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### Inevitable path to becoming an entrepreneur writes Lachlan Colquhoun

Don Holley says he treated every business he managed as if it was his own, so it was inevitable that one day he would turn his entrepreneurial talents to a start-up venture for himself.

Holley, who graduated with his MBA (Executive) in 1999, was included in the BRW Upstarts list of Australia's fastest growing new businesses for his role as one of three partners in Odin Consulting (now The Mindset group), which came in ranked at number 57.

"I was very successful at managing other people's businesses and made a lot of money for them, but there was always this desire to see what I could do on my own and it's been very rewarding to be part of a successful company," says Holley, whose earlier career was in the automotive accessories retail sector with management roles at the Beaufort and Midas chains.

The Mindset Group (formerly Odin Consulting) was formed in 2003 and has offices in Sydney and Melbourne and is concentrating on the burgeoning market for human resources outsourcing, with a capability to manage all facets of the HR function for businesses small or large.

Mindset also has distribution rights to a proprietary psychometric assessment called [Prevue](#), which is essentially a risk management tool to screen prospective employees, and a performance management methodology called [Performance Advantage](#).

While performance management is one of the current buzzwords in the HR industry, the 36 year old Holley says many organisations lack the expertise and the tools to implement an effective system.

"We have [Performance Advantage](#) now to a point where it is accessible to most companies. It is a hosted system with a user pay scenario and as such is accessible to small to mid-sized companies that need to have good practices in place. It's such a competitive market for talent that effective performance management and development systems can give companies a real competitive edge.

"One thing about performance management is that you really need to give people regular feedback and make it clear what the expectations are and create

development plans for them, that can be effectively managed. The software makes the management of the process far simpler and more efficient,."

HR outsourcing, he says, is particularly attractive to small and medium sized organisations, and this is proving to be a market niche for Mindset.

"What we've done is find a good tool where employee's role descriptions are linked to a performance management system that is managed online. Many companies, particularly those with around 60 to 100 employees, can't justify an expensive full time high level HR resource," says Holley.

"So we basically provide the tools, know how and people to go in there and create an effective HR function within their organisation, and there is a growing niche market for those services."

Mindset is also involved in the recruitment function, where it pursues two models.

"Unlike many recruitment firms, Mindset looks at how it can help clients reduce the costs of recruitment, and in some instances provide them with the recruitment software to manage that process better, and we'll use tools like the [Prevue](#) assessments to help them minimise the risk of making the wrong decision," says Holley.

"Alternately, we can undertake the whole recruitment and selection process ourselves."

Mindset is a long way from Holley's early career in retailing and franchising, and he attributes the shift largely to the benefits of his AGSM education.

"I was with one company for many years, earned the accolade of Manager of the Year and was one of their youngest ever regional managers but as I was going through the MBA I started to question if this industry was the one I wanted to be in. I realised that I probably only stayed there because my roles were growing and I kept on being promoted," he says.

"I did my MBA because I recognised there was a lot more to learn and I wanted to learn it."

I was also looking for a way to apply it and it has always been my desire to start my own business."

The MBA, he says, taught him to critically evaluate what was on offer to the customer, and this perspective has been useful in building up Mindset.

“Consulting, HR and recruitment are very fragmented with thousands of players so we wanted to create a point of difference which was multi-faceted,” says Holley.

“So now we’ve got a flexible process where we do recruitment and selection, which is about 50 percent of our business, and the other half is organisational development related services.

“We find that our offering is very attractive because we have a whole end to end HR service that clients find valuable.”

Although it is three years old, Holley says Mindset is “just at the start” of where he and his partners want to take it.

“I’m really committed to growing this business and think there is great potential to achieve our goals with what we have to offer our clients,” he says.

“We want to grow this into a quality Australian consultancy and then take it offshore.”

## **MINDSET**