

Of boxes and self-deception

BY TOH MEI LING I

What if there is a serious problem in your organisation and you don't realise it? This is the first question S Senthil, the Arbinger Institute's managing director for Southeast Asia, asked this writer: Searching for an organisation that

does not have any form of "people problem" is like looking for a needle in a haystack. No matter how stringent the employment requirements or how careful the management when hiring, this issue still exists, whether the organisation knows it or not. In most cases, it doesn't.

The Arbinger Institute's book, entitled *Leadership and Self-Deception*, puts forth the theory of living among people and objects. Pioneered by the founder of the Arbinger Institute, Terry Warner, the theory implies that people move between these two modes (of living among people and living among objects) all the time.

The underlying subject of the book is the factors that cause people to move between these two modes.

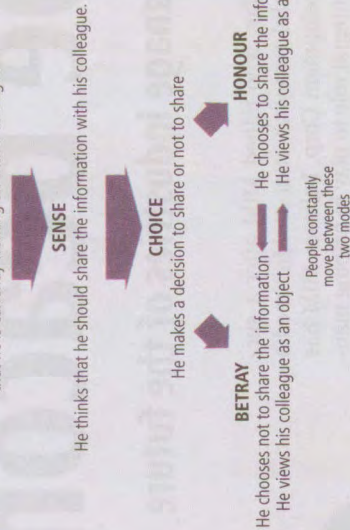
In short, the book is targeted at helping the reader appreciate what their problem is, says Senthil, who will be speaking at TAIPAN, the Making of Asian Giants Conference, next month. The conference is being organised by the Young President Organisation (YPO) and is open to YPO members.

"When people get a 'sense', they are given the opportunity to make a choice. [Sense here refers to the first instinct that comes to mind when faced with a situation.] They can decide to either honour their sense or betray it. When they choose to honour the sense [that is, they follow their instinct], it means that they view the other individual as a person. On the other hand, should they choose to betray the sense, they are viewing the other individual as an object. When this happens, the betrayer enters a condition that we call 'in-the-box' and the 'object' is viewed solely based on his or her value to the betrayer," he explains.

To better illustrate the theory, Senthil used the analogy of an employee who comes upon some

Theory of Honour and Betrayal

A person finds some information that is useful for the project that he is currently working on with a colleague.



of such a situation are evident, the Arbinger Institute has not been able to put its finger on the pulse of this disruptive behaviour.

"We could not get an exact answer as to why people choose to betray their sense, but the best possible answer we could come up with is that they do it because they can. In my own opinion, I feel that it happens because they do not realise the full impact of their betrayal," he adds.

In this case, how do you get employees out of the box? Most people are naturally resistant to change, especially in the workplace. The strategy is simple, says Senthil. Just create an environment that focuses on others and results in the office. However, the application of this strategy is only possible if everyone understands the theory.

"The answer lies not on the behaviour of the employees but on their 'way of being'. The solution for this is for them to start thinking for others and empowering them on how to recognise and change their countenance from in the box to out of the box. People inherently want to be out of the box once they understand the theory," he says.

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Senthil explains how employees get stuck in the box