What is an outward mindset?

There's a reason that [70% of organizational transformation efforts](#) fail. It's the simple fact that you can't change behaviors without changing mindsets first. In the behavioral approach to organizational transformation, leaders adjust systems and processes by providing motivation or incentives for employees to adopt new behaviors. Without a change in mindset, however, desired behaviors are often in conflict with our own perspectives, making it difficult or impossible to obtain the desired results. With an outward mindset, we see others as people who matter like we do. We consider their needs, challenges, and objectives. And we focus on collective results. We feel responsible to do our jobs well, but we also want to do them in a way that enables others to accomplish their work because we know their work also contributes to the organization's results.

When we have an outward mindset—when other people matter like we do—we naturally want to be helpful to them. So we adjust our own efforts to make their work easier. 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 longstanding problems.

In practical terms, having an outward mindset means actively seeking to understand and empathize with the people you interact with, whether they're colleagues, clients, or even

strangers on the street. It involves being open to feedback, listening actively, and recognizing that the success of any group or organization is dependent on the collective efforts of its members.

Because the goal of cultivating an outward mindset is to build stronger relationships, foster greater trust and collaboration, and ultimately achieve better outcomes for everyone involved, it is a powerful and [transformative approach](#) to life and work that can have a profound impact on both individuals and organizations alike.

Inward mindset vs. Outward mindset

An inward mindset is a way of seeing ourselves and others that keeps us focused on our own needs, wants, and goals, often at the expense of others. When we live and work with an inward mindset we see people as objects rather than as people—as vehicles to be used, irrelevancies to be ignored, or as obstacles to be overcome, rather than as individuals with their own thoughts, feelings, and perspectives. Inward mindset tendencies can show up in various ways such as blaming others, justifying our own mistreatment of others, or avoiding responsibility.

When we choose to see people as objects, we look for ways to

justify this choice and become invested in seeing them as less than ourselves, which invites them to respond poorly to us in return. Their response, of course, justifies our original choice to not see them as a person. This self-perpetuating cycle of justification-seeking, mutual mistreatment, and blame characterizes most of our relationships when we are inward. Until we can escape this need for justification, we will continue to wallow in the problems are to a large degree of our making. Until we can learn to acknowledge the obvious truth—that our coworkers, family members, and neighbors are as important and legitimate as we are—then our relationships will continue to be strained and the results we accomplish together much less than they could be.

Inward Mindset

Disregard for others and focused on *my* own objectives

Disregard

Blame

Silos

Disengagment

Stagnation

Resistance

VS.

Outward Mindset

Curious about others and focused on *our* results

Awareness

Accountability

Collaboration

Engagement

Innovation

Cooperation

Here are some examples of these two mindsets in action:

Inward mindset	Outward mindset
I blame my teammates when things go wrong.	I hold myself accountable.
I see my colleagues as competitors or obstacles in my way of success.	I see my colleagues as collaborators.
Other peoples' perspectives don't matter to me.	I work to understand perspectives—even if they're different from my own.

The key difference between an inward mindset and an outward mindset is the focus of our attention: an inward mindset is focused on ourselves and our own needs, while an outward mindset is focused on others and their needs. At the Arbinger Institute, we believe that cultivating an outward mindset is crucial for building strong relationships, fostering trust and collaboration, and achieving better outcomes for all involved.
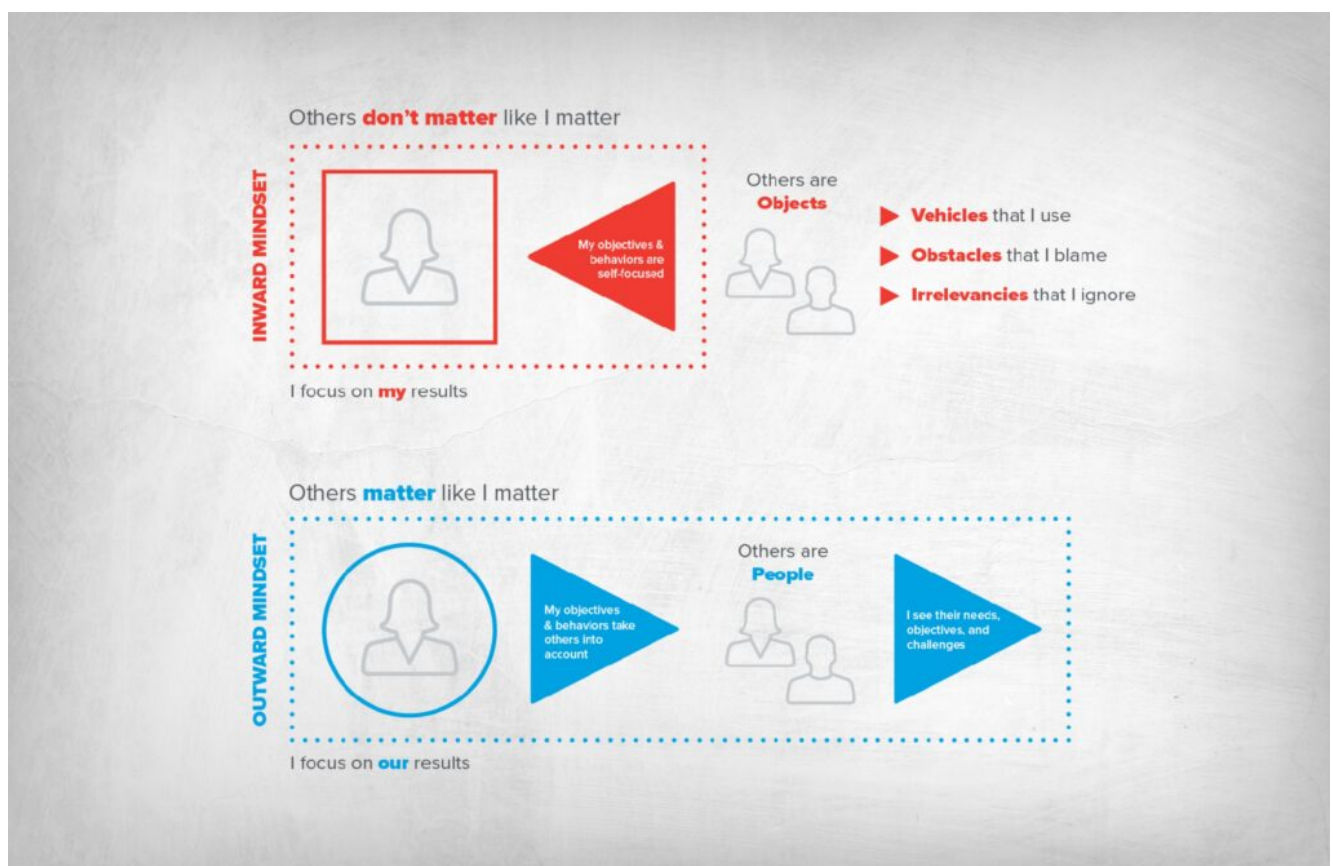
How an outward mindset transforms organizations

An outward mindset can help organizations become more collaborative, resilient, and adaptive in a rapidly changing business environment. By focusing on the needs of others and creating a positive, collaborative workplace culture, organizations can achieve better business outcomes and create a more fulfilling work environment for their employees.

Let's look at a common workplace scenario where mindset comes into play:

Mai and Jose work in the same marketing department. They have been assigned to work on a project together, but they have different opinions on how to approach the project. Jose believes that his approach is the best, and he is not open to feedback or suggestions from Mai. Whenever Mai makes a suggestion, Jose dismisses it and insists on doing things his way. He is focused on being right and getting his way, rather than collaborating with Mai to find the best solution for the project.

Because of Jose's attitude, Mai begins to view Jose as arrogant, difficult to work with, and selfish. Little does Jose know, Mai worked on a similar project last quarter and saw great success. But because of the way she perceives Jose's behavior, she holds back her ideas and wants to see Jose fail by trying things his own way first.

In this scenario, both Jose and Mai are operating from an inward mindset. They are focused on their own needs and desires, and aren't considering the overall team. This creates tension and conflict between Jose and Mai, and ultimately impacts the success of the project.

We've likely all been Jose or Mai at some point in our careers. And the simple solution to resolving this conflict is

approaching it from an outward mindset. Mai and Jose both know the right thing to do is to put aside their personal motives and instead focus on the greater good of the team. But their inward mindsets make following through with the right behaviors almost irrational from their respective points of view.

When we actually take a moment to think about our impact on our others rather than operating from an inward mindset, we can begin to transform relationships like this one. And the truth is, transforming these working relationships is at the heart of large scale, organizational transformation. Once people in conflict begin to see each other as people, the behaviors they adopt will stick. In other words, shifting from an inward to an outward mindset is the not-so-secret strategy for getting our teams to actually change behaviors. And the numbers show it:

- Organizations are [4x more likely to succeed](#) in their transformation efforts when they address mindset to drive behavioral change
- Companies with highly engaged employees [outperform their peers](#) by 147%
- Employees who feel their voice is heard are [4.6x more likely](#) to perform their best work
- Psychological safety is the [#1 factor](#) for building effective teams
- Quiet quitting leads to worldwide company losses of up to [$1.5 trillion](#) each year

How do you turn your organization's mindset outward?

Our Managing Partner, Mitch Warner, explains why most change initiatives don't work in this video:

The good news is that the process to turn your organization outward is easier than you think. At its core, an outward mindset is taking the time to see others as people who matter as much as we do, and understand our impact on them.

Mindset training gets to the root of organizational challenges by fostering self awareness through a set of tools, frameworks, exercises, and video materials designed to evoke empathy and challenge people to actually **see differently** before you even start to think about getting them to **act differently**.

It's only when people truly understand how their behaviors impact others and begin to see their colleagues as people rather than objects (which typically comes with some a-ha moments, epiphanies, and life-changing transformation), will we dig into solving organizational challenges. This change in mindset is the catalyst for meaningful and lasting change. Why? Because when people really see others, they will come up with the answers over and over, they will own the transformation and decide for themselves the right things to do to help be a part of the solution and achieve desired results.
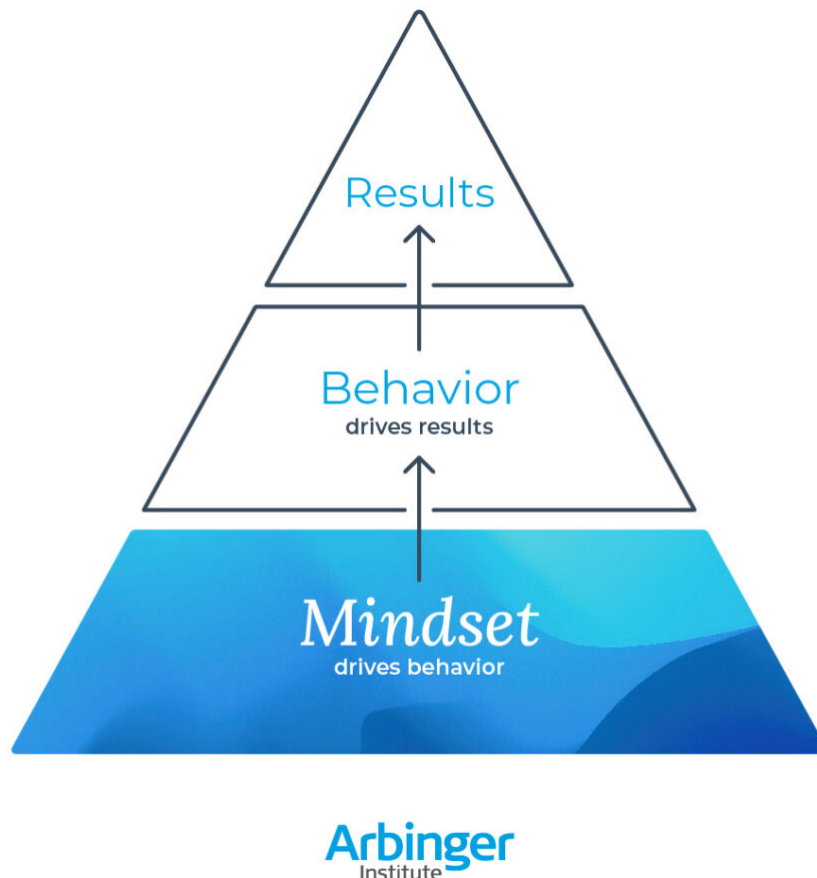
Arbinger can help with assessing your organization's needs and challenges, hosting in-person or virtual workshop sessions, implementing a sustainment program, and providing ongoing training, coaching, and consulting to ensure your team is getting the most out of your investment in your people. (You can chat with an expert [here](#) to learn more about the process!)

The top 5 outcomes of shifting to an outward mindset

1. Improved collaboration and teamwork

When employees adopt an outward mindset, they become more focused on understanding the needs of others and working collaboratively to achieve common goals. They shift their thinking from, "What's in it for me?" to being more aware of

how their role impacts others around them.

Carla Debow from CenturyLink talks how transformational it is to truly "understand the person on the other side of the table" here:

2. Increased employee engagement and retention

An outward mindset can lead to greater employee engagement and retention as employees become more invested in the success of their colleagues and the organization as a whole. This creates more engaged teams and can save you hundreds of thousands of dollars on employee turnover costs.

3. Enhanced customer satisfaction and loyalty

When employees adopt an outward mindset, they become more focused on meeting the needs of customers (whether internal or external stakeholders) and providing high-quality service because it's coming from a place of genuine empathy.

4. Greater innovation and agility

As employees become more open to new ideas and perspectives, greater innovation can happen. The sky's the limit when it comes to what you can achieve with more organizational agility, but it could result in new processes, products, or services that help the organization stay competitive and adapt to changing market conditions.

5. Positive workplace culture

When employees adopt an outward mindset, they create a more positive and supportive workplace culture, which improves morale, motivation, and overall job satisfaction. This makes for a more fulfilling work environment for employees and a more attractive employer brand for prospective hires.

When you have all of these factors working in tandem together, your team is set up for surefire exponential organizational growth.

Outward mindset examples

Now that you know what an outward mindset is, how it impacts

employees and organizations, and what benefits it offers, you're probably wondering what it looks like in practice. Take a look at the impact transforming to an outward mindset has had on these businesses:

Raytheon leveraged Arbinger's outward mindset principles to **cut $100M in expenses** without laying off a single employee. See how:

Tubular Steel Inc. grew from $30 million to over $100 million and **more than quadrupled profits** (in a shrinking market)

Kansas City Police Department **reduced community complaints by 100%** (from two to three per month to zero in the ten years!) with an outward mindset. Watch the transformation:

Turning your organization outward starts with you

There's a major shift happening in the world. Creating a people-centric culture is now a critical component in achieving desired business results. The data speaks for itself, when employees feel seen and cared for by an organization, their potential for success and impact dramatically increases. An outward mindset is the key to helping your organization get there.

Interested in learning more about developing and implementing an outward mindset at work? [Chat with an expert from our team](#).