

Chapter 3

Mindset, Decision Making, and Motivation

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ABSTRACT

This chapter will provide an overview of mindset and discuss how mindset can assist in decision making and serve as a catalyst for changing perceptions that influence outcomes. Mindset is based on three theoretical foundations: 1) cognitive psychology, 2) social psychology and leadership, and 3) positive psychology. The act of applying mindset theory impacts decisions and decision making. Mindset has the ability to make changes and develop new paradigms for thinking. Strategies for applying growth mindset and how to avoid a fixed mindset will be offered to the reader. Along with the issue of motivation, mindset will also be discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Focus of the Chapter:

- Understand the theoretical concept of mindset
- Learn the difference between fixed and growth mindset
- Explore how to move from fixed mindset towards a growth mindset
- Gain insights on how mindset can help improve decision-making
- Make connections with mindset and ethical decision-making

The focus of this chapter is to present the social and psychological basis for the theoretical concept of mindset and make connections with decision making, while drawing parallels with ethical decision making. Decision making is impacted by many social factors, by innate motives and by external motives. Decision making is also affected by ethics and morals which help to situate the choice to act.

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What is mindset and how is it connected to decision making? Mindset is a frame of mind, schema, gestalt, mental picture, mental construct, mental model, mental frame, or the process of brainstorming. Any of these applied methods for thinking, for decision making, or for the application for weighing thoughts, assist humans in forward thinking. This is what the author refers to as “the mindset approach”.

Mindset is an established set of attitudes and perceptions; a mental attitude that will determine how persons respond to situations. Mindset is the view one adopts, and one that measures whether abilities and characteristics can change, or whether they are set in stone. The ability to change and the adaptability to life circumstances can be impacted by mindset. Mindset impacts intrinsic motivation (Ng, 2018) and affects behavior both deliberative and implemental frames of mind (Armor & Taylor, 2003). Mindset can also affect behavior and motivational states associated with pre-decisional and post-decisional frames of mind (Armor & Taylor, 2003). Mindset theory and characterization have attempted to identify both a task and the cognitive mechanisms that were activated to successfully perform a task.

Mindset, according to Dweck (2006) can be associated with being fixed (a closed approach that implies limits to change), or growth, a mindset which is an open attitude and frame of mind for growing, learning, and for adapting to change. Mindset can aid in making sense of the world as it is intertwined with the act of decision making.

BACKGROUND

The literature shows three theoretical overarching themes as a basis for mindset: 1) cognitive psychology; 2) social psychology and organizational leadership, and; 3) and positive psychology. According to French (2016):

The mindset concept has had a long history in the fields of cognitive psychology and more recently in organization theory where scholars have focused on the question of how people and organizations make sense of the world in which they interact (p.674).

Cognitive Psychology

Cognitive psychology conceptualizes the construct as both tasks and cognitive processes, whereas mindset describes the “general cognitive operations with distinct features that facilitate a given task” (Torelli & Kaikatic, 2009, p. 232). Mindsets are the “activation of different cognitive procedures...which affect how people interpret subsequently encountered information” (Nencov, 2012, p. 616). Mindset is also “evidenced by the effect of performing cognitive or motor activity with the likelihood of performing a similar behavior in a subsequent unrelated procedure” (Xu & Wyer, 2012, p. 921).

Social Psychology and Organizational Leadership

In the early twentieth century, the understanding of mindsets emphasized a specific cognitive process or grouping of processes and how they are associated with particular tasks. The defining characteristic of mindset conceptualization in social psychology and in organizational leadership is used for the totality of an individual or for the collective of “organizations’ cognition, mindsets are cognitive filters” (Gupta & Govindarajan, 2002, p.116). “Mindsets are a procedural tool kit, heuristic, or naive theory used to

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