



Growth Mindset Leadership and Employee Performance: Evidence from Cambodia's Emerging Economy

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the impact of growth mindset leadership on employee performance among working professionals in Cambodia. Leadership plays a crucial role in shaping employee behavior and organizational outcomes, particularly in dynamic and competitive environments. However, limited research has explored how leaders' mindset orientations influence employee performance in emerging economies. This study aims to address this gap by investigating whether growth mindset leadership enhances employee performance. A quantitative research design was employed, and data were collected from 61 working professionals across multiple sectors. The data were analyzed using correlation and regression analysis. The findings show that growth mindset leadership has a positive and statistically significant association with employee performance, explaining 49.1% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.491$). This study contributes by applying growth mindset theory to leadership research in an emerging economy context. These results indicate that leaders who emphasize learning, development, and continuous improvement can significantly improve employee effectiveness. This study contributes to the literature by applying growth mindset theory to leadership research in an emerging economy context and providing empirical evidence from Cambodia. The findings also offer practical implications for organizations seeking to enhance performance through leadership development.

Keywords: Cambodia, Employee Performance, Growth Mindset Leadership, Leadership Development, Organizational Behavior

INTRODUCTION

Employee performance remains a critical factor influencing organizational success, particularly in today's dynamic and competitive business environment. Cambodia has experienced steady economic growth, with GDP growth averaging above 5% in recent years; however, challenges remain in labor productivity and workforce capability development (Weltbank, 2023). Organizations in Cambodia continue to face difficulties in improving employee performance and adapting to increasingly competitive market conditions, highlighting the need for more effective leadership approaches (Ly, 2024). In this context, leadership is widely recognized as a fundamental factor influencing employee behavior and organizational performance (López-Cabarcos et al., 2022; Northouse, 2021). However, traditional leadership approaches—particularly transactional and control-oriented leadership styles—have been found to be less effective in promoting long-term employee development and adaptability in dynamic environments (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Hoch et al., 2018). These limitations create a need for more development-oriented leadership approaches that emphasize learning, growth, and continuous improvement.

One emerging approach is growth mindset leadership, which is grounded in growth mindset theory. This perspective suggests that individuals' abilities and intelligence can be developed through effort, learning, and persistence (Yeager & Dweck, 2020). When applied to leadership, this perspective suggests that leaders who believe in employee development are more likely to encourage learning, support improvement, and foster resilience (Dweck, 2006; Yeager & Dweck, 2020). Such leaders create environments where employees are motivated to embrace challenges and continuously enhance their performance. This theoretical perspective aligns with contemporary leadership theories that emphasize employee empowerment and capability development (Hoch et al., 2018; Koziel et al., 2021).

Recent studies in the fields of social sciences and organizational research have emphasized the critical role of leadership practices in improving employee performance and overall organizational outcomes, particularly within developing countries (Som et al., 2024; Khath & Tan, 2024). Moreover, Banks et al. (2022) and Hoch et al. (2018) have highlighted the importance of leadership in influencing employee outcomes, including motivation, engagement, and performance. Other studies further suggest that leadership behaviors that encourage learning and continuous development can enhance employee effectiveness (Koziel et al., 2021). Nevertheless, most existing studies have focused on well-established leadership styles such as transformational, servant, or ethical leadership, while relatively limited attention has been given to growth mindset leadership in organizational contexts. Moreover, prior research has largely been conducted in developed countries, leaving a gap in understanding how this leadership approach functions in emerging economies.

Cambodia represents a rapidly developing economic context, with sustained GDP growth and increasing integration into regional and global markets. However, challenges remain in labor productivity, workforce capability, and performance management (Weltbank, 2023). Organizations in Cambodia continue to face difficulties in improving employee performance and adapting to competitive business environments, highlighting the need for effective leadership approaches. Despite these challenges, empirical research examining leadership practices that promote employee development and performance in Cambodia remains limited.

Based on this gap, this study seeks to investigate the effect of growth mindset leadership on employee performance among working professionals in Cambodia. This study contributes to the literature in several ways. First, it extends growth mindset theory from individual-level applications to the domain of organizational leadership. Second, it provides empirical evidence from an emerging economy, thereby enhancing the generalizability of leadership research. Finally, the findings offer practical insights for organizations seeking to improve employee performance through leadership practices that emphasize learning and development.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Growth Mindset Leadership

Growth mindset leadership is grounded in growth mindset theory, which posits that individuals' abilities and competencies can be developed through effort, learning, and persistence (Dweck, 2006; Yeager & Dweck, 2020). Recent leadership research highlights that development-oriented leadership plays a critical role in shaping positive employee outcomes. Leadership approaches that promote empowerment, learning, and growth have been associated with higher levels of motivation, engagement, and performance (Hoch et al., 2018; Banks et al., 2022). Growth mindset leadership aligns with these perspectives by encouraging employees to embrace challenges, learn from mistakes, and continuously improve their skills (Han & Stieha, 2020). Leaders who adopt this mindset are more likely to provide constructive feedback, recognize effort, and create supportive environments that enhance employee capability (Lei et al., 2020).

Furthermore, growth mindset leadership is consistent with contemporary leadership theories that emphasize people-centered approaches. For example, servant leadership focuses on employee development, empowerment, and well-being, which are closely aligned with growth mindset principles (Buil, Isabel & Matute, 2019). Similarly, recent studies indicate that effective leadership in modern organizations requires fostering adaptability and learning capacity among employees (Northouse, 2021; Koziel et al., 2021). In addition, leadership behaviors that promote learning and development have been shown to positively influence employee well-being and performance (Saks, 2022). Therefore, growth mindset

leadership represents a meaningful and relevant framework for understanding leadership effectiveness in dynamic organizational environments.

Growth Mindset Leadership and Employee Performance

Employee performance is a key determinant of organizational success, as it directly influences productivity, efficiency, and competitive advantage. Prior research consistently indicates that leadership is one of the most important factors influencing employee performance, particularly when leaders provide direction, support, and opportunities for development (Banks et al., 2022; Koziel et al., 2021). Leadership approaches that emphasize learning and continuous improvement can strengthen employee confidence, increase effort, and enhance performance outcomes.

From the perspective of growth mindset theory, employee performance tends to improve when individuals operate in environments that emphasize effort, learning, and continuous development. Leaders who promote a growth mindset encourage employees to view challenges as opportunities rather than obstacles. This reduces fear of failure and increases willingness to engage in learning and problem-solving activities. As a result, employees become more motivated and capable of improving their performance over time (Yeager & Dweck, 2020).

Empirical studies also support the relationship between development-oriented leadership and employee performance. Leadership styles that encourage empowerment, autonomy, and skill development have been linked to improved job performance and positive workplace behaviors (Hoch et al., 2018; Kim et al., 2020). These findings suggest that leadership behaviors aligned with growth mindset principles can significantly enhance employee effectiveness. Although growth mindset leadership has received less direct empirical attention compared to traditional leadership styles, its underlying principles are consistent with recent findings in leadership and organizational behavior research.

In emerging economies such as Cambodia, the role of leadership in improving employee performance is particularly important. Organizations often face challenges related to workforce capability, productivity, and performance management. In such contexts, leadership approaches that promote learning, adaptability, and continuous improvement can provide practical solutions for enhancing employee outcomes. Therefore, examining the impact of growth mindset leadership on employee performance is both theoretically relevant and practically valuable.

Hypothesis Development

Based on growth mindset theory and recent leadership research, it is expected that leaders who emphasize employee development, learning, and continuous improvement will positively influence employee performance. When leaders create supportive environments that encourage effort, adaptability, and

growth, employees are more likely to perform effectively and contribute to organizational success. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Growth mindset leadership has a positive and significant effect on employee performance.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A quantitative approach was employed in this study using a cross-sectional survey design to examine the relationship between growth mindset leadership and employee performance. This approach is appropriate for testing relationships between variables and providing empirical evidence to support the research objectives (Creswell & Creswell, 2023; Creswell & Guetterman, 2024). Quantitative research methods are widely used in social science research to measure variables and analyze relationships in a systematic and objective manner.

The study focuses on two main variables: growth mindset leadership as the independent variable and employee performance as the dependent variable. Growth mindset leadership refers to leadership behaviors that emphasize employee development, learning, and continuous improvement, while employee performance refers to the effectiveness of employees in fulfilling their job responsibilities.

The data for this study were obtained from working professionals across different sectors, including private companies, public organizations, and service industries. A purposive sampling technique was employed, and respondents were selected based on the following criteria: (1) currently employed, (2) having at least one year of work experience, and (3) directly reporting to a supervisor. These criteria ensured that respondents had sufficient experience to evaluate leadership practices within their organizations. A total of 61 valid responses were collected and used for analysis.

Data were collected through an online survey to ensure accessibility and efficiency. The research instrument used in this study was a structured questionnaire adapted from established studies in leadership and organizational behavior research. The questionnaire consisted of two main sections: (1) demographic information and (2) measurement items for the study variables. All items were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

The measurement items for growth mindset leadership captured leaders' support for learning, encouragement of employee development, and openness to improvement. Employee performance was measured using indicators related to employees' effectiveness in fulfilling their job responsibilities. The use of a structured questionnaire ensured consistency and reliability in data collection. Data collection was conducted through an online survey to ensure accessibility and efficiency. The questionnaire was distributed electronically to respondents, and

participation was voluntary. Respondents were assured of confidentiality and anonymity to maintain ethical research standards.

The collected data were analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the respondent profile, while Pearson correlation analysis was applied to examine the relationship between variables. Linear regression analysis was conducted to test the effect of growth mindset leadership on employee performance. Reliability analysis was conducted to assess the internal consistency of the measurement scales. The results indicated acceptable reliability, with Cronbach's alpha values of 0.85 for growth mindset leadership and 0.88 for employee performance, exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70 (Hair et al., 2019).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The descriptive statistics of the study variables are presented in Table 1. The findings suggest that growth mindset leadership ($M = 3.87$, $SD = 0.62$) and employee performance ($M = 3.92$, $SD = 0.58$) are both rated at relatively high levels among respondents. These findings suggest that employees generally perceive their leaders as supportive of learning and development, which aligns with the concept of growth mindset leadership discussed in the literature. Such leadership practices are expected to foster positive work behaviors and enhance performance outcomes (Yeager & Dweck, 2020).

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Variables

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Growth Mindset Leadership	61	3.87	0.62
Employee Performance	61	3.92	0.58

Source: Author's Calculation (2026)

The correlation analysis results shown in Table 2 reveal a strong and statistically significant positive relationship between growth mindset leadership and employee performance ($r = .701$, $p < .01$). This finding indicates that higher levels of growth mindset leadership are associated with higher levels of employee performance. However, it is important to note that correlation analysis does not establish causality or the direction of the relationship. Given the cross-sectional design of the study, the results should be interpreted as evidence of association rather than causal influence.

The strength of this relationship is consistent with previous studies suggesting that leadership approaches focused on development and empowerment are positively linked to employee outcomes (Kaya & Karatepe, 2020; Koziel et al., 2021). These findings suggest that leaders who encourage learning and improvement may contribute to enhanced employee effectiveness.

Table 2. Correlation Matrix

Variables	1	2
Growth Mindset Leadership	1.000	.701**
Employee Performance	.701**	1.000

Note: $p < .01$

Source: Author's calculation (2026)

To further examine the relationship, linear regression analysis was conducted, and the results are presented in Table 3. The findings indicate that growth mindset leadership is significantly associated with employee performance ($\beta = .701$, $p < .001$). The model explains approximately 49.1% of the variance in employee performance ($R^2 = .491$).

In a simple linear regression model with a single predictor, the standardized coefficient (β) is mathematically equivalent to the correlation coefficient (r). Therefore, the regression results confirm the strength of the relationship observed in the correlation analysis, rather than providing additional independent evidence.

The overall model was statistically significant ($F = 55.50$, $p < .001$), indicating that growth mindset leadership is a meaningful predictor of employee performance within the context of this study.

Table 3. Regression Results

Variable		Beta (β)	t-value	Sig. (p-value)
Growth Mindset Leadership		.701	7.45	.000
Model Summary	Value			
R	.701			
R ²	.491			
Adjusted R ²	.482			
F-value	55.50			
Sig. (F)	.000			

Source: Author's Calculation (2026)

The findings of this study provide preliminary evidence of a positive relationship between growth mindset leadership and employee performance. The results suggest that leaders who emphasize learning, development, and continuous improvement are associated with higher levels of employee effectiveness. This finding supports the proposed hypothesis and highlights the importance of leadership mindset in shaping employee outcomes.

These results are consistent with growth mindset theory, which suggests that individuals are more likely to perform effectively when they believe their abilities can be developed through effort and learning (Yeager & Dweck, 2020). Leaders

who adopt a growth mindset may create supportive environments that encourage employees to embrace challenges, learn from mistakes, and continuously improve their competencies. Such environments may reduce fear of failure and increase motivation, which could help explain the improved performance outcomes observed.

The findings also align with recent leadership research emphasizing the role of development-oriented leadership in enhancing employee performance. Prior studies have shown that leadership approaches focused on empowerment, learning, and capability development positively influence employee engagement and productivity (Kaya & Karatepe, 2020; Banks et al., 2022; Koziel et al., 2021). In addition, leadership behaviors that promote employee well-being and development have been linked to improved workplace outcomes (Saks, 2022). Growth mindset leadership reflects these characteristics, as it encourages employees to develop their skills and take ownership of their performance.

Furthermore, the results support the argument that leadership mindset is a critical factor in modern organizational effectiveness. Contemporary leadership theories highlight the importance of fostering adaptability, learning, and continuous improvement among employees (Northouse, 2021; Koziel et al., 2021). Growth mindset leadership contributes to this perspective by promoting a culture where employees are encouraged to grow and improve over time. This reinforces the idea that leadership is not only about directing employees but also about developing their potential.

From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that organizations should prioritize leadership development programs that promote a growth mindset. Leaders who provide constructive feedback, support learning, and encourage improvement can enhance employee motivation and performance. This is particularly relevant in emerging economies such as Cambodia, where organizations face challenges related to workforce capability and performance improvement. Growth mindset leadership offers a practical and effective approach for addressing these challenges and improving organizational outcomes.

Overall, this study contributes to the literature by demonstrating that growth mindset leadership has a significant influence on employee performance. By linking empirical findings with recent theoretical developments, the study provides a deeper understanding of how leadership mindset shapes employee behavior and performance in organizational contexts. This study extends growth mindset theory by demonstrating its application in leadership and its impact on employee performance in an emerging economy context.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the effect of growth mindset leadership on employee performance among working professionals in Cambodia. The findings confirm that growth mindset leadership has a significant and positive influence on employee

performance, emphasizing the importance of leadership approaches that support learning, development, and continuous improvement. Leaders who adopt a growth mindset are more likely to create supportive environments that encourage employees to enhance their capabilities, adapt to challenges, and achieve higher levels of performance. This study contributes to the literature by extending growth mindset theory into the context of organizational leadership and providing empirical evidence from an emerging economy. From a practical perspective, the findings highlight the need for organizations to invest in leadership development initiatives that promote a growth mindset in order to improve employee performance and sustain long-term organizational effectiveness.

This study provides preliminary evidence of a positive relationship between growth mindset leadership and employee performance. The findings highlight the importance of leadership approaches that emphasize learning, development, and continuous improvement in enhancing employee effectiveness within organizational settings. Nevertheless, this study has several limitations. The sample size is relatively small, and the data were collected from a single country context, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. In addition, the cross-sectional research design does not allow for causal inference, and the use of self-reported data may introduce response bias. Future research may build on this study by examining potential mediating variables such as employee motivation, psychological safety, and self-efficacy, as well as moderating factors including organizational culture and leadership experience. These additional variables may provide a deeper understanding of the mechanisms through which growth mindset leadership is associated with employee performance.

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