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**TABLE OF CONTENT**

Editorial.....	3
Liviu Warter	
The Use of the War Metaphor During the Pandemic: A War for Whom and By What Means?: The US as a Case Study .....	5
Amna Ben Amara	
Affirmative Action Reconsidered .....	15
Walter E. Block	
Tenacity of Nonsensical Opinions: Resisting the Allure of Certainty.....	25
Hershey H. Friedman, Deborah S. Kleiner	
Growth Mindset versus Stagnation Mindset .....	45
Georgiana Corcaci	
The Medicalization of Risk .....	55
Mircea Gelu Buta	
The New Romanian Legislation Regarding Some Measures of Protection for People with Intellectual and Psychosocial Disabilities – Ethical Aspects and Implementation Controversies .....	63
Bogdan Mălinescu	

# GROWTH MINDSET VERSUS STAGNATION MINDSET

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## Abstract

This paper delves into the fundamental concepts of a growth mindset and a stagnation mindset, exploring their implications across various aspects of personal and professional development. The dichotomy between these mentalities profoundly influences individuals' attitudes toward challenges, learning, and success. The study aims to elucidate the characteristics of each mindset, examine their impact on decision-making and resilience, and assess how they shape one's approach to learning and achievement. By scrutinizing real-world examples and incorporating insights from psychological studies, this work seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics between a growth mindset and a stagnation mindset. Ultimately, it aims to underscore the significance of fostering a growth-oriented perspective for personal and professional fulfillment.

**Keywords:** growth mindset, stagnation mindset, resilience, learning, achievement.

## Introduction

In the context of personal and professional development, the concepts of "growth mindset" and "stagnation mindset" represent two fundamental approaches that influence how individuals perceive and respond to challenges, failures, and success. These mindsets not only shape perspectives on effort and learning but also mold the evolutionary path of each individual. The growth mindset essentially suggests that skills, intelligence, and abilities can be developed through sustained effort, continuous learning, and risk-taking. An individual with a growth mindset sees failures as opportunities for learning and believes that perseverance is the key to success. On the other hand, the stagnation mindset reflects the belief that individual qualities are fixed and unchangeable, and additional efforts cannot significantly influence outcomes. Individuals with a stagnation mindset may avoid challenges to evade failures, as they perceive them as threats to their self-confidence. In this context, the present study explores the implications of these two opposing mindsets on personal and professional development. Evaluating how individuals manage their mindsets is essential for facilitating sustainable growth and positive evolution in various life domains. By analyzing the interaction between these two mindsets, we can gain the necessary understanding to guide individuals towards a beneficial and constructive growth mindset.

In the contemporary era, where change and adaptability are essential, mindset becomes a crucial aspect of individual approaches to life's challenges. The growth mindset and stagnation mindset are two distinct paradigms that influence how people perceive and respond to opportunities and adversities. The growth mindset, popularized by psychologist Carol Dweck (2006), asserts that intelligence and abilities can be developed through effort, dedication, and continuous learning. Individuals with such a mindset view failures as stepping stones to success, and the desire to learn and improve is a central element in their lives. On the other hand, the stagnation mindset assumes that individual qualities are static and unchangeable. Individuals with a stagnation mindset often avoid challenges, fearing possible failures that could affect their self-image. It has been observed that many individuals do not exclusively adopt one of these mindsets but can oscillate between them in various contexts. Within this analysis, it is essential to explore how these two mindsets interact and influence each other. For example, an individual with a predominantly growth mindset may

face moments of doubt and temporarily fall into a stagnation mindset in the face of a significant challenge. At the same time, someone with a stagnation mindset may experience episodes of awareness and aspiration to adopt a more growth-oriented approach.

The primary aim of this study is to investigate the impact that the growth and stagnation mindsets have on individual development, both personally and professionally. A detailed analysis of how these mindsets influence decisions, objectives, and individual outcomes will provide a comprehensive understanding of how these paradigms affect human evolution.

## **Origins of concepts and their evolution in psychological research**

### **The growth mindset**

The concept of a growth mindset was introduced and popularized by psychologist Carol Dweck in the 1980s. It was initially defined as a perspective in which individuals view abilities and intelligence as capable of development and improvement through continuous effort, learning, and persistence. The fundamental idea was that abilities are not fixed but can evolve through experience and commitment. This mindset was associated with a positive attitude towards challenges, perceiving failures as learning opportunities, and a sense of control over one's own developmental process.

The concept of a growth mindset (Dweck, 2006) has its roots in studies on how people approach failure and success. Essentially, a growth mindset assumes that individual qualities, such as intelligence or abilities, can be developed and improved through sustained effort, learning strategies, and perseverance. This mindset encourages the belief that success is not solely determined by innate talents but also by dedication and commitment to the learning process. This further clarification of the growth mindset concept not only emphasizes its positive nature but also highlights the significant impact it can have on various aspects of individual life. Thus, this new approach provides a comprehensive and contextualized background regarding the evolution of growth mindsets in different fields, offering a solid perspective on the history and relevance of these concepts. Therefore, Carol Dweck's thesis and her studies on the growth mindset demonstrate beneficial effects on personal and professional development. We enumerate some of these effects (Dweck, 2006):

- *Effects on approaching challenges.* Individuals with a growth mindset are more inclined to approach challenges with courage and see them as opportunities for development. Failures are not viewed as definitive rejections but rather as normal stages in the learning process. This approach encourages a positive attitude towards repeated attempts and aims to transform obstacles into constructive lessons.
- *The role of continuous effort and learning strategies.* Central to the concept of a growth mindset is the idea that continuous effort and the application of appropriate learning strategies have a direct impact on performance and development. Individuals with this mindset believe that success comes from a continuous process of trial, error, and constant improvement. They are inclined to seek feedback and explore new ways to solve problems.
- *Growth mindset in the context of education.* Initially studied in the educational environment, it was found that students with a growth mindset achieve better academic performance and are more resilient to stress. This led to the implementation of educational practices that promote this mindset, such as highlighting effort and the learning process instead of simply focusing on outcomes.
- *Adaptation of the concept in various fields.* Over time, it has been observed that the growth mindset is not limited to the educational context but has significant implications in various fields such as management, entrepreneurship, and personal development. In the professional environment, adopting this mindset has been

associated with a more positive approach to change, the ability to learn from feedback, and perseverance in achieving goals.

To illustrate the points mentioned above, we present a synthesis of studies addressing the growth mindset conducted over time.

*Initial studies.* Carol Dweck was among the first researchers to investigate the concept of a growth mindset in the early 1980s. Studies involving children and adults were conducted to understand how perceptions of abilities influence behavior and outcomes. Through experiments involving challenges and feedback, Dweck discovered that individuals with a growth mindset are more willing to tackle challenges, embrace sustained efforts, and view failures as learning opportunities (Dweck, 1999). These studies laid the foundation for subsequent research on the effects of the growth mindset, providing insights into how mindset can influence learning, academic outcomes, and behavior in the face of personal and professional challenges.

*Study on the effect on academic performance (Mueller & Dweck, 1998).* Mueller and Dweck conducted a longitudinal study to examine how the growth mindset influences academic performance. The researchers followed students over several years, assessing their mindset and academic performance. The study revealed that students with a growth mindset showed significant improvements in grades and approached courses with more courage and perseverance (Mueller & Dweck, 1998).

*Study on educational interventions (Blackwell et al., 2007).* This study aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of interventions to promote the growth mindset in schools. Interventions by specialists Elizabeth L. Blackwell, Kali H. Trzesniewski and Carol S. Dweck included training sessions and feedback focused on developing a growth mindset. Results showed that students who participated in interventions demonstrated significant improvements in academic outcomes, especially in previously considered challenging areas. These researchers contributed to understanding how interventions geared towards fostering a growth mindset can influence academic performance and motivation.

*Study on the relationship between growth mindset and sports performance (Frontini et al., 2021).* Frontini et al. (2021) investigated how the growth mindset influences sports performance and stress resilience in high-level athletes. The study involved assessing the mindset and behavior of elite athletes during competitions. Results highlighted that athletes with a growth mindset displayed a more positive attitude towards training, better management of failures, and increased adaptability to competitive pressures.

*Study on brain neuroplasticity (Ng, 2018).* This study aimed to explore the neuroscience of the growth mindset and intrinsic motivation, investigating whether this mindset can influence neurological processes associated with learning and development. Although the field is still in its early stages, the study provided an overview of the basic mechanisms between the growth mindset and participants' intrinsic motivation during learning tasks. Findings suggested that participants with a growth mindset exhibited significant changes in brain activity, indicating greater adaptation to learning demands and increased neurological responsiveness to change.

*Studies addressing the impact of the growth mindset on the professional environment.*

The growth mindset in the professional setting refers to the attitude and belief that individual skills and qualities can be developed through sustained effort, continuous learning, and perseverance. The studies presented below have suggested that individuals with a growth mindset may experience more success in their careers, better handle challenges, and exhibit greater adaptability to change. This is partly attributed to the fact that these individuals view failures as learning opportunities, are open to feedback, and are willing to exert extra effort to develop their skills.

*Study on the impact of the growth mindset on career (Grant & Dweck, 2003).* Researchers explored how the growth mindset can influence professional goals and their impact on career success. The study suggests that goal choice influences how a person with a growth mindset approaches challenges and achieves success.

*Study on growth mindset in the organizational environment (Mueller, & Dweck, 1998).* This research focuses on the effects of intelligence-related praise on the growth mindset and academic performance in children, exploring how praise can influence the growth mindset and performance in the organizational environment. The study indicates that praise emphasizing intelligence may undermine motivation and performance, while praise for effort and process can support the development of a growth mindset.

*Study on the impact of the growth mindset on personal development (Yeager & Dweck, 2012).* This work concentrates on how the growth mindset can promote resilience and personal development in various life domains. The research suggests that when students believe that personal traits can be developed, they are more resilient and better equipped to face academic challenges.

*Study on growth mindset in management and leadership (Heslin, Vandewalle, & Latham, 2006).* Here, the exploration focuses on how the growth mindset of managers can influence coaching and development practices for employees. The study investigates how managerial attitudes toward growth can impact coaching and employee development.

These studies represent significant efforts to better understand the impact of the growth mindset in various domains, including learning, adaptability to change, and professional performance. Their results highlight the benefits on behavior and performance in diverse contexts, reinforcing the idea that how individuals perceive effort and personal development can influence their outcomes. The presented research has substantially contributed to understanding how the growth mindset can enhance performance, personal development, and the professional environment.

### **Stagnation mindset**

The concept of a "stagnation mindset," like that of a "growth mindset," was primarily developed and elaborated by American psychologist Carol S. Dweck and her research team. These concepts were introduced in research papers and the book "Mindset: The New Psychology of Success" (2006). In their studies, Dweck and her team explored how beliefs about the nature of intelligence and abilities can influence behavior, performance, and adaptability to failure. They identified two main types of mindsets: the growth mindset and the stagnation mindset. We will now delve into the characteristics of the stagnation mindset. In contrast to the growth mindset, individuals with a stagnation mindset believe that their skills and intelligence are fixed and cannot be significantly changed. Those with a stagnation mindset may avoid extra effort and adopt a more defensive attitude toward challenges or criticism. Additionally, individuals with a stagnation mindset may think that their intelligence, talent, or abilities are fixed, and there is little flexibility in terms of change or improvement.

These two concepts have had a significant impact in the fields of education, psychology, and personal development, influencing how people understand and approach learning, success, and failure. Over the years, further research has explored and validated these concepts, demonstrating how mindset can influence academic and professional performance, as well as personal development.

Below are some characteristics of the stagnation mindset:

- *Avoidance of extra effort.* Individuals with a stagnation mindset may hesitate to exert extra effort or engage in activities that could challenge them. This reluctance stems from the belief that outcomes will not significantly improve with additional effort,

leading them to avoid situations that require sustained work and long-term commitment.

- *Risk avoidance.* When one believes their abilities are fixed, they may be more reluctant to take risks or try new things, fearing failure or negative evaluation. The fear of failure can lead those with a stagnation mindset to avoid risks and stay within their comfort zone. Additionally, they may perceive failure as a confirmation of their intrinsic limitations rather than as a learning opportunity.
- *Negative reactions to criticism.* Individuals with a stagnation mindset may react more defensively or take criticism personally, as they may perceive it as an evaluation of their fixed abilities. People with a stagnation mindset can have defensive reactions to criticism, interpreting it as a judgment of their fundamental capabilities. This defensiveness can hinder the learning and development process.
- *Constant comparison with others.* Continuous comparison with others can be a consequence of the stagnation mindset. Believing in a fixed amount of intelligence or talent may lead individuals to constantly compare themselves to others, perceiving them as competitors in a race where qualities are predetermined. People may become obsessed with rankings and comparative performances, viewing them as a measure of their intrinsic worth.
- *Limiting learning opportunities.* Individuals with a stagnation mindset may avoid situations involving learning and development because they believe they do not have the potential to improve. The belief that abilities are fixed can lead to the avoidance of learning and development opportunities. People may refuse to engage in activities that could provide new experiences and help them develop their skills.

It is essential to mention that these traits of a stagnation mindset are not set in stone, and individuals have the capacity to change their mindset through awareness and deliberate effort. Education, positive feedback, and developing failure management skills can contribute to transitioning to a more growth-oriented mindset, encouraging individuals to see failure as an opportunity for learning and development. We emphasize that mindsets are not always fixed and can evolve throughout life. People can become aware of their mindset and begin to adopt elements of a growth mindset, which promotes personal development and continuous learning. By recognizing and becoming conscious of a stagnation mindset, it is possible to initiate the process of change and evolution.

The stagnation mindset has significant implications for how people approach challenges, failures, and effort in various aspects of life. Developing a stagnation mindset can affect individual behaviors and attitudes in ways that may hinder personal and professional growth. Here are more details about this mindset. The stagnation mindset has been explored in numerous studies in the fields of psychology and education. While not aiming for an exhaustive review of all studies, we want to mention a few representative examples.

- *Dweck (1999): Self-Theories. Their role in motivation, personality, and development.* This work is one of the first where Carol Dweck presented the concepts of growth mindset and stagnation mindset. It explores how these mindsets affect motivation, personality, and individual development. Dweck emphasizes how beliefs about the nature of intelligence can influence behavior and how people respond to challenges and failures.
- *Blackwell, Trzesniewski and Dweck (2007): Implicit theories of intelligence predict achievement across an adolescent transition: A longitudinal study and an intervention.* The study investigated how the stagnation mindset influenced academic performance during an adolescent transition. It found that adolescents with a growth mindset achieved better academic results over time, unlike those with a stagnation mindset, and that intervention to promote a growth mindset had positive effects.

- *Mueller and Dweck (1998): Praise for intelligence can undermine children's motivation and performance.* This study examined how the way children are praised (either for intelligence or effort) can affect the development of a growth or stagnation mindset. The results demonstrated that praise for intelligence can encourage a stagnation mindset, while praise for effort can contribute to the development of a growth mindset.
- *Leondari, Syngollitou and Kiosseoglou (2005): Implicit theories, goal orientations, and perceived competence: Impact on students' achievement behavior.* The study explored the relationship between students' implicit theories (mindsets) about intelligence, their goal orientations, and perceived competence. The growth mindset was associated with a learning goal orientation and a higher perception of competence, while the stagnation mindset was associated with more of an avoidance orientation toward effort.

These studies have significantly contributed to understanding the impact of the stagnation mindset and how it can affect various aspects of life, including academic performance, personal development, and adaptability to challenges. Ongoing research in this field is crucial to uncover new aspects and guide educational and psychological interventions. Therefore, the presented research indicates that the impact of the stagnation mindset extends to the professional domain, affecting an individual's career success and progress, including career development, skill enhancement, and adaptability to workplace changes. Furthermore, the conclusions from the presented studies demonstrate that the stagnation mindset can influence an individual's mental health, including stress levels, anxiety, and depression. It can affect academic outcomes, attitudes toward learning, and the approach to effort among students. Additionally, it can influence interpersonal relationships, including how people perceive and respond to challenges within relationships.

### **The impact of growth and stagnation mindsets on decision-making**

Decision-making is a fundamental aspect of our daily lives and is significantly influenced by the mindsets we adopt. Growth and stagnation mindsets represent two distinct approaches to how we perceive our abilities, learning capacity, and how we relate to failure and success. These mindsets can have a profound impact on how we evaluate options, make decisions, and manage life's challenges. As mentioned, the growth mindset is characterized by the belief that our skills and intelligence can be developed through sustained effort, learning, and perseverance. An individual with a growth mindset sees failure as an opportunity for learning and sets goals oriented toward personal development. In the context of decision-making, this mindset can generate courage to address new situations, take risks, and seek growth opportunities. Decisions are made with the perspective that each experience, whether successful or a failure, represents a step forward in personal evolution. On the other hand, the stagnation mindset involves the belief that our skills and intelligence are static, immutable. Those with a stagnation mindset may avoid sustained effort and be reluctant to engage in situations that challenge them. In decision-making, they may choose known and safe options, avoiding challenges that could involve extra effort or risk. Failures are perceived as evidence of intrinsic incapacity and can generate fear of trying new things or heading in unexplored directions.

The impact of these mindsets on decision-making is reflected in several aspects of our lives. Those with a growth mindset may have a more flexible approach, exploring diverse options and being willing to take calculated risks. They can set ambitious goals and approach challenges with determination. In contrast, those with a stagnation mindset may be tempted to stay in their comfort zone, choosing the less demanding path and avoiding uncertain situations. To develop a more conscious and adaptable approach to decision-making, it is



essential to examine our mindsets and adjust them accordingly. Awareness of our own mindset can open doors to more flexible thinking and a healthier approach to decision-making. Encouraging a growth mindset can contribute to developing a positive attitude towards failure, adopting a broader perspective, and fostering courage to explore new options and challenges. By understanding the profound impact of mindsets on decision-making, we can navigate life's complexity more efficiently and contribute to continuous personal development. The impact of mindsets on decision-making is a complex and vast area of research in psychology and human behavior. Mindsets can influence how people perceive, evaluate, and make decisions in various areas of their lives, such as education, career, health, and interpersonal relationships. We briefly present some relevant aspects of the impact of mindsets on the decision-making process (Dweck, Chiu & Hong, 1995).

- *Perception of one's abilities.* A growth mindset is usually associated with a more flexible perception of one's intelligence and abilities. Individuals with a growth mindset are more willing to take risks, embrace new challenges, and make decisions more easily, perceiving the opportunity to learn and develop as they encounter obstacles. In contrast, those with a stagnation mindset may be more reserved and avoid challenges to maintain a stable image of their own abilities.
- *Approach to failure.* How people perceive failure can be strongly influenced by their mindset. Those with a growth mindset may see failure as an opportunity for learning, while those with a stagnation mindset may interpret failure as confirmation of their intrinsic limits. This perception can affect how they make subsequent decisions and engage in future challenges.
- *Risk-taking.* Mindset can influence a person's comfort level in taking risks. Individuals with a growth mindset may be more willing to try something new or take risks in their careers or other aspects of their lives. In contrast, those with a stagnation mindset may be less willing to take risks, preferring comfortable and familiar situations.
- *Reaction to criticism and feedback.* How people receive and accept feedback and criticism can be influenced by their mindset. Those with a growth mindset may see feedback as an opportunity for improvement, while those with a stagnation mindset may react more defensively and take feedback and criticism personally.
- *Planning and goal setting.* Mindset can affect how people set their goals and future plans. Those with a growth mindset tend to set goals that involve personal development and continuous improvement. In contrast, those with a stagnation mindset may set goals aimed at maintaining the status quo or avoiding risks.

Overall, the impact of mindsets on decision-making underscores the importance of being aware of one's beliefs and how they can influence behavior and decisions. Education and personal development can play a crucial role in changing mindsets and encouraging a more adaptable and open-to-learning approach in the decision-making process.

## Conclusion

The impact of growth and stagnation mindsets on decision-making is a broad and complex field that influences various aspects of individual and professional life. These mindsets, defined by our beliefs about personal development, effort, and abilities, have significant consequences for how we assess options, approach challenges, and align with our goals.

The presented studies reveal that a growth mindset is associated with a more flexible, adaptable, and learning-oriented approach to decision-making. Those with a growth mindset are inclined to take risks, learn from failures, and seek opportunities for continuous development. On the other hand, a stagnation mindset may generate a more conservative

attitude, avoiding risks and limiting the exploration of new options. It is essential to understand that mindsets are not rigid and can be influenced and changed over time. Awareness of one's mindset can be the first step toward developing a more adaptable and positive decision-making approach. Research in this field shows that promoting a growth mindset can bring significant benefits in various contexts, from the educational environment to the professional realm. Education and personalized interventions can play a crucial role in mindset change and in promoting a more open-to-learning approach.

In the future, directions for further research could explore in more detail the influence of mindsets in various professional fields, the impact in intercultural contexts, and the role of technology in mindset change. These efforts could make a significant contribution to optimizing the decision-making process and facilitating more sustainable personal and professional development.

In the context of studying the impact of growth and stagnation mindsets on decision-making, there are several relevant directions for further research that could significantly contribute to understanding this complex phenomenon. We believe that exploring the impact of mindsets in specific professional domains, such as management, entrepreneurship, or technology, is necessary. In this context, understanding how mindset influences decisions could contribute to promoting a growth mindset for improving professional performance. Additionally, investigating how the educational system, specific education, can influence mindset development could be explored. Building on this idea, we hypothesize that educational interventions and training programs can promote a growth mindset among students. Longitudinal studies could examine how mindsets evolve and how their impact changes as individuals go through different stages of life, from childhood and adolescence to adulthood and old age. The impact in intercultural contexts could explore how growth and stagnation mindsets influence decision-making in intercultural settings, considering how cultural differences may modify this relationship and how management practices could be adapted to cultural diversity. Finally, in the era of artificial intelligence, we believe that the role of technology and the digital environment can influence mindset development and, consequently, decision-making.

These directions can provide a solid foundation for further research, shedding light on new and complex aspects of the impact of mindsets on decision-making. Additionally, they can offer practical insights and strategies to promote a growth mindset in different life contexts. Ultimately, a profound understanding of the impact of mindsets can guide us toward more conscious and informed choices in our journey toward success and personal fulfillment.

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