



Growth Mindset – A New Paradigm in Educational Management

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Abstract. This paper explores the growth mindset as an emerging paradigm in educational management, analysing both its theoretical and neuroscientific foundations, as well as its practical implications for educational leaders, teachers and educational communities as a whole. The paper presents various aspects related to the adoption of a growth mindset in educational management, not merely as a motivational technique, but as a genuine paradigm shift, with systemic effects on the quality of education, the organisational climate and students' long-term outcomes. The paper presents the main contextual factors influencing the mindset of educational leaders in managerial decision-making and explains the value of current managerial strategies and practices based on a growth mindset compared to the managerial behavior based on a fixed mindset of some leaders at the organisational level.

The conclusions of the paper highlight the advantages of a paradigm shift in educational management through the adoption of growth mindset principles in the performance management systems of current school organisations.

Keywords: Growth Mindset, Fixed Mindset, Self-Efficacy, Continuing Professional Development for Educational Leaders.

1 Introduction

In recent decades, social, economic, technological and digital transformations and developments have presented constant challenges to education systems worldwide. Globalisation, rapid digitalisation and the unpredictable dynamics of the labour market necessitate the development of 21st-century skills. These include learning and innovation skills (critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, communication), digital literacy skills (information, media and technological), and life and career skills (flexibility and adaptability, initiative and self-direction, social and intercultural skills, productivity, responsibility, leadership (OECD, 2021; World Economic Forum, 2020). In this context, the concept of a 'growth mindset' takes on major relevance in redefining educational management, being considered a key factor in adapting educational systems to contemporary changes. Recent research highlights that the development of a growth mindset is

closely linked to the ability of individuals and organisations to cope with uncertainty, to learn continuously and to innovate (OECD, 2021; UNESCO, 2023).

By ‘mindset’ we mean a cognitive and motivational pattern that shapes the way individuals interpret experiences, respond to challenges and regulate their behaviour. In specialised literature, the ‘growth mindset’ or ‘flexible mindset’ is conceptualised as the belief that abilities can be developed through experience, effort, strategy, learning and constructive feedback, in contrast to the fixed mindset (Dweck, 2016). Individual growth is a process of personal change that can occur in a variety of circumstances. Dweck (2006) demonstrates that individuals’ perceptions of their own growth mindset influence performance, motivation and resilience.

The term ‘growth’ can be linked to Bandura’s (1997) concept of ‘self-efficacy’, which highlights the role of individual beliefs in the ability to accomplish tasks and persevere in the face of difficulties. The sense of being able to succeed in a task – that is, self-efficacy – has an impact on how people think and behave; people’s beliefs in their own ability to successfully tackle specific tasks increase their motivation to put in more effort to achieve them.

Recent studies expand on these perspectives, demonstrating that a growth mindset is not merely an individual trait, but also a construct influenced by the educational and organisational context. For example, research by Yeager and colleagues (2020) shows that interventions targeting students’ mindsets can have significant effects on academic performance, particularly in vulnerable educational contexts. Similarly, David Yeager and colleagues (2019) highlight that the effectiveness of these interventions depends on the coherence of the educational environment and the quality of the pedagogical practices employed.

Furthermore, recent research (Kroeper, Fried & Murphy, 2022; Lou & Li, 2023; Suman, 2023) emphasise that a growth mindset is associated with higher levels of resilience, adaptability and psychological well-being, and is an important predictor of academic and professional success in an environment characterised by uncertainty. Furthermore, post-pandemic studies show that students and teachers with a growth mindset were able to manage more effectively the challenges of online learning and the stress associated with rapid change (UNESCO, 2023).

Integrating this concept into educational management involves a profound paradigm shift and a shift in focus: from an emphasis on static performance to continuous development, from control to facilitation and transformational leadership, and from summative assessment to formative assessment and continuous feedback (Fullan, 2014; OECD, 2021). Furthermore, recent literature highlights the role of educational leaders in fostering an organisational culture based on continuous learning, collaboration and trust (Harris, 2022; Leithwood et al., 2020).

The growth mindset is based on the fundamental premise that human intelligence, talent and abilities are not fixed, genetically determined and immutable entities, but rather malleable qualities that can be developed through effort, strategy and learning from experience. However, recent research highlights the need to avoid a simplistic interpretation of this concept. Walton and Yeager (2020) emphasise that promoting a growth mindset must be accompanied by authentic educational practices (effective

teaching strategies, institutional support) in order to have a real impact. Extensive studies (Yeager & Dweck, 2020) have shown that people who adopt a fixed mindset believe that personality traits do not change; these individuals avoid challenges and tend to prioritise tasks with a low probability of failure. Several researchers (Dweck, 2006; Dweck & Yeager, 2019; Kroeper, Fried & Murphy, 2022; Lou & Li, 2022; Suman, 2023; Walton & Yeager, 2020) draw attention to the fact that intelligence and abilities are not fixed, but can be developed at a personal level through effort and constructive learning strategies, which leads to the establishment of a growth mindset paradigm.

The growth mindset paradigm has profound consequences not only at the individual level, but also at the level of educational institutions, educational management practices and the organisational culture of schools. A growth mindset in educational management contributes to increased staff motivation and a sense of responsibility among all members of the school organisation, improving workplace performance, fostering perseverance, and cultivating courage, a sense of self-efficacy, resilience and self-confidence. School organisations led by the principles of a growth mindset exhibit significantly higher levels of intrinsic motivation, resilience, collaboration and innovation. These organisations foster a climate based on psychological safety, collaboration and learning from mistakes, which leads to increased intrinsic motivation and performance (OECD, 2021; UNESCO, 2023). Furthermore, such organisations are better equipped for innovation and adaptation, an essential aspect in an educational context marked by rapid digital transformations. These are not random effects, but direct consequences of structural changes in the way teaching and assessment processes, continuous professional development for teachers, and communication with families and the community are designed.

In conclusion, the growth mindset is not merely a psychological theory, but an essential conceptual framework for the transformation of contemporary education. Its integration into educational management contributes to the development of more flexible, inclusive and lifelong learning-oriented educational systems, capable of responding to the complex challenges of today's society.

A school culture based on a growth mindset explicitly values individual commitment and progress, as well as the continuous development of every member of the organisation, moving beyond the traditional paradigm centred exclusively on performance. In this type of organisational culture, errors and failures are not stigmatised or penalised, but reinterpreted as genuine opportunities for individual and organisational learning. Recent literature highlights that schools which normalise error as part of the learning process develop higher levels of resilience and engagement among both students and teachers (Bardach et al., 2024; OECD, 2021). In contrast, organisations characterised by a fixed mindset tend to develop defensive mechanisms, in which errors are concealed, minimised or associated with punishment and blame. Research in educational psychology shows that such contexts reduce psychological safety and inhibit authentic learning, negatively affecting long-term performance (Kroeper et al., 2022; Walton & Yeager, 2020). This 'culture of fear of failure' stifles innovative behaviour, change and innovation, discourages risk-taking and perpetuates dysfunctional and inefficient practices.

Furthermore, in a school organisation that embraces the principles of a growth mindset, collaboration, cooperation and the exchange of best practices among teachers are encouraged. Professional collaboration is another essential pillar of an organisational culture based on a growth mindset (in contrast to a fixed mindset, which encourages competition and professional isolation). In such organisations, educational leaders invest in continuous professional development and in the creation of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), within which reflection on teaching practices, collaboration and cooperation, the implementation of joint teaching activities, collective analysis of lessons and teaching activities, the exchange of good practices, the discussion of professional issues and difficulties, the identification of solutions in a collaborative manner, and the co-construction of pedagogical knowledge are promoted. The main outcomes targeted are increased cohesion within the management team and the teaching staff, as well as improved teaching effectiveness and student out-comes (Alma Harris, 2022; Kenneth Leithwood et al., 2020).

In what assessment is concerned, within a growth-mindset-oriented organisation, it shifts from its traditional function as a tool for classification and selection (which generates anxiety, unhealthy competition and a focus on performance) and becomes a formative mechanism, centred on feedback and self-regulation. Assessment is integrated into the learning process as a tool for reflection, supporting the planning of further development and stimulating intrinsic motivation; it becomes an integral part of the continuous learning process and contributes to the consolidation of a growth mindset. According to recent reports, education systems that promote continuous formative assessment and constructive feedback show higher levels of engagement and academic progress (OECD, 2021; UNESCO, 2023).

At the same time, educational leaders play a decisive role in cultivating and sustaining this culture. Contemporary educational leadership, influenced by the growth mindset paradigm, is characterised by the promotion of reflection, continuous learning, and innovation. Leaders invest in the professional development of teachers and create organizational contexts that foster collaboration, experimentation and pedagogical risk-taking. Research shows that leaders who adopt such an approach contribute to strengthening team cohesion and developing an organisational culture based on trust and mutual support (Fullan, 2014; Harris, 2022).

Educational leaders who integrate a growth mindset into their managerial practices promote curiosity, accountability and a focus on continuous improvement. They set high but realistic expectations, foster a positive psychological climate that cultivates growth-oriented communication, provide support and constructive feedback, and contribute to the development of intrinsic motivation and a desire to learn, whilst reducing the fear of failure and encouraging exploration and learning from experience. Recent studies confirm that this type of leadership has a positive impact on teachers' job satisfaction, performance and retention (Bardach et al., 2024; OECD, 2025).

Furthermore, recent post-pandemic research highlights the importance of creating a climate of psychological safety in schools, where teachers and pupils feel encouraged to express their ideas, experiment and learn from mistakes. This type of environment is closely linked to a growth mindset and is an important predictor of educational innovation and institutional adaptability (Burnette et al., 2023; UNESCO, 2023).

Therefore, at the institutional level, the growth mindset paradigm can be an important component in the reform of school organisations, in the sense of changing members' mindsets regarding collective effort, workplace performance, collaborative work, constructive feedback and lifelong learning. In other words, within the context of this paradigm, members of the organisation demonstrate a focus on effort, learning, perseverance and tolerance of failure.

In conclusion, at an institutional level, the growth mindset paradigm represents an essential framework for the transformation of educational organisations. It contributes to changing mindsets regarding collective effort, professional performance and continuous learning, promoting values such as perseverance, collaboration, constructive feedback and tolerance of failure. In an educational context marked by uncertainty and rapid change, adopting this paradigm becomes not merely a theoretical option, but a strategic necessity for the development of resilient and innovative educational organisations.

2 Growth mindset versus fixed mindset in educational management

The difference between the two types of mindset can best be illustrated by a comparative analysis of how they influence four key areas of academic, professional and managerial life: approaching challenges, reacting to failure, interpreting effort, and responsiveness to feedback. We present in a summary table (Table 1) the distinctions between the practices adopted by educational leaders with a growth-mindset as compared to educational leaders with a fixed or rigid mindset. The set of comparison criteria used in this analysis and the diversity of operational aspects examined high-light the need for a coherent and systemic approach to implementing a growth mindset.

Table 1. Comparative approach: growth mindset versus fixed mindset in educational management.

Educational leaders with a growth/flexible mindset	Educational leaders with a fixed/rigid mindset
Gladly accept challenges as opportunities for managerial, professional and personal development.	Do not take too many risks; avoid challenges.
Value effort as a path to improvement.	Consider that effort is pointless.
Focus on continuous learning, growth and continuous improvement.	Focus on performance, success and end results.
Provide non-judgmental feedback, support effort and performance	Provide labelling feedback; do not value effort too much; focus on quick results.
Have strong self-confidence, take joy in and do not feel	Feel intimidated or even threatened by the success of others.

threatened by the success of others, drawing inspiration from it.	
Believe that one can learn quickly and effectively from mistakes, and opportunities for success are provided.	Errors are concealed. Mistakes are often penalised. No second chances are given.
Are perseverant in the face of obstacles	Give up easily in the face of obstacles
Consider failure as an opportunity for growth and development, and success - a crowning achievement of teamwork.	Consider failure as evidence of a lack of competence or negligence, whilst success – the reconfirmation of a personal quality.

When it comes to tackling challenges, educational leaders with a fixed mindset tend to avoid them, as the risk of failure poses a threat to their self-image and to how they are perceived by their subordinates. In contrast, educational leaders with a growth mindset view challenges as opportunities to expand their skills and learn new things. Failure is not a sentence and is not a reason to abandon managerial interventions, but rather useful information for adjusting the managerial strategies adopted at a given time. Failure is analysed, interpreted and explained, thereby extracting those ‘managerial lessons’ worth learning, which inform new and improved strategies for action. Regarding the reaction to failure, educational leaders with a fixed mindset often generate maladaptive strategies such as anxiety, avoiding responsibility by externalising blame, giving up easily when faced with challenges, disengagement, etc. These leaders value the process, effort and progress in managerial endeavours. Instead of exclusively valuing and rewarding final results and performance (as in performance management systems), growth-minded leaders value their subordinates’ professional, personal and social development trajectories, the ‘journey’ undertaken (not just the destination), perseverance and resilience in the face of difficulties, and innovation, even when this does not immediately lead to measurable results.

Evidence from neuroscience suggests that individuals’ growth mindsets are directly linked to their greater willingness to provide constructive feedback and correct mistakes (Lou & Li, 2022; Moser et al., 2011). Educational leaders with a fixed mindset do not accept negative feedback, viewing it as a means of confrontation and a threat. On the other hand, educational leaders who adopt a growth mindset encourage and value even negative feedback as objective and valuable information, which can be used to improve internal processes within the organisation. This distinction has significant implications for educational management, as feedback largely determines the quality of learning and professional development processes, contributing to the pro-motion of active, participatory and democratic management. Hattie (2009) analyses feedback as a major factor in teacher performance. Thus, if schools implement a coherent system of providing feedback among teachers, through peer observation of lessons and teaching activities,

followed by the formulation of mutual observations and the provision of constructive feedback, the quality of teaching improves considerably.

Educational leaders with a growth mindset practise transformational leadership (Caldwell & Spinks, 1992; Leithwood, 1994; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006). These leaders are not merely managers concerned exclusively with compliance with procedures and the fulfilment of formal indicators, but are rather concerned with the genuine development of their subordinates and, in this regard, they promote a positive, healthy and robust organisational culture that exerts a desirable and profound influence on the behavior of the organisation's members and helps companies remain flexible and find innovative solutions to overcome obstacles. Such leaders 'manage to rally the dedication of those around them to such an extent that (...) higher levels of achievement become a moral imperative' (p. 49). These leaders are visionaries and know that their mission is to create conditions in which all members of the school community can develop to their full potential, in flexible and adaptive ways.

Another defining characteristic of these leaders is their ability to publicly embrace their 'vulnerability' – in the sense of demonstrating, through their behaviour and attitudes, that they are not 'all-knowing', that they can make mistakes, but that they are willing to learn constantly, including from their mistakes. Researcher Brown (2012) has demonstrated that leaders who display this type of authentic behavior inspire far greater trust and commitment from their colleagues than those who project an image of infallibility and authority. This represents a profound shift from the traditional model of authoritarian leadership, which still prevails in certain school organisations. In school organisations run according to the principles of a growth mindset, decision-making processes are carried out democratically, through broad consultation with the entire school community, with transparency and a forward-looking approach.

Educational leaders who adopt a growth mindset encourage staff to develop resilience and to persevere in the face of challenges, obstacles and setbacks. This resilience is essential for coping with the increasingly complex nature of school life. Educational leaders with a growth mindset openly share their reflections, uncertainties, fears, difficulties, setbacks and failures, and the learning experiences associated with them, constantly reminding staff within the school organisation that continuous learning is the key to success. Adopting a growth mindset promotes a culture of continuous quality improvement within the school organisation.

Secondly, educational leaders with a growth mindset value and praise effort, strategies and perseverance, rather than solely the cognitive abilities of their colleagues or the final results achieved within their school organisations, through encouragement such as: "Well done! You've worked really hard on this!", "Well done! You've shown that you're a team player!", "Well done! You've shown resilience in the face of challenge!". At the same time, at an organisational level, these leaders encourage the use of the word 'yet' to transform perceived failures into future opportunities for success (for example, 'I haven't mastered this yet... but I'll look into it'). Management teams that adopt a growth mindset are committed to collaborating and cooperating effectively, making complementary managerial contributions, seeking innovative solutions, providing constructive feedback, adapting to changing circumstances, and actively and interactively seeking opportunities for managerial and professional development. Members

of the management team with a growth mindset are open to exchanging ideas, learning from one another and collectively finding solutions to the school's problems.

Thirdly, educational leaders with a growth mindset value constructive feedback that helps staff and pupils to continuously improve their skills, perspective, vision, ways of thinking and acting, rather than strictly evaluating academic or professional performance.

Fourthly, in a school organisation with a growth mindset, risk-taking and risk assessment are encouraged, as is the careful analysis of mistakes, so that constructive conclusions can be drawn from them, enabling learning, progress and innovation, rather than imposing punishments, thereby reducing anxiety associated with change and innovation. In this way, educational leaders can establish themselves as catalysts for change and innovation.

3 Strategies and tools for fostering a growth mindset in educational management

The individual managerial practices of open-minded educational leaders can be capitalised in various ways: either in combination with mentoring, coaching, training, or with opportunities for learning and professional development, such as workshops and brainstorming sessions. Within a school organisation, there are numerous opportunities for learning and 'growth' alongside others who share similar values, for example: prior reading and collective analysis of educational and managerial policy documents, discussing/clarifying managerial concepts, expressing opinions, judgements, ideas or sharing personal experiences, new perspectives, receiving and giving feedback, etc. All these opportunities serve to stimulate self-awareness, boost self-confidence and build a professional learning community.

A growth mindset can also be developed at an organisational level. Educational research into the continuing professional development of educational leaders is a priority from the perspective of the growth mindset, given the central role that leadership plays in shaping the organisational culture of today's schools and in ensuring quality in education. There is also a need for more comparative studies analysing how different school organisations adopt the growth mindset paradigm.

In conclusion, one of the most significant changes brought about by the growth mindset paradigm in educational management concerns the way in which performance management systems are designed and implemented. Traditional systems for evaluating teachers' performance rely predominantly on analysing final outcomes (through spot inspections, peer observations, summative assessments and benchmarking against external standards), creating a climate of anxiety and conformity that does not foster innovation and genuine professional development. In contrast, performance management in the school organisation, oriented towards a growth mindset, is based on the following principles:

- Teacher performance evaluation becomes a continuous, communicative and reflective process, centred on identifying pathways for professional development. For example, the lesson observation form is no longer seen merely as a

tool for grading and sanctioning, but as a useful tool for improving teaching; self-assessment and peer review are integrated into the continuous assessment system, promoting accountability, learning from colleagues' experiences and mutual learning.

- The management of errors and institutional failures provides opportunities for systematic analysis, with the aim of drawing 'lessons learnt' and preventing their recurrence. In school organisations with a growth mindset, a 'culture of psychological safety' is achieved, as conceptualised by Edmondson (1999, 2018).
- Documenting and sharing best practices and less successful experiences become institutionalised activities. Meetings of the institution's committees and administrative bodies, as well as staff councils, are no longer exclusively administrative sessions, but spaces for collective reflection, communication, debate, problem-posing and -solving and organisational learning. Joint pedagogical analyses of diverse managerial and educational practices are concrete tools through which educational management based on a growth mindset operationalises a culture of continuous learning.

Generally speaking, educational leaders with a flexible mindset act in line with the growth mindset and continuously shape mindsets, setting an example of flexible thinking and positive, proactive behaviour. In this way, they guide staff towards professional and personal success in a less stressful manner, free from pressure and authoritarianism.

Here are some examples of managerial behaviours that educational leaders wishing to cultivate a growth mindset within their school organisations can promote:

- identify elements of a fixed mindset and work to mitigate them, making a conscious effort to do so;
- convey messages that foster growth, not stereotypical messages;
- are mindful of the type of feedback they give to the people they interact with and, if necessary, adapt their feedback (supporting effort, fostering perseverance and determination, ensuring a focus on solutions, and supporting development);
- provide well-considered and carefully-worded feedback, not on a personality trait, but on the action, commitment, effort, strategy, focus and perseverance that people demonstrate;
- foster a growth environment and a growth mindset;
- involve staff in organisational activities (from simple to complex) that foster a sense of competence;
- encourage a passion for testing one's limits, even in challenging situations, at different stages of life;
- openly appreciate those who step outside their comfort zone to learn something new and challenging;
- openly appreciate those who face challenges with enthusiasm, joy and a passion for testing their own limits;
- organise and carry out activities for mental enrichment (cognitive training) and socio-emotional development (emotional development workshops);

- promote the idea that there is nothing ‘shameful’ or to be hidden; flaws are to be acknowledged and overcome, as they are the key to our development; let us worry less about our image as ‘infallible’ and invest more energy in learning;
- treat mistakes as opportunities for learning and development; they do not indicate failure, but are a springboard for growth; they are painful, but they do not define us;
- advocate the development of an honest, objective and healthy self-image.

The implementation of a growth mindset in educational management must be accompanied by a critical awareness of its limitations and risks. One challenge is the risk of superficial implementation or of transforming the growth mindset into a hollow institutional slogan, the so-called ‘false growth mindset’ – that is, situations where institutions rhetorically adopt the vocabulary of the growth mindset without actually changing practices, assessment structures or organisational culture. Some studies (Sisk et al., 2018) have indicated that the effects of interventions based on the growth mindset are more modest and that there are considerable variations depending on the institutional context, the quality of implementation and the characteristics of the school organisations’ members. This nuance does not invalidate the theory, but necessitates the adjustment of expectations and a context-specific implementation.

4 Conclusions

The systemic implementation of a growth mindset at the organisational level involves more than a set of isolated interventions aimed at influencing and training school managers. This process of change requires a coherent strategy, articulated at the level of educational policies, and a paradigm shift in current educational management.

Investment in the teachers’ continuous professional development is perhaps the clearest sign of an educational management team’s commitment to the principles of a growth mindset. Some of the tools used in this regard are: professional communities of practice, which represent a model of continuous professional development compatible with the growth mindset paradigm; mentoring and educational coaching are other professional development tools perfectly aligned with the growth mindset, possessing a strongly formative and egalitarian character.

The implementation of the growth mindset as an institutional paradigm cannot be limited to the school setting, but must be viewed holistically; it requires a genuine partnership with pupils’ families and the wider social community. The school’s communication with pupils’ families and the community must also reflect the values of the growth mindset. Thus, adopting a growth mindset as an institutional paradigm entails systemic changes affecting all levels of the school organisation: leadership, organisational culture, teaching practices, assessment systems, and partnerships with pupils’ families and the community.

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