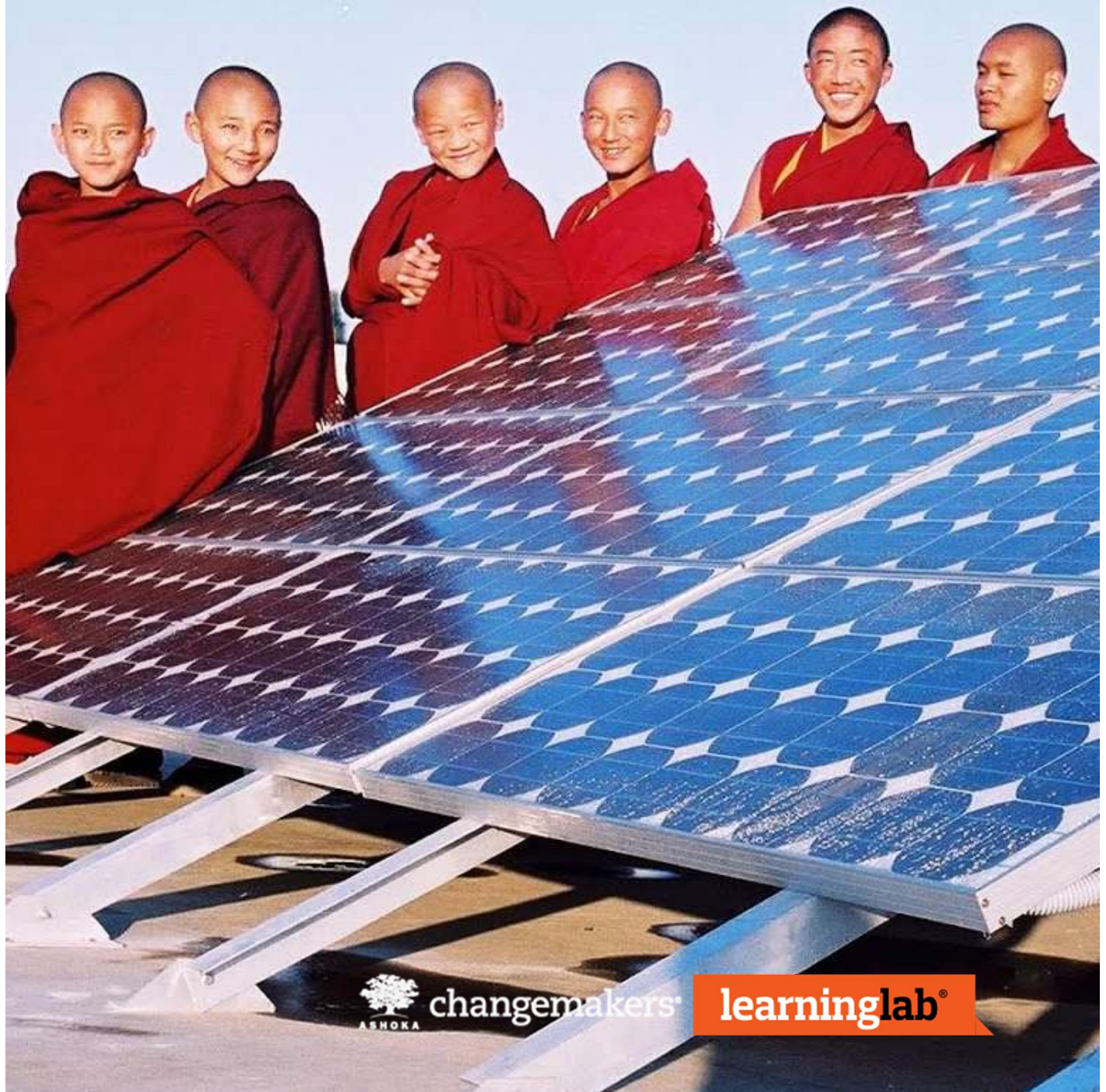


More than Simply “Doing Good”: A Definition of Changemaker

What Children, Truckers, and Superheroes all have in Common

February 2016



changemakers

learninglab®

1| INTRODUCTION

What do a group of school children, truckers, and a Nobel Peace Prize winner from Bangladesh all have in common? Each is a **changemaker** - part of a growing movement that demonstrates how anyone, young or old, can make a difference from anywhere in the world.

In Haiti, [students](#) are creating [new traffic safety](#) systems, American [truckers](#) are becoming leaders in [preventing human trafficking](#), Bangladeshi [bankers](#) have redefined finance in way that [tackles poverty](#), and the list doesn't stop there.

Changemaking is a growing trend. There are now more than 170 schools and [28,000 organizations](#) around the world that are dedicated to changemaking. But the growing movement begs an important question: what exactly *is* a changemaker?

There is a need for a common definition for "changemaker" so that it is easier to build shared community, create resources that can help anyone become a changemaker, and measure progress towards nurturing and inspiring others. Some of us at Ashoka, an organization whose mission is to create an [Everyone a Changemaker](#) world, set out to discover what it takes to be a changemaker. We discovered changemaking stories that range from four-year-olds to elder aunts, from unsung neighborhood caretakers to Nobel Peace Prize winners, and from working professionals to dedicated social entrepreneurs.

From these stories, we distilled a definition that applies to every type of changemaker. Simply put: a changemaker is **anyone who is taking creative action to solve a social problem**. This sounds deceptively simple, but delving into three parts of the definition of "changemaker" provides a roadmap for making transformative difference.

2| MORE THAN SIMPLY DOING GOOD: TENACIOUS ABOUT THE GREATER GOOD

First, by actively tackling a social problem, a changemaker demonstrates they are **motivated to act**. It is not enough to have the intention to do something good, intentions must be translated into action.

This begins by having empathy for others, identifying a specific problem or opportunity to tackle, and giving oneself permission to do something about it. It doesn't stop there. A changemaker keeps trying until they have made a difference.

[Hilmi Quraishi](#) is a changemaker who credits his success to a willingness to keep trying, over and over. "There is no manual for ground realities," he explains as he describes why his health education games now reach millions. "It has to come with experiencing first hand, and by getting gray hairs. Every day is new learning."

Second, a changemaker focuses on **solving a social problem for the greater good**. It's more than doing anything socially-oriented— what sets a changemaker apart is focusing on tackling a “social problem.” Doing this creates an understanding of how to solve a social problem that grows over time.

For example, a young child who wants to recycle plastic rather than let it hurt local wildlife has taken their first steps in changemaking. But if, one day, recycling became commonplace, this doesn't mean that everyone is a changemaker; changemakers would be actively trying to solve the next major challenge in managing resources (a scenario that is [already becoming true](#) in some places).

A changemaker's efforts may or may not succeed, but they are motivated by a genuine and heartfelt desire to make the world a better place, even if it is on a very personal scale. As Hilmi says, “the first law of social enterprise is your heart.”

Finally, being a changemaker is not possible without also being **creative**. It takes courage to see and do things differently from the status quo. Changemakers are inquisitive, open-minded, and resourceful. Even when good things are happening within the status quo, they are not satisfied with

the status quo because they have a vision of how to make things better.

[Khalid al-Khudair](#), a Saudi social entrepreneur who focuses on creating jobs for women, captures the type of creativity that changemakers apply to create new possibilities when he says that “to an entrepreneurial mind, every obstacle can become an opportunity.”

Being a changemaker is not possible without also being creative. They have the courage to see and do things differently than they are already being done.

3 | LEAVE THE PARACHUTE AT HOME

The Changemakers who create the most impact cannot just parachute into a community as an outsider who has come to save the day. They must be personally connected to the issue they want to solve. Each of the case studies of the [3,000 changemakers](#) Ashoka has selected to fund, for example, includes a story describing the personal experiences that led them to tackle a particular problem, and many live within the community where they are co-creating solutions.

Further, changemaking is not something that is just the domain of the privileged few. Examples abound of people, who are seen as “in need” but who are actually at the heart of creating and driving their own solutions to the most pressing issues of our time. For example, street children in India are running their own helpline to [quickly reach other children in distress](#), women

in Nigeria are incorporating technology to [build wealth beyond subsistence farming](#), and ex-gang members are leading efforts to [reduce gun violence](#) by more than 75 percent within American inner-cities.

4| BUSTING THE “LONE HERO” MYTH

We uncovered important nuances about the different types of changemaking as we explored how a changemaker is defined.

Not every changemaker needs to launch their own start-up or be the president of an organization; changemakers can find opportunities to make a difference in any number of roles. They may have no ties to an organization; they may take action as an individual or as part of a group; they may organize as a part of broader community or they may work within a formal organization.

Changemakers may choose to remain unincorporated, join existing social impact organizations, or help organizations make shifts that allow them to more fully realize their potential. A 2012 call for ideas from within corporations, for example, surfaced more than 100 ideas. For example, a cell-phone company employee worked to help informal businesses in slum areas function by

giving them [mailing addresses through mobile-phones](#), and at a pharmaceutical company an employee began working on cheap, accurate, [paper-based diagnostic kits](#) for anemia after a family friend died without being diagnosed. Known as [social “intrapreneurs,”](#) these are people that are creating social impact from within large companies or organizations.

Deep and lasting change requires a wide array of efforts by many collaborative teams. As part of our effort to define the term changemaker, we mapped more than 200 leading social entrepreneurs, Ashoka partners, and historic figures, and we found six common types of changemakers, many of which can be compared to these familiar roles:

Lasting change does not happen by lone heros; it requires teams of people, strong institutions, and support from every part of society.

- **Social Architects:** build new social structures or optimize existing ones - whether spatial, procedural, or digital - by redefining roles and the flow of resources; they include policy makers, designers, and organizational leaders.
- **Influencers:** guide how people learn and make decisions such as educators; they include researchers, parents, and journalists.
- **Skills Catalyzers:** offer specific expertise; they include

accountants, lawyers, and mediators.

- **Investors:** provide financial or in-kind resources, and include impact investors and philanthropists.
- **Inventors:** create new technologies or tools; they include engineers and scientists.
- **Connectors:** create opportunities for relationships among disparate groups generating solutions that are greater than the sum of their parts; they include conference conveners and community

organizers.

Not everyone fits neatly within just one of these categories. Many play different roles during different stages of their lives, but this underscores how lasting change is not created by lone heroes; it requires teams of people, strong institutions, and support from every part of society. Whatever your skill-set or choice of profession, there's an opportunity to make a difference.

SIX TYPES OF CHANGEMAKERS

Type	Medium of Change	Examples	Ashoka Fellow Example
1. Social Architect	social structures (roles and flow of resources)	designers, policy makers, organizational leaders	Jimmy Wales, Wikipedia, created mechanism for democratizing knowledge creation
2. Influencer	thinking and decisions	educators, researchers, journalists, parents	Mary Gordon, Roots of Empathy, influenced Canadian early childhood education norms
3. Investors	resources (funding, in-kind)	impact investors, philanthropists	Nobel Laureate Muhammad Yunus, Grameen Bank, enabled millions in funding via microloans
4. Skills Catalyzers	expert resources (including skills)	accountants, lawyers, mediators, computer programmers	Ami Dar, Idealist.org, connected millions of job-seekers to social sector organization needs - demonstrating the needs for skilled professionals in changemaking
5. Inventor	technology, tools	engineers, scientists,	Lassane Savadogo, ASPMY, created food storage systems that double local income.
6. Connector	Relationships	conveners, community organizers	Nobel Laureate Kailash Satyarthi, Global March Against Child Labor, alliance among 2,000+ organizations

5| WHY KINDERGARTENERS COUNT. AND FAILURE CAN BE A GOOD THING

Changemakers can start at a very early age, and can encounter failures along the way. Ashoka board member Mary Gordon describes the youngest changemaking example she can recall involving a very shy kindergartener who noticed her classmate being bullied, overcame her shyness, and enlisted the teacher's help to put a stop to it. "That child had empathy for the little boy and she had the leadership qualities at three-and-a-half years of age to ask the authority figure to come over and help him." This 3.5-year-old did not conduct a problem-analysis, formulate a strategic plan, or declare their role, but is still an inspiring example of very early changemaking in action. The same is true of parents, teachers, technologists and any range of people who are changemaking whether they actively self-identify as such or not.

It's worth noting that you don't have to immediately see success in order to be a changemaker. In fact, many effective changemakers experience repeated failures before they see lasting impact. [Sunil Abraham](#) describes how, in his work to meet software needs of hundreds of civil society organizations, "ideas that failed completely 10 years ago--10 years later the exact same idea

worked. As an organization, we are open minded and willing to try ideas from people that come from completely different contexts, and we are willing to learn from them as well."

The path of changemaking, in the chart below, outlines just how diverse the path of changemaking can be in terms of outcome (failure vs. success), self-identity, role (individual vs. group), or scale of impact.

Handouts can create a crutch of dependency that do more harm than good. Lasting change requires approaches that create self-empowerment.

6| HANDOUTS: A FIRST STEP, BUT SOMETIMES THE WORST STEP

While anyone *can* be a changemaker - at any age or point in their career - it is essential to understand how we can all work together to create deep and lasting impact. Using a fishing example, Ashoka's founder [Bill Drayton describes](#) how one type of changemaker- social entrepreneurs - are "not content just to give a fish or teach how to fish. They will not rest until they have revolutionized the fishing industry."

To break this analogy down: the empathy required to see that someone else needs a fish, and the generosity to give a fish, are indeed noble qualities that should be cultivated. That type of generosity can make a difference and may sometimes be the only immediate way to make a difference. However, at a certain point, giving handouts can

CHANGEMAKING PATHWAYS	
	earlier stage-----> later stage
Self-Identification	implicit ⇔ explicit
Outcome	failure ⇔ success
Role	individual ⇔ group ⇔ community ⇔ organization ⇔ association
Scale of Impact (see explanation below)	direct service⇔scaling direct service⇔systems change⇔framework change

actually create a crutch of dependency that do more harm than good. Lasting change requires approaches that create self-empowerment for the beneficiaries, such as teaching the skill of fishing.

There is another level of impact beyond providing direct services, known as systems change, that involves creating change at an even greater scale, such as at the level of industries and sectors, and addressing the root issues that cause persistent problems. [Ori Vigfusson](#) offers a real life example as it relates to fishing extinction and protecting local families from losing the jobs that depend on fish. Through the [North Atlantic Salmon Fund](#) (NASF), his network's radical approach to changing the fishing industry's depletion of salmon stock around

Iceland was to find a way to value a live salmon more than a dead one. To do so, NASF established catch-and-release fly fishing as a base for the economy instead of extractive fishing, which generates more income than simply selling the fish once. New economic incentives and multiple million dollar business partnerships cut down on excessive salmon fishing while allowing local fisherman to continue to prosper.

This innovation from Iceland's fishing industry is only one example of social entrepreneurs' work to fundamentally change the way systems operate. Ashoka has now identified more than 3,000 such inspiring social entrepreneurs that serve as [examples](#) of how changemakers work together to create systems-change in health,

education, the environment, civic engagement, economic development, and human rights. Each social entrepreneur is highly skilled at collaboration, and is often focused on equipping *others* to thrive and collaborate in solving social problems (i.e., to be changemakers).

While Ashoka is deeply committed to finding and supporting the changemakers that are passionately focused on creating a particular type of

systems change, it's important to note that each level of impact is valuable and necessary; every changemaker that creates systems change has some sort of direct service that their work is built upon - and without which widespread impact would not be possible.

Social impact can be viewed as occurring in levels, beginning with providing direct services, and then progressing to scaling up the impact of a direct service, fundamentally changing how social systems operate, and finally achieving very large-scale systems

FOUR LEVELS OF SOCIAL IMPACT		
Level of Impact	Description	Examples
Direct Service	Addressing the immediate needs of specific individuals or communities.	Soup kitchens, small-scale mentoring programs for students, legal services for community members.
Scaling Direct Service	Solving a social problem at a regional or nationwide scale.	The Red Cross, Americorp, or large-scale refugee resettlement programs.
Systems Change (indirect service)	Transforming the patterns within which society operates - including individuals, leaders, institutions, policies, and cultural practices. These types of solutions address the root causes of problems, as opposed to the symptoms.	Micro-credit as a fundamentally new innovation for millions of women to lift themselves out of poverty. Wikipedia as a means for democratizing information.
Framework Change (indirect service)	Systems change at scale. Changing mindsets and behavioral patterns through networks of individuals and institutions; embedding new patterns into society-wide norms.	Universal Human Rights, Women's Rights, Civil Rights, Democracy, or the idea of Social Entrepreneurship. Source: Modified from Rethinking the Impact Spectrum, Ashoka U

change by changing mindsets and behavioral patterns through networks, a process we call framework change.

7| TOWARDS AN EVERYONE A CHANGEMAKER WORLD

The vision for an Everyone a Changemaker world is rooted in an urgency for a better way to solve social problems, especially given the increasing rate of change in the world. But what might an “[everyone a changemaker](#)” world look like? [Bill Drayton describes](#) it is as a world in which people have the

“Everyone has changemaking in their DNA, it’s just a matter of unlocking it.”

societal support, freedom, and confidence to reach their full potential and make a difference in the lives of others. This requires nurturing the set of skills and experiences that are needed to be a changemaker, as well as cultivating the environment that allows changemaking to flourish.

There remains a great deal more to be explored on the journey towards building an Everyone a Changemaker world. Questions of active, ongoing research at Ashoka include: What ongoing movements make building the Everyone

WHAT IS A CHANGEMAKER? DEFINITION:

Ashoka is driven by the belief that everyone has changemaking in their DNA, it’s just a matter of unlocking it. Simply put, a **changemaker is anyone who is taking creative action to solve a social problem**. Thus, whether sparking a global movement or stopping a classroom bully, a founder of a social enterprise or an employee of a multinational company, every changemaker is:

- **Intentional about solving a social problem for the greater good.** A changemaker has empathy for others and is driven by the genuine goal of making the world a better place.
- **Motivated to act.** A changemaker gives themselves the permission to do something about a social problem, and keeps trying until they have made a difference.
- **Creative.** Changemakers are inquisitive, open-minded and resourceful. They have the courage to see and do things differently.

Social entrepreneurs are a type of changemaker who creates widespread impact by being focused on systems change. Every social entrepreneur is highly skilled at collaboration, and is often focused on equipping *others* to thrive and collaborate in solving social problems (i.e. to be changemakers).

a Changemaker world possible? What is the evidence that shows that practicing changemaking is a critical skill for preparing young persons for the future? How do we measure progress towards an Everyone a Changemaker world? And what are the best ways to nurture and inspire people to be changemakers?

These questions aside, this effort to provide a definition of changemaker and explore its nuances demonstrates how changemaking is needed in every shape and size, and how inspiration can come from any corner. At some time, we are all touched by an urgent social problem that needs “change,” or we can name a hero who has been a courageous “maker” of a solution. Thus, becoming a changemaker, or helping to nurture and inspire others, is something we can all resonate with. As Engineers Without Borders founder George Roter says, “Everyone has changemaking in their DNA, it’s just a matter of unlocking it.”

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Written by Reem Rahman, Kris Herbst, and Patrice Mobley

Thank you to Sachin Malhan, Sushimta Gosh, Aditi Shekar, Michael Zakaras, Maggie Lemere, Dani Matielo, Tim Scheu, and Lynsey Farrell for the thought partnership that made this article possible and to the Ashoka teams and changemakers network who are shaking up the status quo and inspiring better solutions anywhere and everywhere.

Photo Credits: Cover - Lotus Solar Energy, Nepal; Page 5 – [Yuwa Kicking It New School](#), India

FEEDBACK WELCOME!

We welcome your feedback on how to make this paper better! Leave a comment on any specific paragraph here: bit.ly/definingchangemaker or feel free to e-mail: learninglab@ashoka.org .