



The Innovator Mindset: A Growth Mindset in Action!

by M. Chris Decker, MD, and Julia Schmitt

In [*Mindset*](#), author Carol Dweck, PhD, defines Growth Mindset as the mindset of a person who thrives on challenge, seeing failure and setbacks as a springboard for growth. She describes people who believe that their success depends on time and effort as having a growth mindset, a belief that their skills and intelligence can be improved with effort and persistence. The Kern Institute's Transformational Ideas Initiative (TI²) puts the power of growth mindset into action as the foundation to building successful projects and programs here at MCW.

Each year, all MCW students, staff, residents, fellows, and faculty are encouraged to submit innovative project ideas to improve the educational experience here at MCW. Once advanced into the TI² program, teams are coached through the development of their idea – an innovation journey of “learning by doing” – developing an innovator mindset. [Applications to the 2021–22 program](#) are open now and have been extended through February 19, 2021.

The Innovator Mindset

The Innovator Mindset encourages the use of curiosity to deeply understand the people who are served by a project or program. With that understanding, TI² teams embark on an interview journey to learn what is valuable to the people affected by their project or program. While holding the best evidence and practices to be true, we encourage teams to consider diverse points of view to gain insights about how to improve their project or program. As a final step, teams also test their ideas with a small sample audience to gain feedback – a process we call a “minimum viable pilot.” These pilots provide key learnings for teams

to consider when making adjustments, or "pivots." Each of these iterative steps sharpens their final project or program – sometimes leading to a radical or large-scale programmatic change, which some would term a failure, but we embrace as a successful step in an innovator's journey – a growth mindset in action.

The Mindset in Action

MCW–Milwaukee medical students Zak Sharif–Sidi (M4) and Alexis Williams (M4), along with their advisor, Pinky Jha, MD, submitted an idea to the TI² program last year. They recognized a need for a mentoring program to increase the number of under-represented in medicine (URiM) medical students who publish in medical journals. They participated in the TI² Innovator Mindset Training last summer, and through their discovery process they found a partnership opportunity with Sonal Chandratre, MD, who had a similar interest at MCW–Central Wisconsin. They co-developed a pilot program titled [*Promoting Mentorship & Scholarly Productivity Among Under-Represented in Medicine Medical Students*](#).

Their pilot program launched in Fall 2020 and includes pre-work, access to written clinical cases, and a 90-minute training session with near-peer and faculty mentoring. The team trialed their program with five students, who have all completed submissions to medical journals or conferences and provided feedback on their experience. By using the innovator mindset and humble inquiry, this feedback from the students who experience the program gave the insight on how the team can make this program even better. The team is currently adjusting and planning to expand the next pilot so more students can participate and contribute to the program's development. They have also begun to discuss how to hand off the program in a sustainable way next year, so it can continue to be iterated and built upon far into the future.

Love of Learning & Embracing an Innovator Mindset

2020 has taught us all to be adaptive and creative in how we live, learn and work. The struggles and setbacks provided opportunities to reflect and attempt

new strategies. In short, to learn. As we focus on the year ahead, with more changes to come, an innovator mindset and a love of learning will help us embrace our curiosity and resilience to accomplish new and great things.

The innovative mindset skills taught in the TI² program promote collaboration, questioning, and problem-solving – which we believe are transportable and foundational to a successful career in medicine and other related fields.

Apply to the TI² Program

We encourage all MCW students, residents, fellows, staff and faculty [to submit ideas for funding through the 2021–22 TI² program](#) – applications are open until February 19, 2021.

The Kern Institute's [Transformational Ideas Initiative](#) is a seed grant program to develop and test ideas, creating opportunities for students, staff, residents, fellows, and faculty to innovate the educational experience at the Medical College of Wisconsin.

Teams will be guided through the development of their idea through a series of summer workshops led by trained professionals from the Kern Institute's Human-Centered Design Lab. Funding and deployment of each project will span the 2021–22 academic year. Funding for each project will be individually granted at the conclusion of the summer workshops based on the deployment needs of each project.

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