



*Study #5: Conducted by Cory Dobbs, Ed.D., of The Academy for Sport Leadership*

## **The Invisible Driving Force of Mindset (Part One)**

This study utilized a qualitative approach to explore the mental models of a Fixed Mindset and Growth Mindset (Dweck, 2007) as practiced by coaches. At the personal or individual level, we know coaches have either a fully developed operating philosophy, or a working philosophy that is grounded in the values and experiences of the coach. The purpose undergirding this research is to better understand why and how the coach with a growth mindset is more likely to engage in a formal leadership training process for their student-athletes. It is also expected that the coach with a growth mindset is more likely to present leadership opportunities to his/her student-athletes than does the coach with a fixed mindset. Because the literature on fixed mindset and growth mindset to date has only focused on classroom education the design of the research project is novel and exploratory. To begin the exploration (knowing this would be phase one of the project) I used the research question: ***How do coaches distinguish between a fixed mindset and a growth mindset?***

Coaches from four schools participated in this research; two high schools (N=35) and two colleges (N=30). Each participant was emailed a questionnaire designed by the researcher to identify the respondent's orientation—fixed or growth mindset. Each participant answered the questionnaire and, as instructed, and then rank-ordered five (5) attributional statements from the survey that they believed they would never change. The participant's were instructed to bring both documents to a scheduled group meeting.

*(\* The synopsis will only represent participants from one of the two high schools for the purpose of space. The same research processes were engaged with all of the other participants too.)*

The Group Session began with a scoring of the orientation questionnaire. Participants were then seated at one of three tables. Those that were Fixed Mindset, as identified by survey responses, sat at the same table as did the Growth Mindset and the Medial Mindset (those that straddled the line). The 5 Statements You'll Never Change

component was utilized when necessary to determine the sub-group to which the participant belonged. For subject School A (N=18) the breakdown was 6 Fixed, 3 Medial, 9 Growth.

A Nominal Grouping Session (a deliberately structured process of analyzing or conceptualizing) was used to provide a systematic way to establish each individual's superordinate personal constructs related to student-athletes and leader development.

Group members were tasked with discussing each of the 20 survey questions utilizing a laddering technique (laddering is a qualitative research technique which seeks to understand the way in which the participant sees the world). The participant's read the 20 statements aloud, one-by-one, discussing each with the ladder technique of "and what would be the consequences of thinking this way?" Followed up by "what values underlie this thinking?"

With a deeper understanding of the dualistic construct (Fixed/Growth) and supportive models and constructs, the next step was to give each participant the opportunity to choose to change tables if they desired to change their perspective and motivational orientation (Fixed or Growth). Two of the three Medial Mindset group members relocated to the Growth Mindset table, while one Fixed Mindset relocated to the Growth Mindset table. The rigor with which participants explored the Fixed and Growth Mindset demonstrated the difficulty in obtaining one's self-knowledge and self-awareness related to the deep cognitive structures and mental models controlling many of their coaching behaviors—though for this research leadership development of the student-athlete.

Data Analysis: Based on the in-depth self-exploration provided through this research it can be inferred that most coaches are able to come to a conclusion regarding their Fixed or Growth mindset. Sixty of the sixty-five participants concluded that prior to this exploratory study, *they possessed only little awareness of the depth of mindset and the social and emotional intelligence necessary to arrive at a deeper understanding of the dualistic mental model of a growth or fixed mindset as it applies to their thoughts perceptions, judgment, attitudes and behaviors.*

Author's Note: This exploratory study served as a foundation for the construction of the Model 1 and Model 2 coaching models highlighted in the author's book, *Coaching for Leadership: How to Develop a Leader in Every Locker*. Internal mechanisms, such as a fixed or growth mindset have great impact on how one apprehends and makes sense of the activities in their world. That's why coaches should undergo an exploration seeking self-awareness of one's mindset and its effects on their coaching practice.