

FOUR ROLES OF ACTIVISTS

Activists need to be seen as responsible **citizens** in order to win respect, acceptance and legitimacy from the majority of ordinary citizens who must be won over for movements to succeed. Effective citizens say "yes!" to society's core values [assuming that these are morally acceptable]. And activists must also be **rebels** who say a loud "no!" to social conditions and public policies that violate these values. It is not enough, however, to protest; activists also need to be **social change agents** who work to educate and involve the general public to oppose present policies and seek positive, constructive solutions. Finally, they must be **reformers** who work with the official political and judicial structures to get solutions incorporated into laws and governmental policies and accepted as the conventional wisdom of the day.

Activists can have difficulty in valuing and playing the four roles because they seem to conflict, and because individuals are instinctively drawn to one or other of them. An awareness of how they relate to the different stages of a social movement is needed.

1. Citizen

- articulates a vision of the good society
- achieves legitimacy in the eyes of ordinary citizens
- withstands powerholder attempts to discredit the movement
- reduces potential for violent attitudes and actions within the movement

Ineffective citizen: ineffective citizens believe the powerholders' view of how things are and if they do admit that something is wrong, think it is an isolated phenomenon. They can be super-patriots who believe that their country is the best.

2. Rebel

- puts issues on society's agenda
- causes 'creative tension', ie highlights the gap between what is and what should be
- represents society's moral vanguard
- leads in stage 4 of social change movement

Ineffective rebel: negative rebels use strident rhetoric and aggressive actions against powerholders. They promote militant protest actions that are driven by strong feelings of anger, hostility and frustration. They advocate change by any means necessary, including disruption and destruction. At demos they engage in skirmishes with the police and vandalism. Their activities are mostly tactics oriented and often counter-productive. They tend to see themselves as on the margins of society and the movement and view the world as polarised into good (them) and evil (the enemy).

3. Social Change Agent

- nurtures a new public consensus
- acts as an 'open system', ie informs the public while learning from dialogue with the public and the powerholders, so that his/her ideas are open to change
- leads in stage 6
- promotes a long-term perspective

Ineffective change agent: promotes utopian ideas without engaging in the hard grassroots struggle to achieve them. They can seek the reform of symptoms without systemic change and a paradigm shift.

4. Reformer

- uses institutional means of getting real change
- leads in dialogue with the powerholders
- at the interface between the movement and the public

Ineffective reformer: maintenance of the organisation becomes the prime concern. They can embrace the powerholders' outlook and end up promoting only "realistic" minor reforms. They get co-opted by the powerholders. They become cut off from the grassroots movement and the general public. They act as if they represent the whole movement.

CITIZEN		REFORMER	
Ineffective	Effective	Effective	Ineffective
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Naïve citizen</u>: Believes the 'Official Policies'. Does not yet realise that powerholders and institutions serve special elite interests at the expense of the less powerful minorities and general welfare. -or- • <u>Super-patriot</u>: Blind obedience to powerholders and the country. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote positive national values, principles, symbols, eg democracy, freedom, justice, nonviolence. • Normal citizen. • Grounded in centre of society. • Protect against anti-nation charges 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parliamentary: Use official mainstream system and institutions, eg courts, MPs, local authority, corporations to get movement goals, values, alternatives adopted into official laws, policies and conventional wisdom. • Use variety of means: lobbying, lawsuits, referenda, official rallies, candidates etc. • Professional Opposition Organisations (POOs) are the key movement agency. • Watchdog successes to assure enforcement, expand success, and protect against backlash. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Realistic politics": Promotes minor reforms that might be more acceptable to the powerholders. • POO limitations: Patriarchal, hierarchical organisation leadership and structure; organisational maintenance needs replace movement needs/goals; dominant power undermines democracy with the movement and disempowers the grassroots. • Co-optation: POO staff identify more with official powerholders than with movement's grassroots. • Does not advocate paradigm shifts.
REBEL		CHANGE AGENT	
Ineffective	Effective	Effective	Ineffective
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anti-our-nation, anti-authority, anti-organisation rules and structure. • Self-identity as radical militant, a lonely voice on society's fringe. • Any means necessary: especially disruptive tactics and violence to property or people when "necessary". • Tactics without realistic strategy. • Isolated from mass-base grassroots • Victim attitude and behaviour: angry, aggressive, judgemental, dogmatic, powerlessness... • "Politically correct", absolute truth, moral superiority. • Strident: acts out strong personal upset emotions, needs and freedom, regardless of movement's needs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protest: say NO! to violations of positive national values. • Nonviolent direct action and attitude, including civil disobedience. • Target: official powerholders and institutions. • Puts problems and policies in public spotlight and agenda. • Strategy and tactics. • Exciting, courageous, risky 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People Power: educate, convince, involve majority of ordinary citizens and whole society in change process. • Mass-based grassroots organisations, networks, activists. • Put issue on political agenda. • Promote strategies and tactics for waging long-term social movement. • Nurturer role: empower grassroots. • Create permanent organisations and support + nurture activists. • Promote alternatives and paradigm shift. • Promote paradigm shift 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Utopian: promote visions of perfection or live alternatives in isolation from the practical political and social struggle. • Promote only minor reform. • Movement leadership and organisational patriarchy and oppressive hierarchy. • Tunnel vision: advocate single approach, while opposing those doing all others. • Patriarchal and oppressive movement organisations and leadership. • Ignore personal issues and needs of activists