

## Friendship Networks, Affinity Groups and Cliques.

Individually there is very little any of us can do to change the world. Light bulb changing isn't going to avert the positive feedback loops, anymore than a speech by Martin Luther King, on its own, was going to overthrow racism.

We gather together to learn from each other and to use our **power** together to change (or save) the world.

But it's not easy to keep that power free and useful. We all know examples, both small and large, of power that has turned into domination, dictatorship, exclusivity. Some people seem to want it that way; either to be leaders or followers.

But the belief in non-hierarchy (or as it was known before its recent re-branding, “anarchy”) means we have to hope that the impulse isn't inevitable, and we do what we can to counter it.

The point we try to make is that each type of group is good for *certain types* of things. We have to constantly ask ourselves: *is this formation going to achieve our aims* (the dread phrase “fit for purpose”)? If not, then what are we going to do about it?

	<b>Friendship Network</b>
What's it good for?	Helping you through tough times when the media is smearing, money is tight, you've been banging your head against a brick wall. Sustaining long-term activism in difficult psychological and financial environments
Plus	You get validation from people who are similarly “unsuccessful” in “real world” terms. When all the people you went to school with are plumbers/doctors/whatever When a group is full enough of talented people, and the facilitation is working well, you can get a lot of wisdom and a lot of planning done very very quickly. Quicker than in hierarchical organisations, and better quality too.
Minus	People don't even realise they are talking over everyone else's heads, that in a room of 60 people, 10 are doing all the talking. The personal becomes political. If bad ideas come from a friend, they get higher priority than good ideas from strangers/enemies. The common culture is defended, and rotten assumptions become dogma. Opportunities get missed.
Interesting	How to get beyond the “ <i>but when we organise as friendship networks it makes it harder for the cops to figure out who we are/what we are doing</i> ” nonsense
Trajectory	Do FN's always progress (well, degress) into cliques? If not, when and how not?
Reading	The Eurovision Song Contest as “Friendship Network” by Anthony Dekker Connections 27 (3) 53-58

	<b>Affinity Group</b>
What's it good for?	Planning small-scale (but perhaps very high-impact) non-violent direct actions both on their own and as part of something bigger. With everyone in affinity groups, a swarm can become a rabble
Plus	Security less of an issue. Decision making sometimes easier

Minus	You need to be in one. If you're all starting out together it can be like two virgins de-virginising each other- lots of confusion and noise and possibly very under-whelming. Once there's a cop inside, that AG is in serious trouble.
Interesting	How well does new blood and new ideas and remorseless self-criticism fit?
Trajectory	Some last for decades. Others don't. Tortoises and mayflies, tortoises and mayflies...
Reading	Clamshell Alliance stuff. Network for Climate Action toolkit

	<b>Clique- (is NOT just a group you are not welcome in! Casual allegations of cliques devalues the term, and makes real ones harder to name.)</b>
What's it good for?	Making people feel they are cool. Protecting from criticism or doubt. Keeping outsiders from feeling welcome or useful.
Plus	Everyone in it feels cool Everyone knows each others strengths and weaknesses. And bitches about them.
Minus	Messages not coming in from outside Only new faces that look like the old faces get in; and determined ones at that.
Interesting	The ways cliques delude themselves into denying their own existence (the best trick the devil ever played was in convincing everyone [and himself] that he didn't exist)
Trajectory	Cliques may or may not be incompetent at the outset, but they tend to incompetence and sclerosis over time. No new eyes, reluctance to criticise mates' methods and behaviour. People value the ongoing friendship/membership of the clique over and above a clear-eyed accounting of who is fucking up what. They often start to coalesce around charismatic, affable and well-intentioned people who have good people skills. These sorts can be very hard-working (especially if they have a martyr complex)
Reading	Stuff on interpersonal ties in wikipedia "The formal definition of a clique as it is used in network analysis is much more narrow and precise than the general notion of a high local density. Formally, a clique is the maximum number of actors who have all possible ties present among themselves." <a href="http://www.faculty.ucr.edu/~hanneman/nettext/C11_Cliques.html">http://www.faculty.ucr.edu/~hanneman/nettext/C11_Cliques.html</a> International Network for Social Network Analysis The Study of Social Networks The Tyranny of Structurelessness by Jo Freeman

## What is to be done?

Acknowledge the strengths and weaknesses in our movement

Acknowledge when things fuck up

Acknowledge the costs of not having proper accountability mechanisms.