DOES ONE SIZE FIT ALL? INVESTIGATING MINDSET AND PERFORMANCE RELATIONSHIP, BASED ON PSYCHOLOGICAL REGULATORY FOCUS THEORY AND SOCIAL LEARNING THEORY.

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ABSTRACT

Actual learning has been a critical aspect for organizations and humans in general. Organizations are trying innovative ways to convert training into actual learning but in most of the cases it goes in vain. This model tries to explore the link mindset and performance. Premised on the principles of Psychological Reactance theory and Social Learning theory, this research examines a phenomenon mindset or individual’s mental attitude or inclination towards actual learning which further has an impact on adaptive performance. Our study also contributes to our understanding of the mediating and moderating processes through which mindset is linked with adaptive performance. We also discuss the impact of organization’s learning culture on learning and adaptive performance. Drawing on psychological reactance theory and social learning theory, the model posits that the effect of mindset on learning is mediated by levels of propensity to learn while the relationship between mindset and propensity to learn is moderated by internal (pleasure/pain) and the relationship between propensity to learn and learning is moderated by external stimuli (learning culture). More specifically, an attempt is made to develop a moderated mediation model linking mindset and adaptive performance.

INTRODUCTION

In today’s fast-paced economy, corporate sectors are encountering tremendous challenges from the rapid expansion of new areas of knowledge. Organizational restructuring, technological change, intense competition, and globalization have heightened the importance of performance and human capital in sustained competitive advantage (DeNisi, Hitt, & Jackson, 2003). Thus it is imperative for organizations to adapt by appropriately modifying their system, structure and culture while maintaining the core values in actual learning. One of the most baffling and recalcitrant of the problems which business organizations face is employee resistance to learning which further leads to low performance due to lack of competence. To achieve competitive edge, it’s inevitable to not only to reach certain standards by improving their performance to align with such great demands; but also to inculcate change which further necessitates change in skills, attitude through learning. Literature suggests the creative learning significantly leads to performance, Guta, A.L. (2013). The expansion of interest in learning and performance research is best shown by the positively accelerating curve of references in organisational, Education, neuro psychology, psychological and sociological journals. Learning has been studied from
various perspectives—performance, Guta, A.L. (2013), organisational structure, culture and knowledge sharing, job satisfaction, turnover intention (Egan T.M., Yang B., Bartlett K..R. 2007). Although there is no denying the strength and ubiquitousness of adaptive learning and performance research, it is conceivable that learning and adaptive performance can manifest based on the mindset of the individuals. An attempt made to develop a moderated mediation model linking mindset and performance concept which has not to date been explored in any depth in any psychological and organisational context and represents a fertile area for future research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

ADAPTIVE PERFORMANCE

Adaptive performance is an individual’s ability to adapt to dynamic work situations (Hesketh & Neal, 1999). Increased uncertainty, complexity, turbulence, and interdependence at workplace has led workforce to demonstrate adaptive performance by adjusting their behaviours to the requirements of work situations and new events (Pulakos et al., 2000). Research on adaptive performance began with Pulakos et al. in 2000; they were first to propose a global model of adaptive performance, identifying the link between individual performance and adaptability to changes. Successful adaptive performance implies that employees are able to efficiently deal with uncertain and unpredictable work situations that may, for example, arise from organizational restructuring, a change in priorities, or scarcity of available of resources (Ashford, 1986; Edwards & Morrison, 1994; Goodman, 1994; Murphy, 1989; Weiss, 1984).

It requires inherent ability adapt quickly and easily and make decisions in the face of uncertainty and ambiguity.

MINDSET

Mindset refers to a collection of beliefs and thoughts “that make up the mental attitude, inclination, habit or disposition that predetermines a person’s interpretations and responses to events, circumstances and situation” (carrol dweck2006). A recent analysis and studies demonstrated that Mindset plays an important role in many personal and social processes, ranging from physical health and psychological well-being, to money, business and relationships. According to Carol S. Dweck, Mindset is based on ability and talent. There are two types of mindset – Fixed and Growth. The former refers to the perception of talent, personality, character, ability, intelligence and skill as fixed, and the latter refers to the perceiving that abilities, talent, intelligence and skill are not stagnant but can be grown and developed. Growth mindset individuals are especially attuned to focus on constant development with continuous practice and effort.

They are sensitive and responsive for situational requisites. The Challenge and setbacks are considered to be an opportunity for progress. Fixed mindset individuals are controlled by their affective states and attitudes and are usually sensitive to criticism, sealed to innovation and less responsive to situational requirements. They are characterized by dysfunctional self-esteem, fragility, excessive individualism, and authoritarianism. Drawing from an Athletes literature, it is clear that the athletes with a growth mindset grow, achieve, and learn far more than individuals who have a fixed mindset (Joanna Zeiger, 2014).
Literature suggests, the mindset affects leadership style just like other personality traits and character (Carol S. Dweck Mary Murphy, Jennifer Chatman, and Laura Kray, 2014), student’s performance (Blackwell, Trzesniewski, and Dweck, 2007).

From the extant literature it is clear that mindset does not only have a strong impact on learning, leadership style, & innovation but also on adaptive performance. Such that individuals with growth mindset who are open to new ideas, constant self-craving for improving the situation, hardworking and grit believers are most likely to have capability to solve new problems and develop creative methods to handle complex problems and individuals with fixed mindset are hesitant to display skills, avoid challenges and pessimistic attitude towards innovation are more unlikely to adapt performance.

Hence, our first propositions is as follows

**Proposition 1: Mindset significantly leads to Adaptive performance, such that Proposition 1a: growth mindset will relate positively to Adaptive performance and Proposition 1b: fixed mindset will relate negatively to Adaptive performance.**

**LEARNING**

Research on learning began with Wilhelm Wundt in Leipzeig, Germany in 1879. He proposed that learning is the lasting change in behaviors or beliefs that results from experience. The ability to learn provides every living organism with the ability to adapt to a changing competitive environment. Learning reflects a change over time, not a state at a particular moment in time also plays a dominant role for organisational performance and development which elicits employee retention, individual performance quality, and organizational performance (Eraut, 2007). Consistent with empirical and conceptual studies, mindset first leads to learning before actually enrolling in adaptive performance behavior. Specifically, we expect that mindset (growth or fixed) of an individual to exhibit effective learning about the uncertain and unpredictable work situations, reasons behind scarcity of reasons first and then efficiently deal through adaptive performance.

**Proposition 2: learning will mediate the relationship between mindset and Adaptive performance, such that 2a: Growth mindset will relate positively to Actual learning and it further predicts Adaptive performance better and 2b: Fixed mindset will relate negatively to Actual Learning and further reduce Adaptive performance.**

**PROPENSITY TO LEARN**

Propensity is a natural tendency to behave in a certain way. It is a natural inclination to do something. Propensity to learn is a natural or acquired habit or characteristic tendency in living beings. Studies suggest that propensity to learn as a proactive measure is an intrinsic or inner stimulus resulting in high-quality learning and creativity. The propensity to learn varies across individuals. At one end of the
spectrum are individuals who love to learn and at the other end are individuals who will only learn if tangible incentives are strong enough. Studies in the propensity to learn literature suggest that students’ inclination to learn or ‘keenness to learn’ is explored in response to graduate employability literature (Tom Bourn, Sue Greener and Asher Rospiglioni, 2011). Reliability and validity test showed organizations have high propensity to learn both at organisational and individual level, (R.chiva, J.Alegre & R.Lapedra, 2007).

So we can assume a significant positive relationship between growth mindset and propensity to learn. Growth mindset individuals in the process of learning may involve themselves in diverse internal stimuli which further stimulate propensity to learn. Hence we can contend that growth mindset with high propensity to learn predicts actual learning better. Where as an individual with fixed mindset perceive basic abilities, intelligence, and talent as fixed and do not believe in effort. Nevertheless there is lack of research on fixed mindset and propensity to learn, it is inevitable to assume that fixed mindset individual is expected to express unwillingness to learn. So there is a negative correlation between fixed mindset and propensity to learn. Hence we can contend that fixed mindset with low propensity to learn would further negate the relationship with Actual Learning.

Hence our next proposition is

**Proposition 4: Propensity to learn mediates the relationship between growth mindset and Actual learning, such that 4 a: the effects of growth mindset and propensity to learn leads to predict Actual Learning better. 4b: Propensity to learn may further negate the relationship between Fixed Mindset and Actual Learning.**

**REGULATORY FOCUS THEORY**

According to the psychological regulatory focus theory “human motivation is rooted in the approach of pleasure and the avoidance of pain, i.e. the two aspects of this theory are promotion and prevention focus. The former involves the pursuit of goals that are achievement- or advancement-related, characterized by eagerness, whereas the latter focuses on security and protection, characterized by vigilance”, (Florack et al., 2013; Higgins, 1998).

Many philosophers suggests that the feelings of pain (or suffering) and pleasure are the powerful motivators of behavior and are hypothesized as part of a same continuum. A pleasure stimulus activates inner drive for instinctive seeking of pleasure in order to satisfy biological and psychological needs. A pain stimulus activates inner drive to avoid or to adopt defensive mechanisms in order to survive to gain a larger reward. It is the unconscious human ability to endure pain or sometimes even discard pain for survival.

The pleasure stimulus which is an approach-related behavior is usually driven by ambition. We contend that growth mindset individuals who embrace challenge are more likely to experience pleasure stimulus to
express high propensity to learn. More specifically, pleasure stimulus in growth mindset individuals would further accelerate propensity to learn (willingness to learn). The pain stimulus which is an avoidance-oriented behavior would arouse feelings of uncertainty. We contend that fixed mindset individuals are more likely to engage in acquiring new information in order to reduce the unpleasant feelings of uncertainty. More specifically, pain stimulus can exert force on fixed mindset individual to learn how to avoid risks which emerges in future.

Hence our next proposition is

**Proposition 5:** Psychological regulatory focus theory moderates the relationship between mindset and propensity to learn such that, 5a: the effect of Growth mindset on propensity to learn will be stronger with pleasure stimulus and 5b: the effect of pain stimulus will negate the negative relationship between fixed mindset and propensity to learn.

**SOCIAL LEARNING THEORY**

According to Albert Bandura (1977), Social learning theory combines cognitive learning theory (which posits that learning is influenced by psychological factors) and behavioral learning theory (which assumes that learning is based on responses to environmental stimuli). We can posit that growth mindset individual learning is influenced by psychological factors and fixed mindset individual learning is based on responses to environmental stimuli.

**LEARNING CULTURE AS MODERATOR**

A learning culture is a collection of organizational covenant, values, practices and processes. Learning culture has been studied from various perspectives such as innovations (Raid Bates & Samer Khasawneh, Kandemir & Hult, 2005), Organisational commitment and turnover intentions (Baek Kyoo’s 2010).

As mentioned earlier, the attitude of individuals with growth mindset are open minded, hardworking, calm, carving to reach their full potential produces mental stimulation that elicits willingness to learn response. We assert that the effect of propensity to learn on actual learning depends on learning culture adopted by the organization. The effect of propensity to learn on Actual Learning may change based on the moderating effects of Learning culture. We contend that propensity to learn based on interactive effects of mindset (Growth or Fixed) with pleasure/ pain stimuli tend to have different effects on actual Learning when interacted by learning culture. Based on social Learning theory, we can posit that growth mindset individual learning is influenced by psychological factors and fixed mindset individual learning is based on responses to environmental stimuli. Based on social learning theory, we contend that growth/ fixed mindset individuals with pleasure/pain stimuli would exhibit high propensity to learn which further significantly leads to effective actual learning when interacted by learning culture in the organization. We can assume
that fixed mindset individuals move towards learning due to pain stimulus and also in exchange for tangible incentives.

Hence our next Proposition is as follows

Preposition 6: Learning Culture moderates the relationship between Mindset and Actual Learning such that the 6a. Learning Culture strengthens the relationship between propensity to learn with growth mindset (driven by pleasure stimulus) and Actual Learning and Adaptive performance. 6b: learning culture may strengthen the relationship between propensity to learn with fixed mindset (driven by pain stimulus) and Actual Learning and Adaptive performance.

IMPLICATION / DISCUSSION / CONCLUSION

Thus far, we have presented a model of mindset leading to learning and adaptive performance and have identified internal (Pleasure/Pain) stimuli and external (learning culture) stimuli that increase the likelihood that it will manifest. Pain stimulus might contradict the negative affect on adaptive performance through leaning from fixed mindset implies that each individual is unique and have distinct learning ability. It is the strategists’ role to develop innovative training techniques to unleash learning capability of individuals as it is true that no one-size-fits-all model for learning. Though the paper is conceptual based it facilitates to understand how different types of mindset positively or negatively leads to Learning and adaptive performance. This model can also be examined across genders, age, and educational qualifications etc., to check its generalizability. We have tried to explain why in spite of adopting good learning strategies, organization performance is elusive. Through this model, organizations can understand the type of mindset the individuals have and strategists can develop appropriate learning techniques to ensure individual growth and to further accelerate organisational adaptive performance.

REFERENCE


