

## THE ETHICAL MINDSET:

### NATURE OR NURTURE?

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## The Ethical Mindset: Nature or Nurture?

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## The Ethical Mindset: Nature or Nurture?

- ▶ Why is this important?
  - ▶ We have the opportunity to impact the future ethicality of our professions
  - ▶ How can this best be accomplished?
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## The Ethical Mindset Outline

- ▶ What is “Mindset?”
  - ▶ How do we develop an ethical mind and become ethical learners?
  - ▶ What can educational institutions, workplaces, and organizations do to positively influence the ethical mindset?
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## What Is Meant By Ethics?

- ▶ Ethical conduct is based on our ethical standards—one’s family, morals, and culture
  - ▶ Are our ethical standards reasonable and well-founded?
  - ▶ Ethics seeks to answer two questions:
    - *What* should we do?
    - *Why* should we do it?
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## What Is Meant By Ethics?

- ▶ Health care providers are bound by state and federal law
  - ▶ Also bound by certain ethical standards—personal standards and professional Code of Ethics and ethical guidelines
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## Can Ethics Be Taught?

- ▶ Socrates
  - Ethics consists of knowing what we ought to do
  - Knowing what we ought to do can be taught
- ▶ Today—The Concept of Moral Development and the Ethical Mind



## Mindset: The New Psychology of Success—How We Can Learn to Fulfill Our Potential

- ▶ Carol S. Dweck, Ph.D.
- ▶ Published 2006
- ▶ It's not always the people that start out the smartest that end up the smartest (Alfred Binet)
- ▶ Why? The power of mindset in determining success (and developing an ethical mindset)



## Mindset

- ▶ Definition: the established set of attitudes held by someone
- ▶ Two mindsets: fixed and growth



## Mindset

- ▶ Fixed Mindset
  - Belief that one's qualities—amount of intelligence, a certain personality, and a certain moral character are immutable
- ▶ Growth Mindset
  - Belief that one's qualities are only a *starting point*-- can be cultivated and grown through effort
  - Everyone can change and grow
- ▶ Fixed mindset—how will I be judged?
- ▶ Growth mindset—how can I improve?



## Mindset

- ▶ Fixed Mindset:
  - Failure is transformed from an action (I failed) to an identity (I am a failure)
  - When facing a transition, it is seen as a threat (losers are forever)
- ▶ Growth Mindset:
  - Love of a challenge—how can I do better?
  - Belief in effort
  - Convert life's setbacks into future successes
  - Resiliency



## Mindset

- ▶ Fixed mindset environment:
  - When image is threatened—blame, make excuses, stifle critics and rivals
  - Worry about being judged or fear of being judged
  - Difficulty in admitting errors
  - Difficult for courage and innovation to survive in an environment with a fixed mindset
- ▶ Growth mindset environment:
  - Courage to be open—to welcome change and new ideas
  - Demonstrates a readiness to grow



## Mindset--GROUPTHINK

- ▶ Everyone in a group starts to think alike
- ▶ Unproductive levels of harmony
- ▶ No one disagrees or takes a critical stance



## Mindset--GROUPTHINK

- ▶ Fixed Mindset:
  - Dissent is punished
  - People may not stop thinking critically but they will stop speaking up
  - We are brilliant and superior therefore nothing will go wrong (Enron)
- ▶ Growth Mindset:
  - Leads to full and open discussion
  - Enhances decision-making (no fear of being judged)
  - Belief that people can be independent thinkers and team players at the same time



## The Ethical Mind

- ▶ Professor Howard Gardner—Harvard Business Review, March 2007, p. 51 – 56.
- ▶ 5 Mindsets for the Future (2008)
- ▶ Put forth the theory of multiple intelligences
- ▶ The Five Minds



## Development of the Ethical Mind

- ▶ Begins at home—absorb parent's values
- ▶ Peers and colleagues—have an enormous effect as children get older
- ▶ Community
  - How are the young and old cared for?
  - Are there cultural and social events to learn from?
  - Is good work rewarded?



## Development of the Ethical Mind

- ▶ An ethical mind is easier to obtain when one is raised or in an environment where good work is the norm
- ▶ Who do parents, teachers, educators, or leaders set as examples for children or young adults?



## Becoming As Ethical As We Think We Are: The Ethical Learner At Work

- ▶ Dolly Chugh Stern School of Business, NYU
- ▶ Mary C. Kern Baruch College
- ▶ What it takes to be an "ethical learner"
  - Moral Identity
  - Psychological Literacy
  - Growth Mindset



## The Three Qualities of an Ethical Learner

- ▶ Moral identity: an individual's self-concept and whether it is based on moral traits (development of an ethical mind)
- ▶ Psychological literacy: The understanding that a gap exists between our self-view—how we *believe* we behave--and our *actual* ethical behavior
- ▶ Growth Mindset:

## Qualities of an Ethical Learner

- ▶ Fixed Mindset
  - Character is set—one only has a certain level of morality
  - Therefore view of oneself (self-view) must be one of being highly ethical
  - If self-view is threatened—the only recourse is to view the ethical failure as being either morally acceptable or someone else's fault
  - Self-threat question is "Am I ethical?" And the answer is either "yes" or "no"

## Qualities of an Ethical Learner

- ▶ Growth Mindset:
  - How can I improve my self-view—in what ways is it right or wrong?
  - "What can I learn from this?"
  - "How can I become more ethical?"

## The Ethical Learner

- ▶ Transition from ethical learner to actual improvement in ethical behavior
- ▶ Necessity of "psychological safety"

## The Ethical Learner in an Organization

- ▶ Challenges of Organizational Life
  - The ethical climate is formed at the organizational level and influences individual ethical decision-making
  - Perceived risk for speaking up, asking for help, admitting mistakes, proposing an idea, taking blame, confessing uncertainty about right versus wrong, or concerns about one's ability to perform
  - Individuals are not forthcoming
    - Do not want to be viewed as unethical
    - Keep their questions and ethical challenges to themselves

## The Ethical Learner in an Organization

- ▶ Groupthink
  - Group norms influence individual ethical behavior
  - Groups will lie more than individuals if lying benefits economic outcomes

## Challenges at the Organizational Level

- ▶ Ethics is ambiguous
  - Small ethical lapses occur and reoccur without addressing or learning from them—minimized
  - Over time, small ethical lapses if not addressed have the potential to escalate to headline ethical failures
- ▶ Ethical failures are stigmatized

## Challenges at the Organizational Level

- ▶ Failure is stigmatized
  - Most failure is seen as a “bad” failure
  - “Smart” failure allows for growth, improvement, innovation
  - Small ethical lapses—should be viewed positively as opportunity to avoid disastrous results in the future
  - Goal—reduce the likelihood of small ethical lapses to morph into major ethical breaches
  - Requires highlighting and learning from small lapses rather than ignoring or diminishing them

## What Prevents Us From Behaving Ethically?

- ▶ Bad behaviors of others
- ▶ If people around you are cheating and are successful, you assume that it is the price of success and you cheat because “everyone does it”
- ▶ “I would like to behave ethically, but that is a luxury”—temptation to behave less ethically is mounting

## Psychological Safety

- ▶ Definition of psychological safety
  - Shared belief that a team is safe for personal risk-taking
  - An environment where individuals are encouraged to disclose and discuss failure

## Psychological Safety

- ▶ Ethical learner is allowed to thrive (self-threat is reduced)
- ▶ Ethically ambiguous situations can be discussed, reflected upon and changed
- ▶ Admit difficulties and ask for help rather than resorting to cheating or taking shortcuts

## The Role of Institutions

- ▶ Does the leadership—and the members—aspire to do good work?
- ▶ Does the educational institution, workplace, and organization
  - Select those who do good work?
  - Reward those who continue to do good work?
  - Remove those who do bad work and threaten to infect others with their bad attitudes, shortcuts, and poor quality work?

## The Role of Institutions

The real test of an individual or organization's ethical fiber is what happens when there are pressures?

How do we stand up and "do the right thing?"



## Conclusions

- ▶ **Leadership is key**
  - Best way to maintain the moral compass of an organization is to believe that being moral is essential for the good of the organization
  - State beliefs from the onset and tie rewards and sanctions to their realization
  - Leaders act ethically even though it may cost relationships with supervisors or colleagues



## Conclusions

- ▶ Staff listens to what their leaders say and watches what their leaders do
- ▶ Less likely to behave ethically when they see leaders and others "get away with it"
- ▶ Staff **is** inspired by leaders who act ethically
- ▶ It's easier to do good work when everyone is focused on the same thing



## Conclusions

- ▶ Find a trusted advisor—either within the organization or outside the organization (but maintain confidentiality)
- ▶ Be prepared to speak honestly with them about the issue
- ▶ Let them be an independent sounding board



# QUESTIONS?



# THANK YOU!

