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# Staying Relevant in The Workplace

Develop Lifelong Learning Mindsets

PROF. DR. NICK H.M. VAN DAM AND  
ASST. PROF. DR. J. BRASSEY

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# **STAYING RELEVANT IN THE WORKPLACE: DEVELOP LIFELONG LEARNING MINDSETS**

Staying Relevant in The Workplace: Develop Lifelong Learning Mindsets

1<sup>st</sup> edition

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# ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**PROF. DR. NICK VAN DAM** is full professor CORPORATE LEARNING & LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT.



Nick has a passion for people development and is excited about helping individuals to reach their full potential. He strongly believes that lifelong learners are more successful professionally and lead happier, more fulfilling lives. Nick is keenly interested in the emerging insights from the fields of positive development including: Psychology, Sociology, Cognitive Neuroscience, Andragogy and Philosophy. These all have enormous potential to transform people development and to lead to the creation of healthy, humanly sustainable organizations. Nick studied Economics, Business Economics and Pedagogy (Vrije Leergangen – Vrije Universiteit van Amsterdam), Organizational Sociology (Universiteit van Amsterdam) and earned his Doctorate of Philosophy (Ph.D., Human Capital Development).

He started his career in 1986 as a training consultant at (Siemens-) Nixdorf. In 1995, he joined Deloitte Consulting in the USA and served for 19 years in international Consulting/ Learning & Development/Human Resources executive roles. Currently he is a partner, Global Chief Learning Officer and Client Advisor at McKinsey & Company. Nick is a visiting professor and advisory board member at the University of Pennsylvania's, PennCLO Executive Doctorate Program. In 2016, he joined the Corporate Advisory Board of edX which is a non-profit organization founded by Harvard and MIT, with a mission to bridge the gap between education and employment.

Nick has (co)authored 17 books and is an internationally known thought leader in Human Capital Development. His latest book: *YOU! The Positive Force in Change*. Nick has written many articles and has been quoted by *The Financial Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *Fortune Magazine*, *Business Week*, *Harvard Business Review*, *The India Times*, *Information Week*, *Management Consulting*, *CLO Magazine*, and *T+D Magazine*. Under the patrons of the European Parliament Federal Ministry of Education & Research, he received 'The 2013 Leonardo European Corporate Learning Award' for *shaping the future of organizational learning and leadership development*.

He is the Founder and Chairman of e-Learning for Kids ([www.e-learningforkids.org](http://www.e-learningforkids.org)), a global non-profit foundation that offers free, digital lessons for underserved elementary school aged children worldwide.

## DR. JACQUI BRASSEY

Jacqui considers herself very fortunate to be a true **Lifelong Learner** – throughout her professional career she has been working on quite a few ‘Greenfield’ projects, building a strong ‘**M-profile**’ within her overall field of expertise as ‘practitioner-academic’, living and working in multiple countries experiencing many different cultures and organizations.



She brings about 20 years of professional experience in Human Resources (Org. Effectiveness, Leadership Development and Learning, Employee Engagement, Diversity & Inclusion and HR Analytics), Customer Development, Sustainability (NGO) and Academia.

A large part of her business career she has been in global HR Expertise roles at **Unilever**, leading Employee Engagement, People & Organization Insight, Organizational Diagnostics, Learning and Leadership Development.

Following her passion for leadership and talent development, she also has been a career development advisor and a lecturer in Diversity and Inclusion for International MBA students at **Luiss Business School** in Rome, Italy.

She joined **McKinsey & Company** in 2013 as an Expert Consultant in the Organization Practice where she specialized in Transformational Change, Diversity and Inclusion, Human Capital and Leadership Development; Currently she is responsible for the Leadership Development and Learning of their most Senior Partners and is Client Advisor. Over her career, she has been based in the Netherlands, Belgium, Italy and the UK.

She holds a B.C. in International Business & Languages (Avans University of Applied Sciences), a Cum Laude M.A in Organization Studies (Tilburg University) and has complemented her business experience with related applied academic research through her Ph.D. study in Economics & Business at Groningen University.

Next to her role at McKinsey & Company, she also an Assistant Professor at **the School of Governance of Tilburg University**. In her current research she focuses on Authentic Confidence and Emotional Flexibility in leaders and organizations. Together with other senior business professionals, she founded **'The Confidence Project'** in January 2016 to raise awareness on this topic in the professional context.

Last but not least, she is a very passionate and proud member of the Supervisory Board of **Save the Children** in the Netherlands.

She has (Co-)authored a number of scientific and practitioner books and articles.

Dr. Nick van Dam and Dr. Jacqui Brassey are continuously developing, through their research and experience, the following diagnostic instruments to help you grow and develop:

- A. MINDSETS FOR LIFELONG LEARNERS and
- B. AUTHENTIC PROFESSIONAL CONFIDENCE.

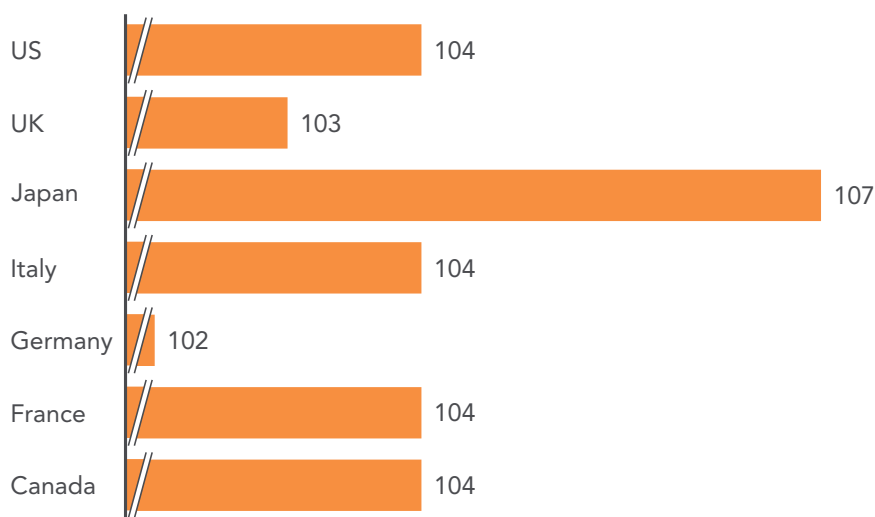
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# 1 LIFELONG LEARNING

Organizations around the world are experiencing sweeping, rapid changes in what they do, how they do it, and even why they do it. Mastering current and future realities requires deep learning capabilities. The people who will thrive and flourish in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are those who embrace lifelong learning and are motivated to up-skill and re-skill themselves during their lifetime.

Lifelong learning can be defined as: *lifelong, voluntary and self-motivated pursuit of knowledge for personal or professional reasons*. The overall aim of learning is to improve knowledge, skills and competencies.

One motivator for a need to keep learning are the changes in pension policies around the world caused by a continuing growth in life expectancy. Existing data suggests that since 1840 there has been an increase in life expectancy of three months for every year.



**FIGURE 1:** OLDEST AGE AT WHICH 50% OF BABIES BORN IN 2007 ARE PREDICTED TO STILL BE ALIVE  
Source: Gratton, 2016.

Nick van Dam's son, Yannick, who was born in 1997, has a 50 percent probability of reaching the age of 100 or 101. The factors behind the increase of life expectancy are: better health; earlier diagnoses; better nutrition; better medical care; better education; and tackling the diseases of old age.



## 2 INDIVIDUALS: BECOME LIFELONG LEARNERS

Studies show that people who maintain their ability to learn, outpace others professionally. When people are learning they feel the effects of dopamine (which is a neurotransmitter) in their brain which give them a good feeling and makes them want to engage in more of these learning experiences. It is noticed that people flourish when they learn and connect with other people.

Lifelong learning starts and ends with the individual. In the following section we will introduce and discuss six distinctive mindsets and practices which support people in becoming lifelong learners.



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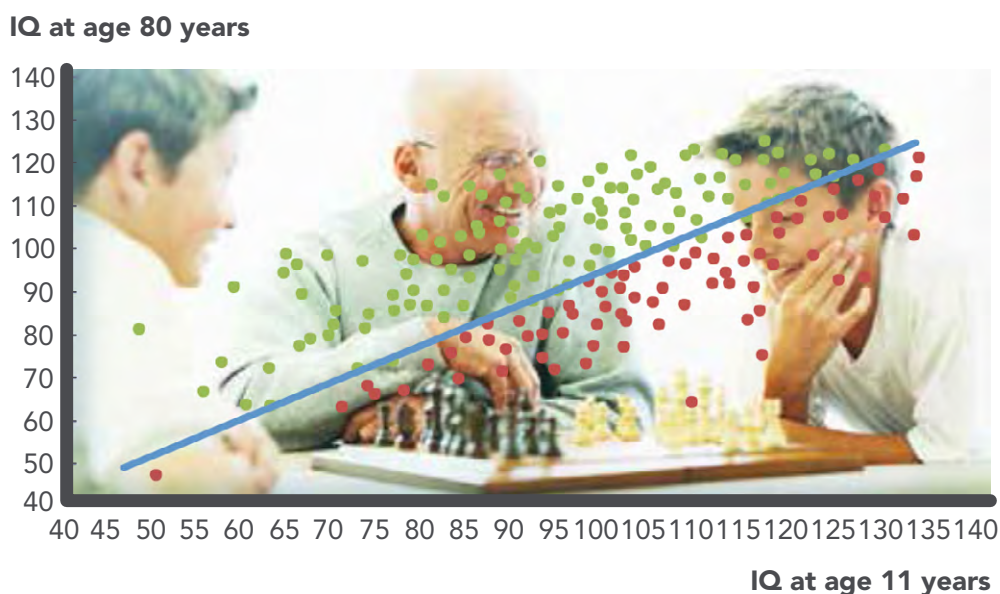
**FIGURE 2:** MINDSETS FOR LIFELONG LEARNERS

Source: van Dam, 2016.

### 3 MINDSET: FOCUS ON GROWTH

Learning starts and ends with the individual, and this takes us to an important question: *Is intelligence static and fixed at birth or can it be developed?* One way to answer this question is to compare people’s Intelligence Quotients (IQ) test scores over a longer period of time.

An illustration of this is a research study which started in 1932. The entire population of Scottish 11-year olds (87,498) children took an IQ test which was repeated over 60 years later and included 500 people of the original population.



**FIGURE 3:** IQ TEST SCOTTISH PEOPLE AT AGE 11 AND 80  
Source: Deary, Whalley, Mackintosh et al., 2011.

The vertical line in the visual shows the perfect positive (1.0) correlation between IQ scores at age of 11 compared with IQ scores at 80. The results show a high (0.66), but not a perfect, positive correlation. All people who are plotted above the line have increased their IQ during their lifetime, versus the people plotted below the line who have experienced a decline in their IQ test scores.

There are many possible reasons for this, including health-related reasons like dementia. However on average, individual scores at age 80 are much higher than scores at age 11.

In 2008, researchers asked the 10 best chess players in the world to take an IQ test. They discovered that 3 out of 10 had a below-average IQ. Since playing chess at the top level in the world is undoubtedly commonly associated with highest levels of IQ – they wondered how this was possible. They learned that those people had played between 10.000 and 50.000 hours of chess. Many studies have confirmed that it is not necessarily intelligence that makes people experts but it is all about effort and practice (= hard work). The most successful people devote the most hours to deliberate practice, practice that focuses on tasks beyond one's current level of competence and comfort. This means continually observing results of your practice and making appropriate adjustments, and doing that for hours every day.

In summary, many studies have confirmed that intelligence can definitely be developed and that there are *no limitations* in what people can learn throughout their lives. According to the psychologist Jesper Mogensen, “*our brain is like a muscle that gets stronger with use and that learning prompts neurons in the brain to grow new connections.*”

Over the last 30 years, Carol Dweck, a psychologist from Stanford University, has studied learners intensively. She concluded that people's mindset about learning will have a significant impact on how much they will learn. Dweck has defined a mindset as: “*how people view their own intelligence and abilities to learn.*” This view will affect the effort put forward, the risk taken, how failures and criticism are perceived and willingness to accept and learn from these.

Dweck differentiates mindsets into *fixed mindsets* and *growth mindsets*.

People with fixed mindsets believe that their potential is fixed based on their genes or heritage, socio-economic background, or opportunities available to them. Those people tell themselves and others, e.g.: “*I can't do public speaking so I should avoid it*” or “*I am not a good learner and therefore I should not take courses offered by my company.*”

People with a growth mindset believe that their true potential is unknown because it is impossible to foresee what can happen over the years as a result of passion, effort and practice. They love challenges because they see this as an opportunity for tremendous personal growth.

## TWO MINDSETS

CHARACTERISTIC/ BELIEF	FIXED MINDSET	GROWTH MINDSET
<b>Self- Image</b>	Believe that intelligence is static. In their view you are smart or not and there is nothing you can or should do about this.	Intelligence can be developed. Don't see their self-image tied to their abilities. They want to learn and accept failure is part of learning.
<b>Challenges</b>	Avoid challenges because the potential to failure presents a risk to their self-image.	Embrace challenges because they believe they will emerge stronger and discover valuable things by engaging in a challenging effort.
<b>Obstacles</b>	Give up or get defensive. Try to avoid obstacles.	Persist in the face of setbacks: An obstacle is just one more of many things on the road toward learning and improving.
<b>Effort</b>	See effort as unpleasant and unrewarding.	See effort as a way to mastery. It is viewed as the natural path of the learning process.
<b>Criticism</b>	View criticism of their abilities as criticism of themselves as individuals. This leads to less chance of improvement because they are not open to use any of the feedback that could help them to improve.	They don't take criticism personally but believe that it is meant to help them grow and develop. They also see criticism as directed at their current level of abilities, which they know will change.
<b>Success of others</b>	See other's success as making them look bad. Feel threatened by success of others.	Is seen as inspiration and something to learn from.

As a result – people with a fixed mindset may plateau early and achieve less of their full potential, whereas people with a growth mindset reach even higher levels of achievement.

Dweck suggests that minds are context specific. For example a person can have a growth mindset in one area and a fixed mindset in another area. Nearly everyone has at least one fixed mindset but there is a lot one can do about this, including:

Become aware of fixed mindsets and understand what has triggered this.

- Learn to hear and reject the fixed mindset voice.
- Recognize that there is a choice.
- Refocus with a growth mindset voice
- Take growth mindset actions.

In conclusion, in order to become lifelong learners – people need to focus on a growth mindset.

## 4 MINDSET: BECOME A SERIAL MASTER

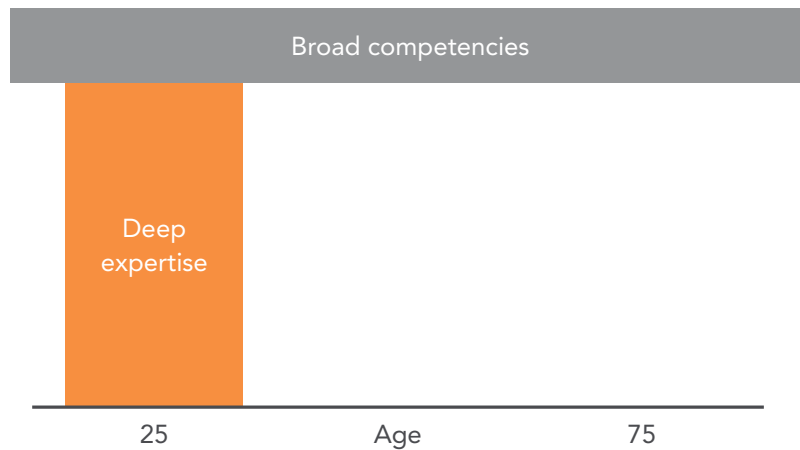
Many forces are currently having an impact on employability including: digitization; automation; robotization; globalization; demographic changes; legislation; changing relationship between employer and employee; competitive forces; climate changes; complexity of work; etc., which makes it challenging to predict the future of work.

Although a number of trends in workforce can be identified. A 2016 McKinsey research report concluded that 20–30 percent of the working age population in Europe and the US engage in some kind of independent work. US employers indicate that they plan to increase the number of contingent or part-time workers. Sociologist Richard Greenwald estimates that up to half of all workers in the US may become freelancers in the next decade.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, work was done by craftsman from home and by people in agriculture. Workers (skilled and unskilled) moved to factories at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century to work on assembly lines. The work was broken down in smaller tasks and could be done with an unskilled workforce. Over the last 80 years organizations have employed more and more non-specialist managers who understood the culture; how decisions were made; and had unique insights on how their company functioned. Their skills and competencies were unique to the organization and this worked well because they were rewarded with a lifetime of employment.

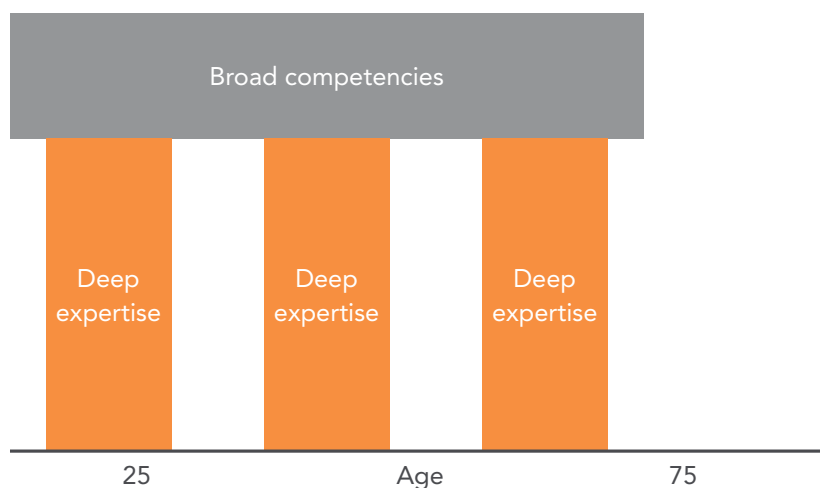
In her book *The Shift*, London Business School professor Lynda Gratton argues that the age of the *shallow generalist*, who knows a little about lots of different topics, is over. Being a *jack of all trades and master of none* means jack (little or nothing) in a world of Wikipedia with instant accessible information at our fingertips. It is not a surprise that the number of managers with *generic expertise* has declined in many countries around the world.

The 21<sup>st</sup> century depends on people's ability to build intellectual capital as this will be the foundation for value. People need to master multiple domains over the lifespan of their careers and become serial masters. We suggest that a *T-profile or T-Shape*, in which people develop deep expertise in one discipline early in their career and supplement this with on-the-job development of integrative competencies, is not sustainable.



**FIGURE 4:** TRADITIONAL T-PROFILE KNOWLEDGE WORKER  
Source: Guest, 1991.

Generations who might live over 100 years and won't retire until their late 70s or early 80s, need to develop different deep areas of expertise during their life supplemented with targeted on-the-job-development.



**FIGURE 5:** M-PROFILE OF THE NEW KNOWLEDGE WORKER  
Source: van Dam, 2016

For example – you may start in the workforce as a journalist with a master's degree in journalism. Later on you might specialize in financial journalism and pursue a master's degree in Business Economics during your thirties. And you may continue to develop by taking various in-depth masterclasses on related topics, such as digitization, etc., throughout your 40s, 50s and 60s.

Achieving excellence in any field requires developing higher levels of expertise. Willyerd and Mistick have defined five levels of expertise:

1. *Initiate*: Minimal or no exposure.
2. *Novice*: Some introductory instruction; may have taken formal courses, but little applied experience.
3. *Competent*: Actively learning and working in the field; usually has five or fewer years' experience; in complex fields may take up to 12 years; relies on others for complex problem solving advice.
4. *Professional*: Able to work with little or no direction at a high level; recognized with awards and recognition for outstanding contribution in the field; often has assumed substantial responsibility for decision making.
5. *Expert or Master*: Highly regarded by others; can handle difficult, rare situations; skilled across subdomains; offers ground breaking solutions; rarely has less than a decade working in the field.

Relevant skills have become the currency in the workplace. It is obvious that contractors only get work due to the fact that they have deep skillsets and expertise for jobs which are in high demand. People need to develop these skillsets that create value and are noticed by others. Because these skillsets are rare, the demand for these skills exceeds supply, and it is difficult for others to develop or imitate this.

In conclusion, the 21<sup>st</sup> Century worker must develop new expertise and become a serial master. This requires a continuous reflection and evaluation of personal skills due to the fact that certain skillsets have a *sell by date* and other skillsets become more valued.



## 5 MINDSET: STRETCH

As discussed, the world is changing fast and it is mandatory to continue developing new competencies. Many researchers have suggested that learning only takes place outside of people's so called *comfort zone*, it happens when they stretch themselves. The comfort zone can be defined as "a behavioral space where people's activities and behaviors fit a routine and pattern that minimize stress and risk, which provide mental security and typically steady performance". People who stay in their comfort zone hold themselves back instead of challenging themselves to try new things and grow.

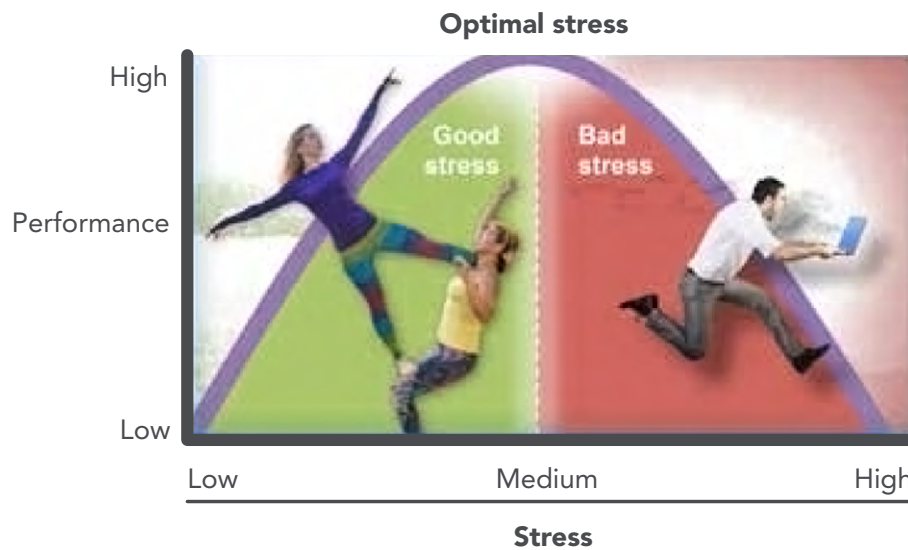
Tasks outside of people's comfort zone move people into their *learning zone*, where they acquire new knowledge, develop and practice new skills. After a while people develop a new level of proficiency, and their learning zone becomes part of their comfort zone. At this stage people can pursue developing new skills by moving into a new learning zone.



**FIGURE 6:** COMFORT AND LEARNING ZONE

Source: Yerkes & Dodson.

People are exposed to risk and more stress when they are executing tasks in the learning zone. Research on comfort zones from the Harvard Psychologists Robert Yerkes and John Dodson suggest that there is a strong relationship between an increase in stress and the enhancement of performance (the *Yerkes-Dodson Law*). Initially, executing new tasks will increase (good) stress which will lead to a higher level of performance. However, an increase of stress beyond a certain level can cause anxiety (bad stress) and will have a negative impact on performance.



**FIGURE 7:** YERKES – DODSON LAW

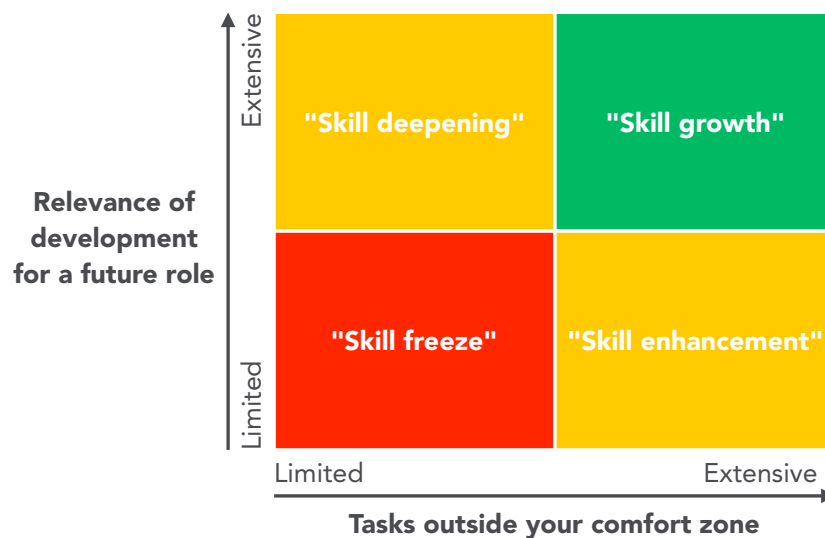
Source: Yerkes & Dodson, 1908.

Their research shows that performance will increase with a moderate amount of stress but if stress gets too high, performance will suffer. Therefore, it is important to expand one's comfort zone with the right new tasks and at the right pace, which differs by person.

People have opportunities to *stretch* themselves while doing their work but it depends on the kind of work that they have been assigned.

New work assignments can be assessed based on two criteria:

1. To what extent the new tasks are outside their comfort zone
2. To what extent the new tasks are relevant to one's development for a (potential) future role

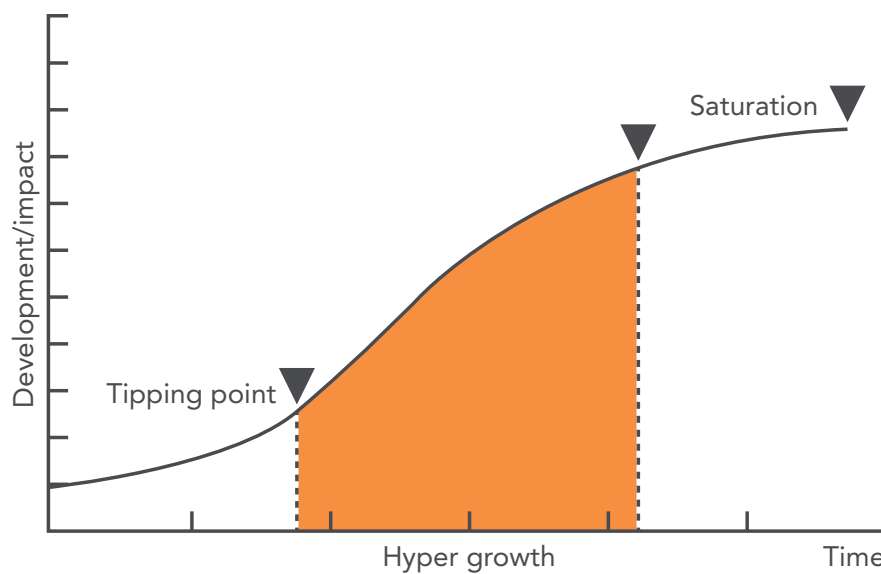


**FIGURE 8:** ASSESSING WORK ASSIGNMENTS

Source: van Dam, revised 2016.

- *Skill Growth:* work that challenges people to complete tasks outside of their comfort zone and can develop them for a potential future role.
- *Skill Enhancement:* work that places people outside their comfort zone. The new tasks are part of the scope of their existing role and therefore doesn't provide the opportunity to develop them for a different future role. For example, an administrative assistant learns to work with new technologies to support his/her daily work. This is important for the existing role but doesn't position the person for a very different role.
- *Skill Deepening:* work that is within peoples' comfort zone but can be relevant in a future role. This is typically a deepening of an existing skill- set. For example, a computer programmer deepens his/her programming skills and could be promoted in the future as *senior computer specialist*.
- *Skills Freeze:* work is completely in one's comfort zone and can be done almost on autopilot. This work doesn't help the person to get ready for a potential future role.

Finally, we would like to introduce the so-called *S-curve model* which is a career model that can be used to drive reflection on personal growth and development. The S-Curve guides people on the timing of personal renewal. This model is used by McKinsey as an instrument to support the learning and development agenda, the performance dialogue, as well as the career progression of its consultants and partners globally. The S-curve model was developed in the 60s and shows how, why, and at what rate ideas and products spread throughout societies.



**FIGURE 9: S-CURVE**  
Source: Johnson, 2015.

When people try something new such as starting a new job, or receiving a promotion, or making a lateral move, they start their next S-curve and are faced with many new demands in the role such as leadership, colleagues, stakeholders, processes, information systems, organization culture, expectations, etc. At the beginning of the new curve, people are going through a steep learning curve in which they rapidly increase their knowledge and skills. Their progress and the business impact of their performance during this first stage of the S-curve is limited.

This stage reaches an inflection point where people’s understanding, competence and confidence in the role suddenly accelerate very quickly and in which they have progressive impact on the business.

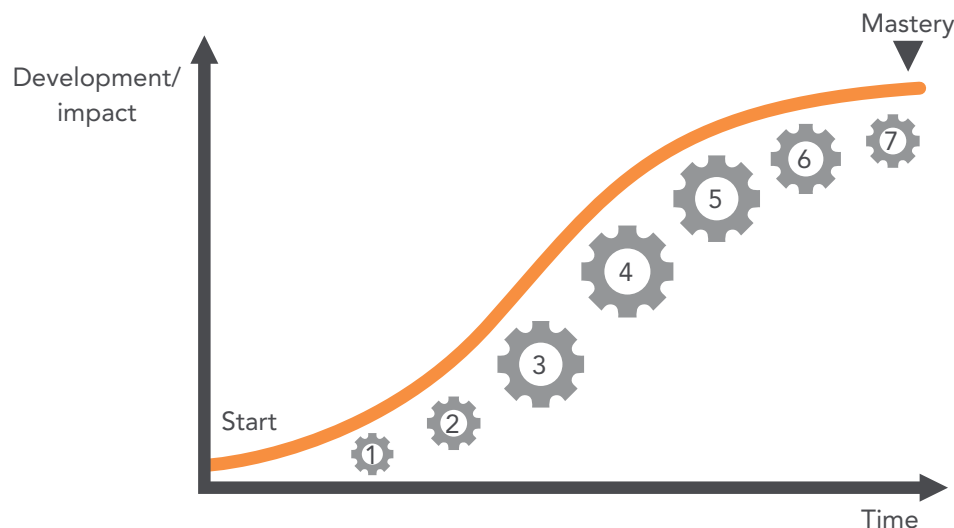
After being in a role for a certain time, people reach the upper flat part of the S-curve. At this stage, people have lost the excitement of the challenges of the role, personal learning and development has stalled, tasks and activities have become habits or are completed automatically, boredom has kicked in and their impact on the business has slowed down significantly.

If people continue to stay in a role where they are no longer emotionally charged and motivated, there is a risk that they start doing a poor job, and as a consequence might be replaced.

The S-model suggests that people need to reflect on where they are in their S-curve and determine when it is time to move on and launch their new S-Curve, or *catch the next wave*.

Seven variables have been identified that can speed up or slow down the movement of individuals along the S-curve, including:

- Take the right risks
- Play to your distinctive strengths
- Embrace constraints
- Battle entitlement
- Step back to grow
- Give failure its due
- Be discovery-driven

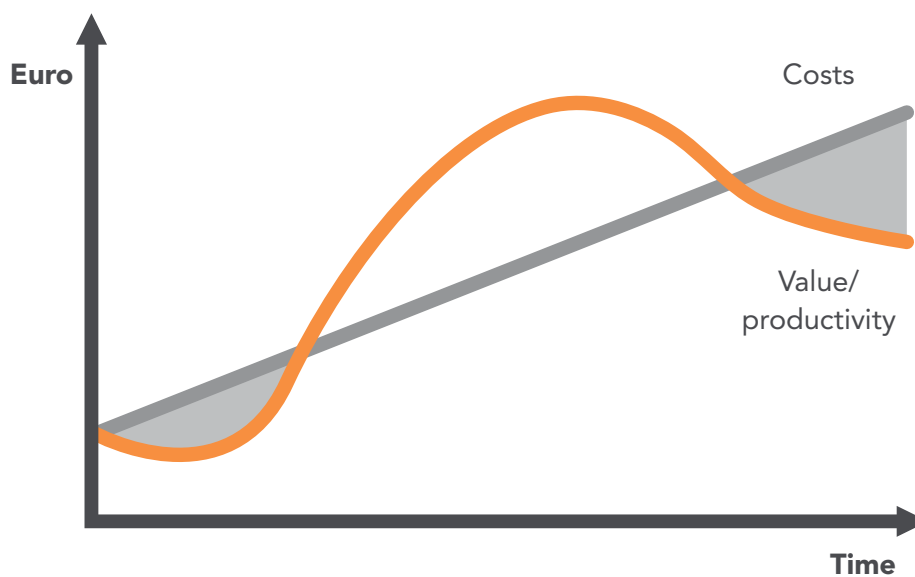


**FIGURE 10:** VARIABLES THAT IMPACT MOVEMENT ON THE S-CURVE  
Source: Johnson, 2015.

Finally, a number of barriers may exist that might hinder people from stretching and as a consequence prevent them from unlocking their full potential. For example a low level of self-confidence will have a huge negative impact on people’s ability to grow or learn. Low confidence is caused by a combination of harsh self-judgement, excessive expectations, a preoccupation with fear, or through a lack of experience or skills. The key to authentic confidence is building *emotional flexibility* which can be increased by practicing dimensions from an *emotional flexibility model* based on ACT (Acceptance and Commitment Theory based on work from Steven C. Hayes et al.) which includes: mindfulness; purpose and values; committed action; self in context/self-compassion; defusion; and acceptance.

Wharton professor Peter Cappelli suggests that companies invest in people's development when they are new in their role. As a result the productivity of people will grow and the value of human capital will increase. However, if the costs of labour grow out of line with growth in productivity – companies will experience losses and try to offer lower salaries or replace people with lower cost individuals.

Individuals will consider changing jobs if their human capital value exceeds the level of compensation or choose to stay in a role if their human capital value in the market is lower than their current compensation level.



**FIGURE 11:** COSTS AND PRODUCTIVITY WITHIN AN S-CURVE

Source: Cappelli, 2013.

## 6 MINDSET: BUILD YOUR PERSONAL BRAND & NETWORK

Having a brand that defines a person's best elements and identifies what differentiates them from others in a positive way, is key to achieving career goals and aspirations.

Everybody has a professional brand based on the impressions they leave behind. Brands communicate the value a person offers. Key elements of a personal brand include: authenticity; clear value proposition; your story; expertise; consistency; visibility; and connections.

In their book, *Leadership Brand: Developing Customer-Focused Leaders to Drive Performance and Build Lasting Value*, authors Dave Ulrich and Norm Smallwood describe 5 steps for shaping people's brand:

1. Determine the results you want to achieve in the next year
2. Decide what you wish to be known for
3. Define your identity
4. Construct your personal brand statement and test it
5. Make your brand identity real

Personal brands are everything but static and should evolve during people's careers. One of the challenges is that "*others judge us by what we have done, versus we judge ourselves by what we feel capable of doing.*" As it is expected that many people will develop different skillsets and play different professional roles in their life, they need to *rebrand* themselves multiple times. Since expertise has become the new currency, people increasingly display their qualifications on social media sites such as LinkedIn through the use of *digital badges*. These are the electronic equivalent of paper certificates. Valuable digital badges can be earned from online learning vendors such as Coursera, edX, Linda.com, and Udemy, among others.

It is suggested that the hidden job market accounts for nearly 80 percent of total vacancies. Typically, before a job gets advertised, hiring managers have reached out to their network whether they know of anyone who is a good fit. Thus, finding a future job or new assignment is one of the reasons why people are building strong networks often supported by social media platforms like LinkedIn which has over 450 million members.

In addition, good networks are beneficial in keeping people informed, make them more innovative, and provide a platform where they can learn new things and gain a sounding board, among others.

It is argued that people should develop diverse networks because diverse people can provide different connections, insights and career opportunities.



## 7 MINDSET: OWN YOUR DEVELOPMENT

The relationship between the employer and employee has been redefined in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. The days of job security and lifelong employment don't exist anymore and it is expected that people will work for many organizations and/or will be self-employed. Also gone are the days that an employer would prescribe people's personal development paths and careers.

As stated before – investing in personal development and growth make people more valuable, set them up for future roles, and provide pay-offs that will enrich people's lives.



**FIGURE 12:** OWN YOUR DEVELOPMENT

Source: van Dam, 2016.

Conditions for owning your development include:

- *Create and execute learning goals*

In order to become continually successful, people need to ask themselves: “*How can I ensure that I am more valuable at the end of a year than I was at the beginning?*” When creating your learning goals, you start by assessing your current knowledge and expertise, and identify competency gaps. Second, people should plan to execute relentlessly on the most important learning goals because this is a competitive advantage. Unfortunately, too many people focus only on quick wins.

- *Work with mentors and seek feedback*  
Mentors are mostly people who guide a less experienced person by building trust and modeling positive behaviors. Mentors are interested in one's long-term personal and professional development and it is critical to have mentors inside and outside of a company. Additionally, feedback from supervisors, peers, direct reports, customers/clients is a critical component of professional development. Mention to different stakeholders that you are open for feedback and set up formal check-ins to review your work and collect feedback.
- *Stay vital*  
One important component that can contribute significantly to people's development is their ability to stay vital and make this a priority. It is strongly recommended that people should start early in life to pay attention to: exercise; nutrition; relaxation (e.g. mindfulness, yoga, etc.); and sleep. Sufficient sleep has a huge impact on our ability to acquire, retain and retrieve knowledge. Other areas that sleep affects include: attention and concentration; creativity; development of insight; pattern recognition; decision making; emotional reactivity; socio-emotional processing; and developing trusted relationships.
- *Measure progress*  
It is important that people periodically reflect and assess the progress that they are making periodically. Learning journals or logs where people track what they are learning has been found to be extremely valuable.
- *Make personal investments*  
As discussed in this book, there is a lot of evidence that the required learning for individuals, who want to retain a market relevant skillset, exceeds the amount of funded formal and informal learning hours that most people receive from many organizations. Therefore, we argue that people need to make (more) personal time and financial investments in their growth and development.

In their book, *Immunity to Change: How to Overcome It and Unlock Potential in Yourself and Your Organization* (1996), Harvard Professor Robert Kegan and Lisa Lahey suggest that you will know that people are taking ownership of their development if they can tell you: “*What is one thing you are working on that will require that you grow to accomplish it?*”:

- How they are working on it?
- Who else knows and cares about it?
- Why does this matter to them?

## 8 MINDSET: DO WHAT YOU LOVE

*"Your time is limited, so don't waste it living someone else's life. Don't be trapped by dogma – which is living with the results of other people's thinking. Don't let the noise of others opinions drown out your own inner voice. And most important, have the courage to follow your heart and intuition."*

– Steve Jobs

People spend a large portion of their day at work and will be active in the workforce for 40–50 years. It is invaluable that people do what they love because this has a huge impact on their health and well-being.

*Ikigai* is a Japanese concept meaning *a reason for being* or *a life worth living*, which represents all elements of life including: work; career; hobbies; relationships; friendships; spirituality; and so on. The discovery of one's *ikigai* brings satisfaction and provides a meaning to live. A study among 43,391 Japanese adults showed that the risk from all-cause mortality was significantly higher among people who did not find a sense of *ikigai* as compared with people who found a sense of *ikigai*.



**FIGURE 13:** IKIGAI: THE REASON YOU GET UP IN THE MORNING

Source: Sone et al., 2008.

Ikigai can be achieved by answering four distinctive questions:

1. *What do you love?*

Irrespective of all other factors, what are the things you love to do? You probably are aware of these already, though you may not know what to do about it quite yet.

2. *What does the world needs?*

A lot when you think about it. There are many problems across the world that need to be solved. If you can find one that interests you, it will guide you.

3. *What can you be paid for?*

Pretty much anything. You just need to find people who need what you are selling. You may need to get a bit creative, but there is something of value within the things you love and what the world needs.

4. *What are you good at?*

Finally, everyone typically has some traits or skills they excel at. It is critical to know your unique strengths as well as areas for personal growth and development.

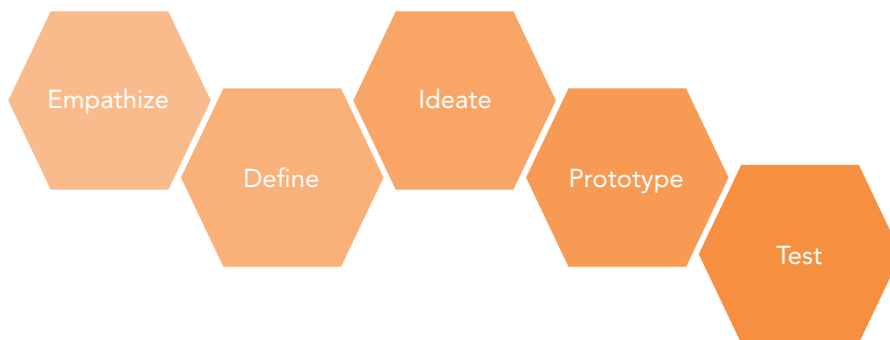
The intersection of all these insights is where people achieve ikigai. Of course, this is a journey in itself and it may take quite some time for people to realize their passion. The meaning of work depends on how we view our work, our motivation for work as well as the objective of the work. The following table shows three different ways to look at meaning of work.

MEANING OF WORK	MOTIVATION	OBJECTIVE
A Job	Financial and material rewards	Obtain financial resources to engage in another activity e.g. <i>"I want to purchase a new car."</i>
A Career	Success	Achieve personal growth recognition, and capability development, e.g. <i>"I want to publish a book."</i>
A Calling	The work itself	Work for a great good or cause beyond personal benefit or reward, e.g. <i>"I care deeply about what I am doing."</i>

Although organizations have a great responsibility to provide a context for meaning, there is so much an individual can do by creating a calling for themselves.

As suggested, exploring our career purpose, meaning and passion is not easy. Stanford faculty Dave Adams and Bill Burnett (2016) have been applying the popular design thinking approach to lives and careers in their book *Design Your Life*. The content of this book has been taught and researched at Stanford. They have identified five things that people can do to better design their life.

1. *Be curious* – Studies have shown that curiosity primes our brain for learning new things.
2. *Try stuff* – Experimentation of prototyping will test assumptions.
3. *Reframe problems* – Cognitive biases can limit people’s thinking and as a consequence restrict choices. By reframing problems people can often look at situations in a new light and come up with better solutions.
4. *Know it is a process* – A focus on process versus outcome will allow people to gain something from every eventuality, good or bad.
5. *Ask for help* – Design and invention are increasingly collaborative processes, and designing your life is not different.



**FIGURE 14:** DESIGN THINKING METHODOLOGY

Source: [dschool.stanford.edu](https://dschool.stanford.edu).

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*There is no friend as loyal as a book*

– Ernest Hemingway

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## THE E-LEARNING FOR KIDS FOUNDATION

*You must give some time to your fellow men. Even if it's a little thing, do something for others – something for which you get not pay but the privilege of doing it.*

– Albert Schweitzer

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