

The common archetypes of organizational change agents

by Risto Sarvas

Secretary

"I document so that others can reach the stars."

Description: The invisible helper.

Talent: Organizing, documentation, avoiding internal politics. Making others succeed.

Weakness: Being overlooked and not getting credit for the great work done.

Greatest fear: Standing up, taking charge, and having people look for guidance.

Coach

"It'll be hard work, but I'll help you win in the end. Now gimme twenty push-ups!"

Description: The trainer and mentor.

Talent: Turning ordinary professionals into motivated & inspirational kick-ass superstars.

Weakness: Forgetting that the coach is successful only if the coached succeed.

Greatest fear: Coaching people who do not want to learn or change.

Hero

"Follow me and we will conquer any challenge!"

Description: The leader to follow.

Talent: Inspiring others, showing by example, taking charge and taking ownership.

Weakness: Not listening to others. Becoming too arrogant when successful.

Greatest fear: Having zero followers. Not having a battle to fight.

Guru

"Listen to my advice, and you will find the way."

Description: The source of infinite wisdom.

Talent: Vast experience and ability to see through the complexities and irrelevant noise.

Weakness: Forgetting to constantly learn new things and falling in love with own wisdom.

Greatest fear: Own knowledge being outdated and irrelevant. No one asking for advice.

Revolutionary

"Nothing can stop me and the movement for change!"

Description: The one who'll change the whole organization.

Talent: Passion to make the organization a better place. Courage to break norms and challenge authority.

Weakness: Falling in love with the revolution. Having no vision if the revolution succeeds.

Greatest fear: Finding herself at the other side of the barricades. Becoming establishment.

Outlaw

"I don't care about governance models. This is the right thing to do!"

Description: The guerrilla warrior who breaks the rules for the common good.

Talent: Ability to ignore policies and rules. Doesn't give a shit about consequences.

Weakness: Not listening to or negotiating with execs to find a long-term solution.

Greatest fear: Becoming a crazy hermit with no admiration from the grassroots.

Servant

"I'll do my best to serve you. Just tell me what to do."

Description: The obedient helping hand. Jeeves.

Talent: Humility and doing exactly what is asked for. Being predictable and professional.

Weakness: Becoming too robotic and not being able to have own opinions & perspectives.

Greatest fear: Failing in the task given. Being fired and replaced by an assertive, opinionated and critical person.

Bureaucrat

"Let's follow these steps and checklists and we will remain objective and scientific."

Description: The process master.

Talent: Perseverance to stick to methods & to respect the process. Passion for objectivity.

Weakness: Shooting down creativity by constantly demanding objectivity and compliance.

Greatest fear: Free form unaccountable creativity and belief in subjective opinions.

Benevolent ruler

"I'll turn our kingdom into a responsive and lean organization."

Description: The queen/king who wants the best for her/his citizens.

Talent: Empathy for her/his subjects. Desire to make the kingdom a good place for all.

Weakness: Listening to the wrong advisers. Too distant from the grassroots of change.

Greatest fear: Ruining the kingdom (business) by leading it to the wrong direction.

Magician

"Let me show you how it is done."

Description: The genius like talent who can do magic.

Talent: A wizard like skill to solve problems no mortal can. An awe-inspiring professional.

Weakness: Forgetting the difference between magic tricks and actual creative team work.

Greatest fear: Mediocrity, losing the magic touch, becoming outdated and ordinary.

Believer

"The Book says that we must believe in the power of the kanban. Let's discuss this in the retro."

Description: The agile/design/lean expert with a strong faith in the principles.

Talent: Inspiring commitment to principles. Ability to convert others to take a leap of faith.

Weakness: Not accepting that sometimes talented people create amazing results just by intuition, common sense and "winging it".

Greatest fear: That the Agile Manifesto has obvious shortcomings and it is not relevant.

Boss whisperer

"Speak their language so that they listen and don't clam up."

Description: The progressive, knowledgeable, and trusted adviser who bosses listen to.

Talent: Knows the worldview of elderly men who have spent their lives in boardrooms.

Weakness: Looks and sounds like the conservative establishment to be overthrown.

Greatest fear: Won't be recognized as a revolutionary and will be sent to the gallows together with the old regime.

Regular gal/guy

"Hey, what if we try this tool out and see what happens?"

Description: One of the team.

Talent: Easy to listen to, approachable, a people's person. Trustworthy and down-to-earth.

Weakness: Conformity and not having the courage to speak up when something is wrong.

Greatest fear: Being alone with her/his ideas and being pushed outside the social circle.