

**Mindset and Psychological Attributes as Determiners for University Students' Achievement and Employability**

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**Abstract**

The development of a nation's economy is dependent on the source of its workforce. In this regard, a recent issue that has become a priority is the employability of university students. Consistent with the Malaysia Education Development Plan (Higher Education), Higher Education Institutions are required to produce competent, holistic and competitive students. To date, findings from studies are inconsistent to determine the main factors that influence university students' achievements in academic achievement that may lead to their future employability. Following this, the current study explores constructs that are necessary to cultivate university students for success and lead to higher chance of employability. Therefore, the aim of the current study is to examine the relationships between mindset and self-efficacy towards academic achievement and employability. Two sets of survey research were carried out to achieve the purpose of study. Study 1 involved 200 university students from both public and private universities. These respondents completed the Dweck's Theories of Intelligence Scale and College Self-Efficacy Instrument. Results from study 1 showed a significant difference in growth mindset between public university students and private university students. Results also revealed significant relationships between mindset and academic achievement, as well as between self-efficacy and academic achievement. Furthermore, it was evidenced that mindset and self-efficacy are able to predict students' academic achievement. In study 2, 137 university students from both public and private universities took part in the study. Mindset was measured using Dweck's Theories of Intelligence Scale, while employability was measured using the Employability Questionnaire. Results from study 2 showed that there is a significant correlation between growth mindset and employability. Findings from these two studies confirm that mindset, particularly, can be a determiner towards university students' achievement and employability. The implication that can be deduced from the findings is that higher institutions should focus on individual differences, in this case, improving students' mindset and self-efficacy to determine high achievement that includes both academic and employability.

**Keywords:** mindset, self-efficacy, academic achievement, employability, university students

The economic growth and development of a country are much dependent on its workforce. As such, it is imperative for a developing country that is striving towards being a fully developed country like Malaysia to have a workforce that is effective and productive. The world is facing so many challenges in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Globalization or a world without boundaries has brought such an impact on countries, particularly developing countries like Malaysia. Globalization is a process of global economic, political and cultural integration. "The history of globalization goes back to the second half of the twentieth century, the development of transport and communication technology led to situation where national borders appeared to be too limiting for economic activity" (Economic Globalization in

Developing Countries, 2002). Globalization is playing an increasingly important role in the developing countries. It can be seen that, globalization has certain advantages such as economic processes, technological developments, political influences, health systems, social and natural environment factors. It has a lot of benefit on our daily life. Globalization has created a new opportunities for developing countries. Such as, technology transfer hold out promise, greater opportunities to access developed countries markets, growth and improved productivity and living standards. Certainly, these opportunities, or I would say challenges will affect people, particularly a country's workforce. When there are challenges, there will be competencies that are required to deal with the challenges.

### **Challenges to the 21<sup>st</sup> century workforce**

What are the competencies that are required to cope with challenges? Burrus, Jackson, Xi and Steinberg (2013) have identified 15 components that are important through their principal component analyses (PCAs). These are problem solving, mechanical skills, service orientation, cultural literacy, business literacy, science literacy, civic literacy, information processing, athleticism, visual acuity, fluid intelligence, communication skills, teamwork, achievement/innovation, and attention to detail/near vision. What is interesting is that the 15 Components were then ranked in importance using the mean component scores over all occupations, 5 competencies stand out as important for most occupations: problem solving (e.g., complex problem solving), fluid intelligence (e.g., category flexibility), teamwork (e.g., cooperation), achievement/innovation (e.g., persistence), and communication skills (e.g., oral expression). Note that the first two ranked most important are cognitive abilities. This highlights the utmost important competency is cognitive in nature (i.e. problem solving).

### **What is a growth mindset?**

Following this, my proposal is that having the right mindset is important to ensure an effective workforce. In particular, the growth mindset. The reason is that complex problem solving is often associated with intelligence. Some researchers believe that intelligence can be formed in the individuals. To build this in a person, the person has to have a growth mindset and not fixed mindset. The concept of growth mindset was synthesized by Prof Carol Dweck, a Stanford psychologist through her book entitled *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*. A mindset, according to Dweck, is a self-perception or self-theory that a person holds about him or herself. Believing that the self is smart or intelligent is a simple example of a mindset. There have been studies that have shown relationships between growth mindset and high achievement in academic. For example, Meece and Holt (1993) found that science grades were high when they are associated with the orientation of growth mindset. Stipek and Gralinski (1996) also found that higher grades and test scores at the end of study among students that have growth mindsets when compared to students who believe that intelligence is fixed. Yeager and Dweck (2012) have shown that academic performance as a correlate to growth mindset. They also found that this view can lower the aggressiveness and stress in youths that will lead to excellent academic performance.

There also has been a perspective of researchers that believe effective problem solving skills in graduates are very important to be considered by employers in making decision on personnel selection (Reid & Anderson, 2012; Stiwne & Jungert, 2010). This perspective reflects a gap in problem solving skills that are sought by employers in graduates that are not taught in academic programs, especially at universities. 21<sup>st</sup> century employers seek workers who possess a set of general skills, in other words, somebody that is able to solve real world

problems by collaborating across many contexts. However, academicians teach problem solving skills specifically in their own discipline (Stiwne & Jungert, 2010; Wellman, 2010). Skills like problem solving are poorly defined. It actually covers various aspects from nonmechanical thinking to high cognitive processes, creativity, and adaptive leadership (Halpern, 1998). In relation to graduate employability, Preet (2015) states that one's ability to proceed in solving complex problems (an ability that is sought after by employers) is functioning from the person's identity and belief. Preet (2015) refers identity as the belief of who the person wants to be and this determines the formation of other skills. Therefore, the issue of identity must be addressed to improve graduate employability. The emphasis on identity refers on mindset, that is, one's belief on learning (an aspect of identity). Similar to Dweck (2006), Peet (2015) also believes that students with a growth mindset are more able to solve difficult tasks in comparison to students with fixed mindset. Students with a growth mindset believe that they are able to learn well. A growth mindset can also form an individual in becoming high and long term achievers. A person with a growth mindset is more likely to persevere in achieving long term goals (Peet, 2015).

### The need for growth mindset in the workforce

Hewitt (2016), in his report entitled "People Trends 2016 What HR Will Be Thinking About in the New Year" predicted major economic and human capital trends for 2016. One of the workforce organization trends is build a culture of growth. Culture will continue to be a focus area. However, given that efficiency gains have been maxed out by most firms, Hewitt expects companies to begin looking for people with a growth mindset rather than just command and control behaviors. This highlights the importance to build growth mindset in potential workers (e.g., university graduates) to meet this demand.

Sarder (2015) in his book entitled "Building an innovative learning organization" pointed out that successful people like Steve Jobs and Bill Gates have something in common. They are passionate in what they believe in, they worked hard and stayed focused on their goals, they are confident and competitive. They are also lifelong learners. Thus, learning is vital to success. When we learn, connections in the brain become stronger and new pathways are etched into our brains. This perspective has been the basis for building a growth mindset. Furthermore, Sarder (2015) emphasized some of the vital characteristics that successful organizations have in common are they are learning organizations, able to remain competitive and continue growing in a rapidly changing global environment. These organizations value, promote and support learning at all levels and have learning plans and systems that enable them to translate that learning into action. Learning is an element of a growth mindset. Sarder's view on a learning organization suggests the need for employees to have a growth mindset.

Senn Delaney which is a culture-shaping firm of Heidrick & Struggles International, Inc., has done a two-year study of several Fortune 1000 companies to examine the impact of an entire organization's mindset. Their major question is that can organizations as a whole show growth mindset characteristics? The research team also refer the term of growth mindset as "culture of development". According to the research team an organization's mindset is the belief that it and its workforce have about the nature of talent and ability. Their research has found that some companies foster a fixed mindset "culture of genius," in which talent is worshipped. This type of organizational culture asserts that employees either have it or they don't, when it comes to skills and learning capabilities. Other organizations, however, foster a growth mindset "culture of development." This type of organizational culture asserts that

people can grow and improve with effort, good strategies, and good mentoring. Culture-of-development organizations foster growth mindset, actively seeking to stretch their employees and promote new skills. Do these different organizational mindsets make a difference? If so, then how?

Their findings point to the importance of cultivating a growth mindset culture of development as key factor in creating greater agility and innovation and developing an engaged, collaborative, highly committed and trusting workforce. Particularly, in these four aspects: Greater trust - People in growth mindset “culture of development” companies have more trust in their company and a greater sense of ownership over their work. In fact, they expressed 47% higher agreement with statements about trust.

### **Stronger commitment**

Stronger commitment to company - In line with this, employees in culture-of-development companies reported that they were more committed to their company and more willing to go the extra mile for it. They are 34% likelier to feel a sense of ownership and commitment to the future of the company. Indeed, those who worked in culture-of-genius companies said they were more interested in leaving their company for another

Stronger support for risk-taking - It is the employees in culture-of-development companies — the companies that believe in people’s growth — who are more likely to say that their organization supports (measured) risk taking, innovation, and creativity. For example, they agreed more strongly with statements like: “This company genuinely supports risk-taking and will support me even if I fail,” or “When people make mistakes, this company sees the learning that results as value added.” or “People are encouraged to be innovative in this company — creativity is welcomed.”

More positive view of employees by supervisors - Yes, supervisors in these companies had significantly more positive views of their employees — and on the dimensions companies should care about. Supervisors in the culture-of-development companies rated their employees as more innovative, collaborative and committed to learning and growing.

### **Building and fostering a growth mindset culture of development**

It is critical for leaders to embody a growth mindset in order to create broad and sustainable agility, innovation, commitment and engagement. Organizations that want to foster a growth mindset culture of development will need to create an intentional focus on hiring people who have growth mindset attributes. People with growth mindsets have a sense of growing and wanting to get consistently better at what they do. They are curious and have a passion for learning and stretching themselves at every stage of their careers.

This leads to the notion that a nation that is prosperous should have a workforce with a growth mindset. Personnel training should include modules that help workers to develop a growth mindset.

### **Discussions**

What can be taken from these literature? First of all, it is clear that growth mindset is crucial in achieving an effective workforce that will lead to productive organizations. However, what is the state of the workforce in Malaysian organizations? How many companies/organizations

believe in culture of development? How does a growth mindset match with Malaysian culture and values? Can we foster growth mindset in Malaysian workforce and organizations?

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