senior vice president of Apple in charge of iPhone software – "to make mistakes and struggle, but eventually we may do something that we'll remember the rest of our lives."

David Kelley, IDEO's founder and chairman: We like our people to fail early and fail often.

Amazon's Jeff Bezos says his company's strategy is like planting seeds, or going down blind alleys.
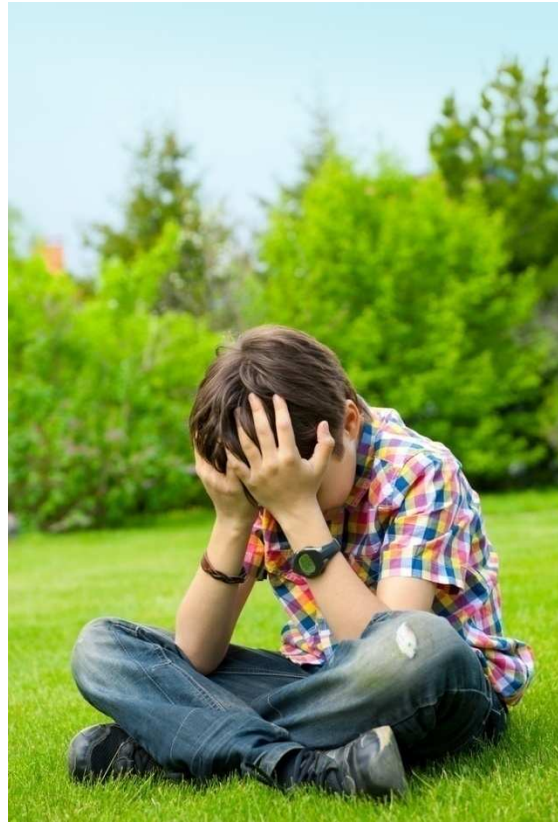
The good news is…

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

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?

Perfect is a verb.

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 ☺!

Try again. Fail again. Fail better.

> Samuel Beckett, Irish poet (1906-1989)

Thanks for listening!