

## From Mindset to Mastery: Leadership Through Learning

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The public leadership landscape is always shifting due to policy changes, regulatory shifts, community needs, and the need for greater accountability. Throughout my experience in public service, I have come to understand that just having technical knowledge and the power that comes with being a "leader" is not enough to ensure continued effective leadership. The ability to succeed and remain relevant as a leader will depend on your willingness to continue learning. This chapter examines how a growth mindset is a significant foundational perspective for leaders that helps them adapt, be resilient, and maintain long-term effectiveness.

In the practice of leadership, a growth-oriented mindset holds that people's capabilities, abilities, and judgment are not fixed; they can be developed through effort, reflection, and experience. Leaders with this perspective, in complex and uncertain conditions, see challenges as opportunities for growth rather than as barriers to overcome.

Carol Dweck is the psychologist whose work closely aligns with the development of the concept of a growth-oriented mindset. In her research, Dr. Dweck examined how our beliefs and perceptions about our

capabilities directly affect our ability to learn, stay motivated, and perform. When someone believes they have a growth-oriented mindset, they will believe that their intelligence and competence can develop through their own hard work, feedback, and their thinking and experience. This is especially critical for leaders because, as the organizations and systems in which they work become more complex, they cannot rely solely on their previous experience.

This understanding of a growth-oriented mindset has been reinforced through my experience in public service, where I have found that as my responsibilities extend beyond delivering technical services, it's essential to maintain this mindset. Early experiences in engineering and property valuation included working in accordance with prescribed rules and regulations. As I moved into management and executive positions, I found myself in situations where I needed more than just my technical knowledge to be effective. The importance of developing leadership capabilities through learning and adjusting was clarified for me at that time.

From an adult learning perspective, a growth mindset aligns with some key principles of adult education developed by Malcolm Knowles. Specifically, adult learners are typically self-directed and learn best through real-world problem-solving. The rationale for this principle is evident in my experience with public administrations because each policy issue, assessment, or regulatory topic presented a distinct set of circumstances. Effective leadership must consider context, feedback, and changing institutional requirements rather than relying on fixed solutions.

In addition to Knowles' principles, Peter Senge emphasized that organizations sustain themselves through ongoing development at both the individual and organizational levels. Part of Senge's rationale was that leaders can help develop a culture that supports rather than punishes ongoing organizational development. While I worked at the Pag-IBIG Fund, particularly at the supervisory level, I found that the teams I worked with performed significantly better when their leaders

established a culture of openness to learning and improvements. This demonstrates how a growth mindset contributes to individual development and enhances an organization's overall resilience.

Theories of leadership further substantiate the importance of developing a growth mindset for leaders operating in uncertain environments. Ronald Heifetz distinguishes between technical issues and adaptive challenges in adaptive leadership. Technical issues can be resolved using what we already know; adaptive challenges require leaders to learn, adapt their behavior, and rethink their assumptions. Many of the issues I experienced associated with property valuation, environmental planning, and governance were adaptive challenges. To resolve these challenges effectively, I needed to be willing to revisit how I viewed certain things and remain receptive to using new techniques to achieve results.

As a leader in the public administration and planning sector, you must be aware that you are subject to regulations and held accountable by the public. Leaders with a growth mindset will use constructive feedback as a tool, rather than as a source of fear, and will continue to take responsibility for their ongoing professional development. While working in public service, I pursued a graduate degree to recognize that I will always need to address leadership effectiveness, as the demands on leaders continue to evolve.

Finally, based on theory and my experience, a growth mindset can be viewed as a practical leadership model rather than an abstract one. A growth mindset supports purposeful reflection, ethical decision-making, and adaptive capacity—all critical to leadership in complex public-sector environments. Therefore, in addition to providing a theoretical basis for effective leadership, the growth mindset is a practical approach that, when applied, contributes to the continued effectiveness of leadership in both the present and the future.