

Transformation Leadership Development: The Stories Told Lead to Successful Forward Looking Change in Your Organization

Organization transformation is a complex, organization wide mix of initiatives that introduces, over time, a series of new forward thinking policies, systems and structures (culture), all anchored in the core values of diversity, anti-oppression, belonging and justice.

This organization movement to create a human centered culture can at times feel formidable. This reality is not cause for panic, fear or reticence in your commitment to organization wide success. Why? Because of the unique kind of transformational leadership that we have seen effective in an array of engagements, across multiple industries. It has led to organizations realizing and sustaining the progressive, future vision and values, they have crafted and embrace.

Organization transformational leadership is anchored on a consequential axiom: The senior executive's traditional role, as a singular agent of influence who is the assumed determiner of enterprise wide change, is not tenable. To drive and sustain the kind of profound organization change envisioned here, senior executives (and in some instances, even board members) must commit to joining with and working hand and glove with top, middle and frontline staff in leading these dynamic and inventive transfigurations of policies, systems, structures and ultimately organization culture. Transformational leadership is, in a word, inclusive.

Individuals assuming the mantle of transformation leaders are not defined by their organization's hierarchical titles. Instead, their correct designation is that of *change makers*.

Change makers are doers committed to integrating an array of stakeholders who work together to tackle complex organizational contradictions. Change makers are responsible for achieving sustainable progress on eradicating any and all vestiges of policies, behaviors and actions as they relate to this fundamental question¹:

Why are some individuals and groups of people within the organization benefiting while others are excluded from decision-making, or suffering personally and professionally?

Moreover, change makers affirm their acceptance that this major organization contradiction matters enough that they will **invest** time resolving it by contemplating these queries:

- Can I imagine emergent strategies and solutions that will help us overcome these organization and human challenges?
- Do I have insights, fully developed or not, about what to do?
- Am I committed to step up and contribute to envisioning and implementing transformative changes to the policies, systems and structures that make up our organization's culture?
- Why do I care?
- If I don't step up, who will?

Change makers are intentional about taking creative actions to solve institutional problems that inhibit the manifestation of a culture that is diverse, inclusive and just. They are devoted to repeated thinking, strategizing and progressive actions, because they understand that there is no manual that captures the particular "ground realities" that they face when grappling with transformation of this nature. **This work is by its nature emergent.**

Ultimately, to transform an organization, transformational leadership—aka change making—embraces a credo that is comprised of three interrelated parts:

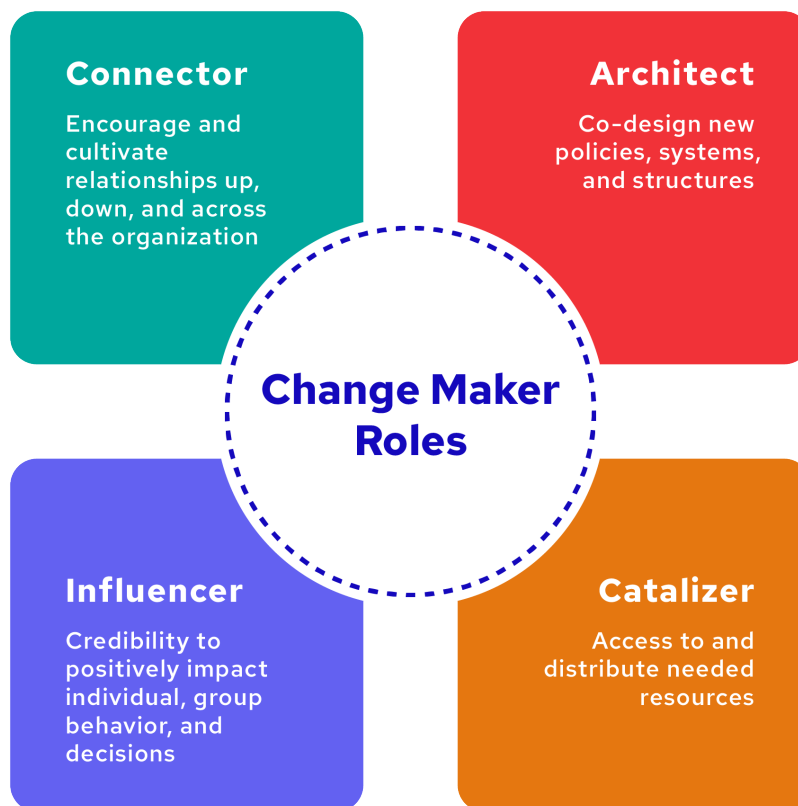
- **Leadership of Self:** Consistently and continuously engaging in self-reflection for growth, and an openness to informed feedback.

¹ Adapted from "My Changemaker Toolkit", Ashoka, 2017.

- **Leading Others:** Fostering collaboration among individuals and teams in pursuit of the (future) vision of the organization via transformational initiative.
- **Leading the Organization:** Challenging long held core cultural and organizational assumptions and co-navigating the resolution of the challenges that arise from these in pursuit of the transformation agenda.

Change Maker Roles

This credo shows up in four broad roles that change makers assume to foster transformation: the *Connector*, the *Architect*, the *Influencer* and the *Catalizer*.



The **Connector** encourages and cultivates relationships up, down, and across the organization.

The **Architect** co-designs new policies, systems, and structures.

The **Influencer** uses their credibility to positively impact individual and group behavior and decisions.

The **Catalizer** accesses and distributes needed resources.

Storytelling

Organization transformation is complex because the flawed institutional policies, practices, cultural norms and ways of thinking and behaving are intimately and insidiously co-joined.

More often than not, clients want to primarily, if not exclusively, address transformation using data. While there is an important place for data and the insights they bring, storytelling (e.g., data stories) help people within the organization make sense of the different complexities that shape the issues that are to be tackled.

Over the years, our collaboration with clients has validated that for change makers (transformational leaders) to be successful in their organization transformation efforts, they must be adept at storytelling.

Storytelling² is a vital skill set that can be learned. Stories are immersive and vivid future or emerging depictions of an alternative way of being that engage people, up, down, and across the organization, intellectually and (most importantly) emotionally. Through stories, people are imbued with a deep feeling that the preferred transformed organization is more probable.

Transformational stories birth new perspectives that:

- Give support to challenging legacy mindsets, goals, rules and systems that sustain the status quo and make these seem preordained.
- Legitimize transformational solutions.

Five types of stories have been proven effective in driving organization transformation:

1. The **Setting & Hook Story** articulates the background on the current situation and the primary challenge(s) confronting the organization, including how it impacts the daily existence of everyone within the organization, and why there is

² Adapted from, "A Changemaker's Eight-Step Guide to Storytelling: How to Engage Heads, Hearts and Hands to Drive Change, Ashoka, 2013

a need for a resolution—i.e., transformation of the policies, systems, structures that make up an organization’s culture.

2. The **Rising Insights Story** provides supporting details that reveal deeper insights into both the challenge and opportunities at hand.
3. The **Aha! Story** identifies and shares the central insight or perceived (conceptual) solution(s) to the challenges, big and small, that are inhibiting the organization from birthing a culture that is equitable, inclusive, diverse and just.
4. The **Next Steps Story** puts forth initial thoughts about the pragmatic steps or processes that will be followed in pursuit of the transformative solution.
5. The **Impact Story** describes the prospective impact/ROI of the Transformation Initiative for people, teams and the organization as a whole over the short and long terms. The utilization of data story techniques are especially helpful when telling an impact story.

