

CSR Change Agents

Experts, Facilitators, Catalysts and Activists

By Wayne Visser

In research conducted for my PhD on CSR, I identified four types of Corporate Sustainability and Responsibility (CSR) Change Agents: Experts, Facilitators, Catalysts and Activists.

Each type represents a constellation of attributes. It is expected that any individual CSR change agent will embody elements of *all* of these types, but that the relative influence of each type will differ per individual. Hence, the dominant type can be thought of as a centre of gravity for each CSR change agent's work, i.e. the mode of operating in which they feel most comfortable, fulfilled or satisfied.

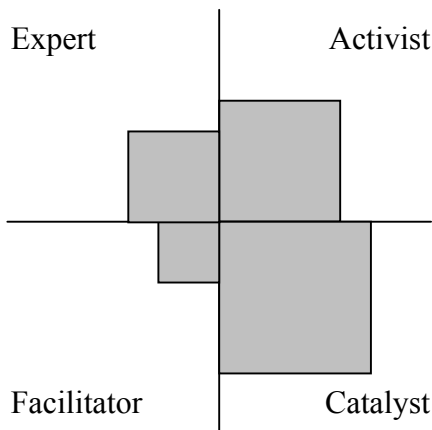
	Expert	Facilitator	Catalyst	Activist
Level of change	Individual	Group	Organisation	Society
Key focus	Tasks	People	Direction	Grassroots
Source of life satisfaction	Specialist input	People empowerment	Strategic input	Societal contribution
Source of work satisfaction	Personal development, quality input	Staff development, effective facilitation	Organisational development, strategic change	Community development, social change
Typical skills	Technical	Interpersonal	Political	Questioning
Legacy they wish to leave	More effective CSR management systems	More inspired & empowered CSR champions	More sustainable & responsible organisation	More just & sustainable world

	Illustrative quotes
Expert	I usually get that sense of meaning in work when I've finished a product, say like an Environmental Report and you see, 'I've really put in a lot and here it is'. Or you have had a series of community consultations and you now have the results.
Facilitator	If you enjoy working with people, this is a sort of functional role that you have direct interaction, you can see people being empowered, having increased knowledge, and you can see what that eventually leads to. I think that creates a great deal of sense of purpose.
Catalyst	I like getting things changed. My time is spent trying to influence people. The real interesting thing is to try and get Managing Directors, try and get plant managers, try and get business leaders, try and get sales guys to think differently and to change what they do.

Activist	It's also about the issue of being poor. It actually touches you. You see these people have been living in appalling conditions, the shacks, the drinking water is so dirty, or there's no running water at all, you see those kind of things, it hits you, and you kind of think: What can you do?
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A few final important points: Not every CSR manager is a CSR change agent. And not every CSR change agent is a particular type forever. The model is dynamic – our “centre of gravity” as change agents can shift over our life and careers. Finally, the ideal in an organisation is to have a balance of CSR Change Agent types.

Example of CSR Change Agent Profile



Article reference

Visser, W. (2008) CSR Change Agents: Experts, Facilitators, Catalysts and Activists, *CSR International Inspiration Series*, No. 2.

NOTE

The research summarised in this article is presented in more detail in Wayne Visser’s book, *Making A Difference*. See also: Visser, W., 2008. CSR Change Agency: Making a Difference, *CSR International Paper Series*, No. 1. First published in *Ethical Corporation Magazine*, November 2008.

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