THE FOUR ROLES OF SOCIAL CHANGE

These four roles of social change are based on a framework initially developed by Bill Moyer (1933 - 2002), a US social change activist and principal organiser in the 1966 Chicago Open Housing Movement who also worked with Martin Luther King and Bernard Lafayette, on non-violent blockades of arms shipments to Bangladesh (1971) and Vietnam (1972), and a nuclear power plant blockade in New Hampshire (1977).

He developed the 'Movement Action Plan' model describing the eight stages of social movements, based on his own experience working on and with different social change campaigns.

This is not the only framework that tries to define the different roles involved in making change happen, but it is a useful starting point to think about the many different ways change can be pushed forward and the many different actors, all with specific strengths - and weaknesses - involved, many of whom are invisible or forgotten as time moves on.

ADVOCATES / REFORMERS

The advocate focuses on communicating with "the powerholders" who can change a policy or practice, using institutional means to achieve change.

Examples might include legal non-profit Client Earth suing the UK government for breaking legal air pollution limits, or pressure groups urging government to change policies or laws.

How to determine if you are an advocate:
- Do you tend to turn towards an authority to try change or fix a problem?
- For example, when you were younger, did you report bullying to the teacher after school?

HELPERS / CITIZENS

Helpers gravitate to providing direct service or support, personally taking whatever action they can to change a situation.

Examples might include starting a community solar energy project, or directly training people on how to reduce their energy consumption, or Transition Town movements helping to empower ordinary citizens.

How to determine if you are a helper:
- Are you happiest when being very hands-on and seeing the direct impacts of your work?
- For example, when you were younger, would you have been the person to personally step in if you saw someone get bullied, or would you have been the first to get the first aid kit when someone was hurt?

ORGANISERS / CHANGE AGENTS

Organisers bring together different groups of people and create new collaborations, or increase participation in existing movements. They are often driven by a belief that the sheer power of numbers will create change and work to bring together mass movements.

Examples might include the organisers of climate marches, or organisations such as Avaaz and Change.Org.

Note: while other roles, such as advocates or helpers might need to organise to make a bigger difference (for example, by starting a charity), the organisation part is not the most satisfying for them, unlike the organiser, who thrives from bringing people together. E.g. the advocate would get satisfaction when convincing a lawmaker that pollution is a crime, not from having organised enough people to support this viewpoint.

How to determine if you are an organiser:
- Do you tend to want to bring different interest groups together and try to align them to work towards the same goal?
- For example, when you were younger, did you try and organise 'awareness days' at school, or were you the kind of person to try and boost morale in a group when something wasn't going well?

REBELS

When seeing an issue or an injustice, rebels want to create some kind of upheaval or commotion to force those holding power into making a change. Through using 'creative tension', they illustrate the gap between how things are and how things should or could be. Some rebels may need organisational skills to scale up their commotion, but they are not focused on numbers for numbers' sake - but on the impact or crisis they want to achieve to create change (which can also be brought about by smaller numbers).

How to determine if you are a rebel:
- Are you drawn towards dramatic, direct action methods of creating change?
- For example, when you were younger, did you ever instigate a 'sit-in' or strike to protest against a perceived injustice?

How is each particular role critical in making change happen?

What qualities are necessary to each particular role or approach? What kind of person makes a good 'leader' in this context?

How are different types of Creative Climate Leadership related to these different roles?

Are there any other roles you can think of?

THE FOUR ROLES OF SOCIAL CHANGE IN ACTION

Successful social movements include all four roles, even if they sometimes seem to conflict - but each can either assist or undermine a movement, depending on context, timing, and how it is played.

The advocate/reformer:
- Transmits the goals and understanding of movements to authorities - and knows how to frame demands to powerholders in a way that can make it more likely that they are carried out.
- Works to create, change, and expand laws and policies and acts as a watchdog to ensure any laws or policies are funded and enforced (or conversely, that they are not broken).
- However, the advocate/reformer can also be at risk of being 'co-opted' by the powerholders, damage campaigns so they settle for less by focusing too much on 'realistic' minor reforms, and get cut off from other parts of the movement because they get too involved in the language and structures of policy and power.

The helper/citizen:
- Demonstrates and makes links to the vision and values of a democratic society and the support of ordinary people for change.
- Empowers people who might be feeling helpless by giving them skills and showing their capacity for action.
- Gives legitimacy to a movement (and can reduce the potential for violence) and makes it harder for authorities to discredit it.
- However, a helper can also end up focusing too much on individual action without understanding mechanisms for how this needs to be scaled up to create more systemic change.

The organiser/change agent:
- Supports the engagement of large numbers of people in the processes of addressing issues,
- Helps build coalitions, and promotes new social and political majority consensuses around positive solutions,
- Creates dialogue with the public and maintains a long-term perspective.
- However, organisers/change agents can also end up focusing too much on utopian ideas without engaging in the action and work to achieve them, and sometimes do not recognise the systemic shifts necessary to change what are symptoms of issues (rather than causes).

The rebel:
- Ensures issues are placed on the social and political agenda through dramatic, non-violent actions that illustrate issues,
- Forces society to confront its problems by highlighting how institutions and authorities violate public trust by causing and perpetuating injustices.
- However, a rebel can also end up self-marginalising the cause, focusing too much on a polarised narrative of 'us' vs. 'them', fall into using violent methods, and drive undecided people to lend their support to powerholders instead.