

ACADEMY FOR SPORT LEADERSHIP RESEARCH

THE DEVELOPING MINDSET

"Original research that breaks new ground!"

This study utilized a qualitative approach to explore the issue of a Fixed Mindset and Growth Mindset (Dweck, 2007). 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 of the coach. The assumption undergirding this research is to better understand how the coach with a growth mindset is more likely to present formal leadership training and more opportunities to lead than does the coach with a fixed mindset. Because the literature on fixed mindset and growth mindset to date has only focused on education and intelligence the research approach had to be novel and exploratory. To begin the exploration (knowing this would be phase one of the project) I used the careful 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 they believed they would never change their answer. The participant's were instructed to bring both documents to a scheduled group meeting.

(This synopsis will only represent participants from one of the two high school 's for the purpose of space.)*

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 were used when necessary to determine the subgroup to which a participant belonged. For subject School A (N=18) the breakdown was 6 Fixed, 3 Medial, 9 Growth.

A Nominal Grouping Session 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. 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 deep understanding of the bipolar (Fixed/Growth) and related hierarchical constructs, the next step was to give each participant the opportunity to choose to change tables if they changed their perspective of their own orientation (Fixed or Growth). Two of the three Medial Mindset

group 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 self-knowledge related to the deep structure and mental models controlling many of their coaching behaviors.

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. All eighteen participants concluded that prior to this exploratory study, they possessed little awareness of the depth of mindset and the social and emotional intelligence necessary to arrive at a deeper understanding of the bipolar mental model.

Authors Note: This exploratory study served as a foundation for the construction of the Model 1 and Model 2 coaching models highlighted in *A Leader in Every Locker*. Internal mechanisms, such as the Fixed or Growth mindset have great impact on how one apprehends and makes sense of the activities in their world.

About the Researcher

Dr. Cory Dobbs is an accomplished researcher of human experience—a relentless investigator always exploring “how things work.” A skilled researcher, Cory’s research firm, [Theory Y Marketing Research Group](#), engages the process of naturalistic inquiry seeking in-depth understanding of social phenomena in their natural setting. (visit www.theorymarketing.com)

Cory previously taught at Northern Arizona University, Ohio University, and Grand Canyon University.