Mindset and the Basics of Arbinger's Work

We realized we have not published an "Arbinger fundamentals" post in a while. So we decided to pull together this piece on inward vs. outward mindset and how a change to an outward mindset can help solve common organizational challenges.

What is Mindset?

Put simply, mindset is how we see. It is the lens through which we see our work, our relationships, and our world. It is at the foundation of all that we do and shapes *how* we do it.

Two Mindsets

Arbinger's research indicates that people operate at any given time from one of two mindsets: an inward mindset or an outward mindset.

From an inward mindset, we focus only on our own personal goals and objectives, without consideration for our impact on others. With this self-focused inward mindset, we see others not as people with their own needs, challenges, and objectives, but as objects. We see them as:

- *Vehicles* to achieve our own objectives and results
- *Obstacles* that are in our way or causing problems
- *Irrelevancies* that can be ignored

With an inward mindset, we are blind to what others need and therefore can frustrate others or create conflict. We might blame others for our frustrations or failures. Focused only on our own objectives, we might even hamper our organization's effectiveness or results while thinking we're doing a good job!

With an outward mindset, however, we see others as people who matter like we do. We take into account their needs, challenges, and objectives. And we focus on collective results. We feel responsible to do our jobs and do them well, but also to do them in a way that supports others in doing *their* jobs—because we know their jobs contribute to the organization's results just like ours do.

When we have an outward mindset—when others *matter* to us—we naturally want to be helpful to them. So we adjust our own efforts to make their work easier however we can. Rather than blaming others for our frustrations or feeling like victims of our circumstances, we begin to see new possibilities and solutions to our most vexing or long-standing problems.

What Kind of Mindset Change is Needed for Organizational Transformation?

You guessed it—a change from an inward mindset to an outward mindset.

Organizations can only resolve internal problems and achieve breakthrough results by maximizing the extent to which their employees work with an outward mindset, taking into account their impact on others and focusing on the needs of the

organization as a whole.

Shifting to an outward mindset is the one change that most dramatically improves performance, sparks collaboration, and accelerates innovation. By implementing an outward mindset across the organization, governmental agencies can set themselves up to develop far more innovative solutions to their most challenging problems.

How Can Outward Mindset Help with Common Organizational Challenges?

With an inward mindset, organizations and the individuals in them may think only about their needs, challenges, and objectives relative to a given problem. Organizations may become more siloed, more conflict-prone, as departments and offices focus on solving their piece of the puzzle. They might try to protect the resources they currently have—at the expense of organizational interests. They might blame others for their inability to solve the problem.

With an outward mindset, organizations and individuals focus on collective results. They can have difficult conversations about resource allocation, roles, and responsibilities without feeling the need to protect their silos, defend their decisions, or appear in certain ways. They might frame the problem differently, allowing them to see new possibilities for solutions and new directions for problem-solving.

The innovation of an outward mindset applies at all levels, even offices and individual contributors. With an inward mindset, office directors and employees may avoid difficult conversations because they're uncomfortable, potentially contentious, or simply too far in the future to worry about.

With an outward mindset, difficult conversations take on a new light. They are seen as important for the success of the team

and the organization. With this framing, the range of possible solutions expands dramatically.

We encourage employees at all levels to experiment with an outward mindset. What would it look like to really see your leaders, coworkers, customers, and direct reports as people? What would it mean to account for their needs, challenges, and objectives? And how could you apply this new mindset to the problems you face today?