Understanding Networks

AdAstra Collective

Who is AdAstra Collective?

AdAstra Collective is comprised of movement building practitioners with expertise in leadership development, resource mobilization, and narrative intervention.

Our vision is transform power through networked movement building for a just, democratic, and liberatory world.
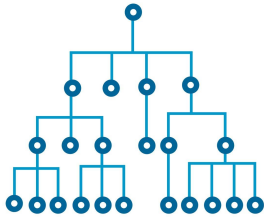
WE

specialize in strategizing through networks in social movements

invest in people, cultivating potential to create economic change.

believe in stories that shift political realities.

AdAstra Collective

Forms of Organizational Structures (Now let's get in Formation)

TRADITIONAL ORGANIZATION

You hear hear the term decentralized network this term a lot. We want to be clear about what we mean and we don't mean.

Quick disclaimer, what you are about to see are idealized types-- the reality is more complex, but these are helpful.

Organizations are hierarchies. In the classic pyramid, decisions and information stay at the top; people work in different silos that are often not connected to each other.
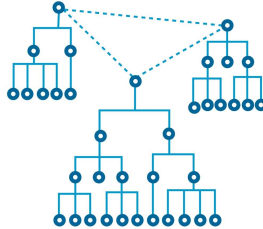
These represent communication structures as well as decision-making.

Forms of Organizational Structures (Now let's get in Formation)

**TRADITIONAL ORGANIZATION**
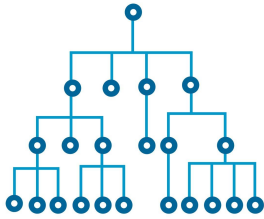
COALITION

This slide maps coalitions or partnerships - people often call this a "network" but in reality, it is often multiple hierarchies connected to each other at their tops.
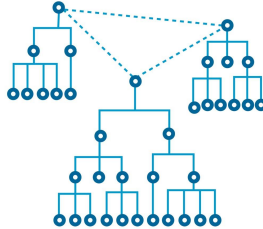
There is something else we often call a network: coalitions. Coalitions aren't really networks, most communication and decision making only happens between the leadership. Coalitions it is often a bunch of hierarchies connected to each other at their tops.

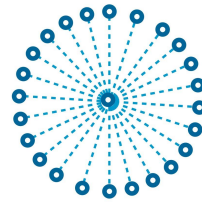# Forms of Organizational Structures (Now let's get in Formation)

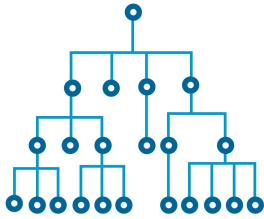**TRADITIONAL ORGANIZATION**
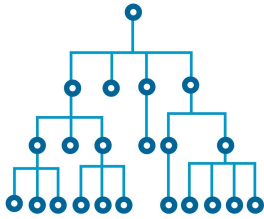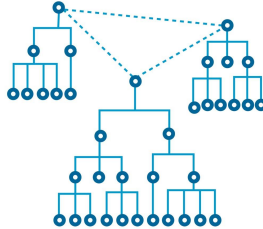
COALITION

HUB AND SPOKE

Here is something else people call a network-- an organization that is primarily an email list. A small number of people communicate with large numbers, but the large numbers don't communicate with each other

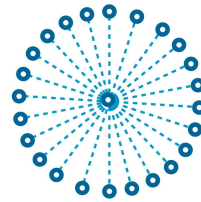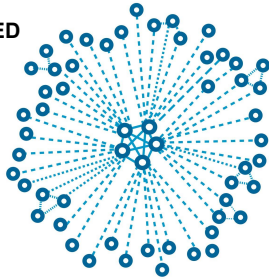# Forms of Organizational Structures (Now let's get in Formation)

ORGANIZATION

COALITION

HUB & SPOKE

CENTRALIZED CLUSTER NETWORK

The Online Campaign Org - without naming names, many large groups are trying to form networks, and they are similar to the email list. A core of very few people making decisions and a huge membership that is simply receiving information and decisions without being deeply connected to each other. They are great for mobilizing large numbers of people to take weak forms of action, like signing on-line petitions and voting. Ideas can originate from the members, but they have to go through the center.

Forms of Organizational Structures (Now let's get in Formation)
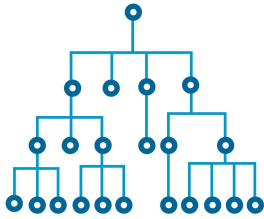
ORGANIZATION

COALITION

HUB & SPOKE

CENTRALIZED CLUSTER NETWORK

CHAPTER ORGANIZATIONS

MOVEMENT
NET LAB

Chapter organizations, which are more distributed, still communicate and make decision through the center which limits innovation.

Forms of Organizational Structures (Now let's get in Formation)

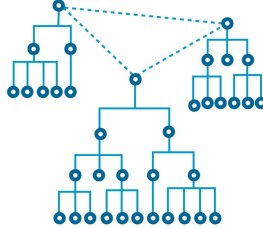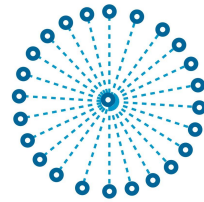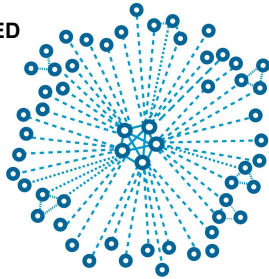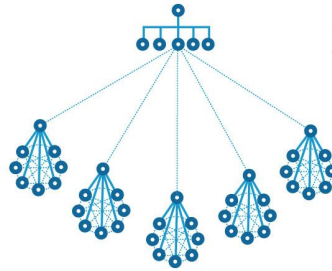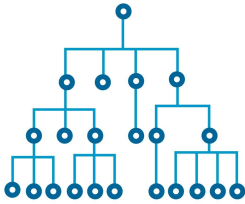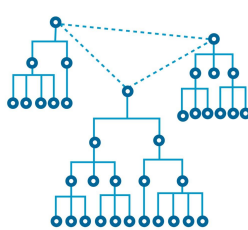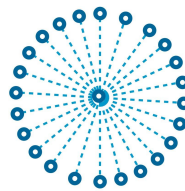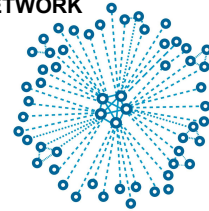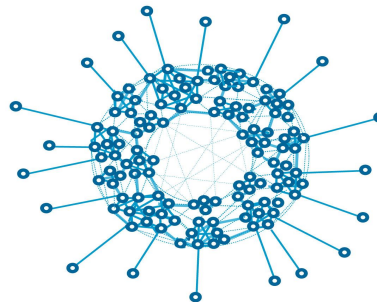ORGANIZATION · COALITION · HUB & SPOKE · CENTRALIZED CLUSTER NETWORK · CHAPTER ORGANIZATIONS · DECENTRALIZED NETWORK

MOVEMENT NET LAB
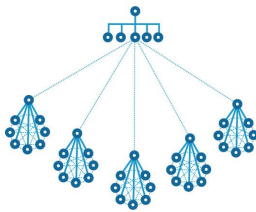
A Smart Network - A decentralized, self organizing network IS what we are talking about. See how different it looks? There is a core, but it's huge. It doesn't have one center, but many centers, and they are all connected to each other. Decisions, ideas and information can come from anywhere and travel throughout the group in any direction. The periphery is reaching out and constantly bringing in new information and members as it grows. The members are more closely connected to each other and hence, more likely to take bolder, riskier forms of actions.

A healthy Movement Ecology includes a network of all of these types of organizations working together adding a new layer, or intensity to existing models.

So what does this mean? We're trying to show that the limitations of a decentralized self organized network are different than these other systems. We're trying to explain form, but then answer the question: why networks? Networks because: they allow for huge amounts of meaningful participation. Because they are able to scale extremely quickly. Because they are able to be broader than other systems. Because they are a return to a more relational autonomy. Because hierarchy can still happen inside networks when it needs to, but it is not the default that it's hard to break out of.

DECENTRALIZED NETWORK
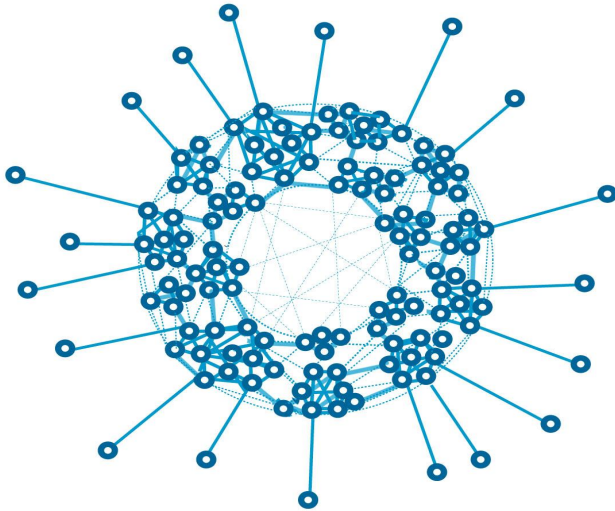
ACTIONS:

- Experiments & collaborations

- From small acts to larger

- Learning through diversity

- Successful innovations spread

DECENTRALIZED, SELF-ORGANIZED
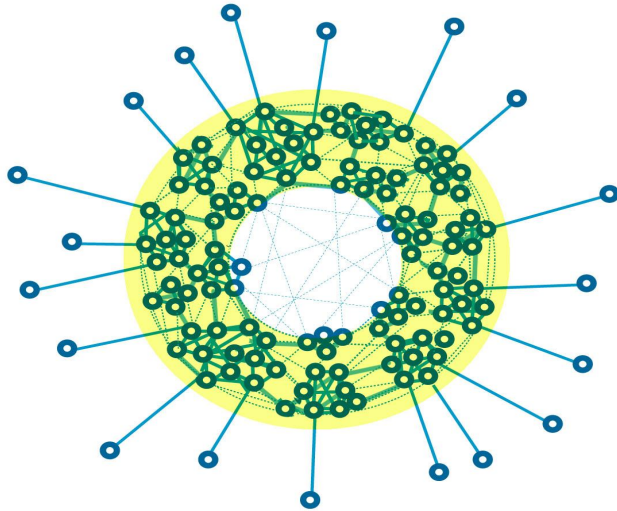
Decentralized
Core

DECENTRALIZED, SELF-ORGANIZED

Decentralized
Core

Overlapping
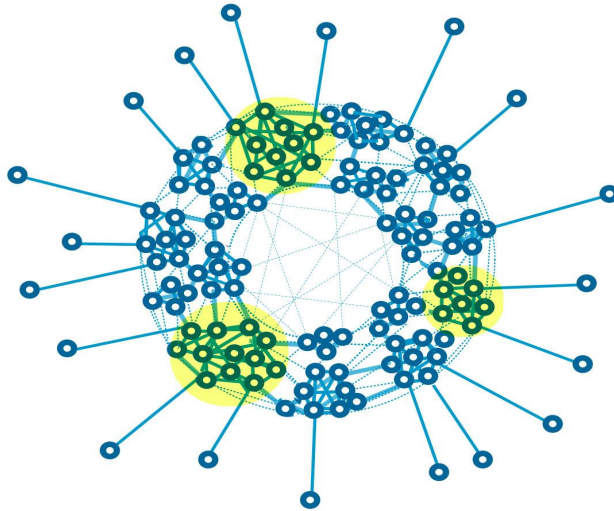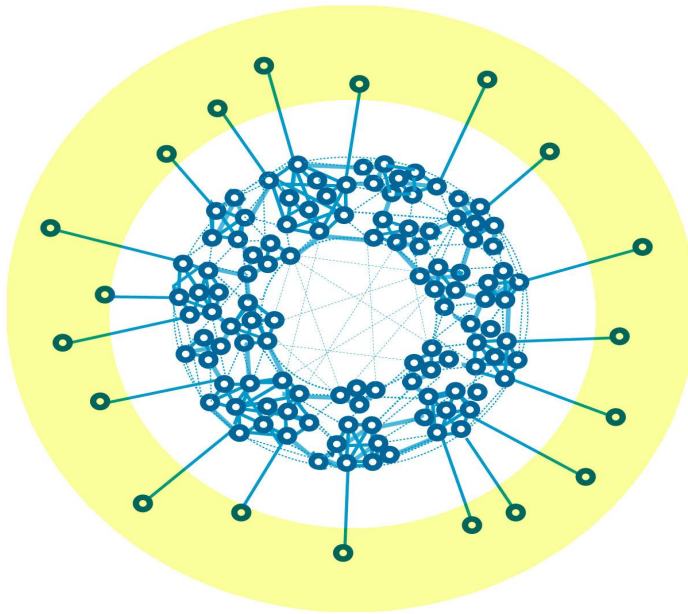Clusters

Decentralized and self-organized means people involved in multiple groups, forming many overlapping relationships, which helps information spread throughout the network

DECENTRALIZED, SELF-ORGANIZED

Decentralized Core

Overlapping Clusters

Strong Periphery

Decentralized, self-organized networks resist inward looking movements. They are constantly looking outwards for infusion of new ideas, and checking for relevance to larger population. This model helps movements stay relevant, popular, grow, change, and adapt. Some things stay on the periphery, but can remain extremely valuable to the core. For example: a friend who has legal advice. They don't have to 'Join' and often try to dictate terms to people who have not decided to join yet.

Peripheral nodes outside are actually connected to their own networks,and infuse resources.

So what/ how does this apply? Social movements, especially with a strong culture (and sometimes a strong orientation or goal) can become self referential and insular. We think the movement is the world and/or fuck the rest of the world they don't get it. If we were only trying to build a new society with the people in the network this might actually work (though probably not) but in a social movement particularly, we have objectives outside of our own relationships. We are trying to impact something that touches us and is also outside of us. So, we need to be able to 1. communicate with people who are not "in". 2: If we think that the way social movements make change is through mass participation and not smart people enacting new policy (theory of change), movements need to be continuously reaching out, absorbing new people, and then reaching out again. 3: Within a group of people, there is a limited amount of creativity, references, ideas, etc. One of the things social movements have going for us, is that we have more people in active participation than the opposition (generally) and so we can come up with more creative solutions faster than them. We need to be

constantly reaching outside our niche for ideas that haven't occurred to us yet or skills we haven't developed. Example of the mathemeticians and the sea slug http://www.ted.com/talks/margaret_wertheim_crochets_the_coral_reef?language=en. Example of overlapping with the fantasy baseball league who's got a lawyer and a cook.

How do you do that? Spending time with people outside your projects. Inviting participation on social media through hashtags. Some open meetings. Some open trainings. Speakers bureau/ traveling educators/spokespeople. Publications. Transparent structures online (loomio podemos)

Reaching out the periphery strategically. Which parts of the periphery are you prioritizing (skills, resources, networks)? How do we gamify this. What do you do and who do you know? Identifying people's periphery in intake forms or initiation. What are fun things for the periphery to participate in?

DECENTRALIZED, SELF-ORGANIZED

Family Members

Workplace Colleagues

Classmates

Friends

Kid's Friends Parents

Church Congregation

Other Social Movement Networks

Lawyer

Sports Teammates

Neighbors

Decentralized Core

Overlapping Clusters

Strong Periphery
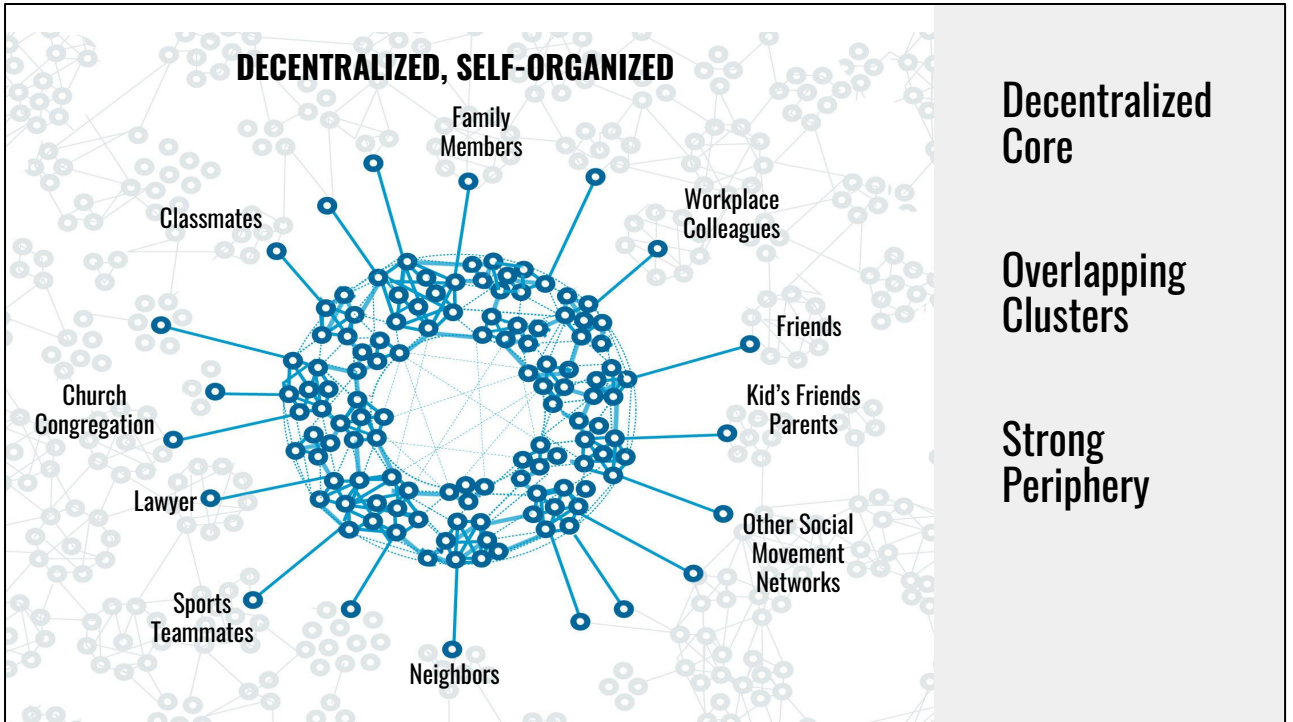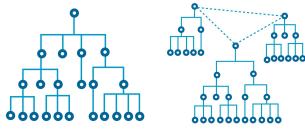
ORGS/COALITIONS   **ON-LINE ORGS**   **CHAPTER**   **NETWORKS**
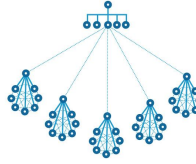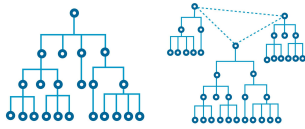
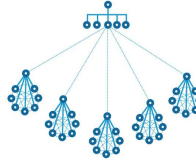Each structure is good at some things
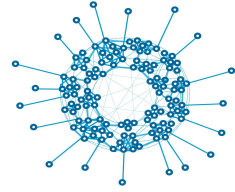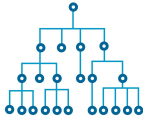
ORGS/COALITIONS   **ON-LINE ORGS**   **CHAPTER**   **NETWORKS**

Each structure is good at some things

And not good at others.

	ORGANIZATIONS/COALITIONS	ON-LINE ORGS	DECENTRALIZED NETWORKS
GOOD	**Knowledge and Material Production:** identifiable outcomes with deliverables **Accountability**: Clear Accountability structures based on rank and file. **Sense of belonging**: Once brought into the organization based on ability they are brought into and buy into the structure and culture.	**Scale:** Able to get huge numbers of people to undertake easier forms of action that can be aggregated into real power ($, votes, petitions, joining networks etc) **Fundraising**: Great at cultivating sustaining donors	**Scale:** Able to get huge numbers of people to undertake courageous action, putting body on the line, direct action **Complexity**: Able to address complex problems **Flexibility** Flexible, able to shift quickly
NOT GOOD	**Complexity:** Historically not been successful at solving complex problems, focus on one small piece or issue. **Flexibility**: Harder time shifting strategies & tactics. Can constrain popular energy, scale Can constrain innovation & information Often don't expand beyond membership	**Commitment:** Apart from online petitions and one directional participation there is not a greater commitment to the vision **Sense of ownership/belonging:** Projects are set by the staff from the online org not from the constituents.	**Accountability** (dependent on clearly outlines principles). **Unified Strategy:** Given divergence in thinking and approaches it is difficult to agree on one strategy or path to do something. **Leadership development** *There is swarm accountability according to shared principles - if you do this during mass trainings up front, then it saves a lot of time and effort

For the last 100 years organizations are the way things have been done. Some of the challenges are that organizations are expensive and restrictive. Both limit experimentation and innovation and autonomy.

We don't know where the future of movement is headed, if orgs are going to fade away or continue. There might be more innovative, less expensive ways to operate in the future. At the very least orgs need to be more networked and collaborative with each other and with people outside their organizations (i.e. the larger public) .

Base-building organizations are still needed. What we are talking about is adding on top of that. Coalitions and organizations be seen as *relatively* temporary, self-organized working groups within a larger networks. Organizations might last 2-15 years, but the network, in communities, in neighborhoods and cities, can last for decades, or generations. Networks are the underlying operating system on which organizations run.

In Formal Structure vs. Informal structureless, tyranny of structurelessness vs. tyranny of structure, each structure has its own tyranny. What happens when networks are operating in a secret, exclusive, undemocratic ways (old boys networks, terrorist networks)? Can organizations create accountability, openness, etc. Can networks be made more democratic without formal structure. Identity and values keep networks more inclusive and democratic. Are organizations needed to shape and massage networks to make them more inclusive and democratic? We don't even know the

answers yet.

Some organizations can be very enabling and empowering towards others (Other can be imprisoning). They can be a platform for self-organizing, that facilitates both individual and network growth.
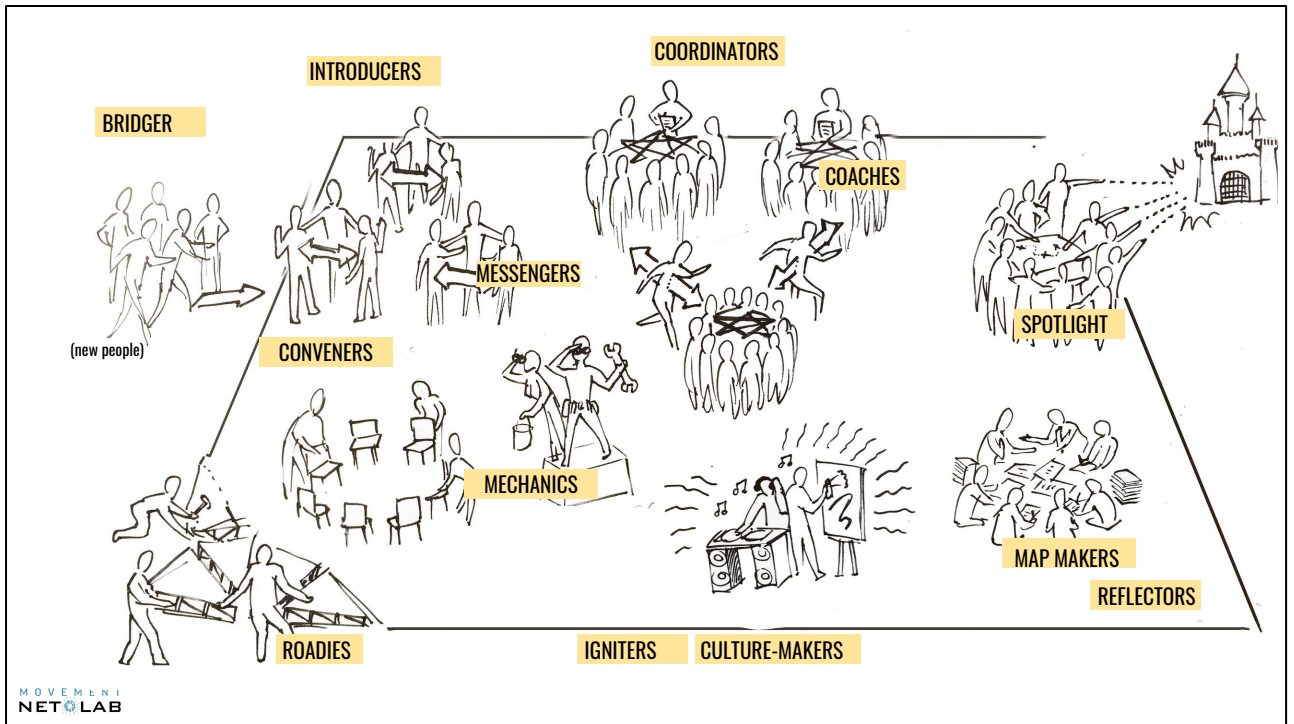
Here are some of the roles that people play inside of movement ecologies.

SELF-ORGANIZING PHASES

GATHERING: Allows people to **find diverse others** from a **large network** to join with them or **collaborate.**

CLUSTERING: Encourages people to **see an opportunity t**o make a change or try something out, and then form more focused, **smaller groups** to take action.

COLLABORATING: People **deepen relationships** by working together, can be a transformative experience.

BRIDGING: Share what is being planned with other clusters and the larger network

ACTION: Individuals and groups feel they feel like they can **initiate action**

LEARNING: Know how to **pay attention** to what is happening, debrief, **analyze** the action to take a **better next step**

MOVEMENT
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Mark **Granovetter** refers to your **strong ties** as your friends and your **weak ties** as your acquaintances in his paper "Notes on the strength of **weak ties**" Granovetter talks about the interpersonal **relationships** between different, disparate groups of people and how they hold different sections of society together. These ties weave these phases together.

Where do the stories of transformation live?
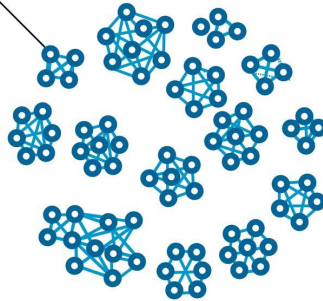
In our networks of relationships!!!!

The Anatomy of a Network
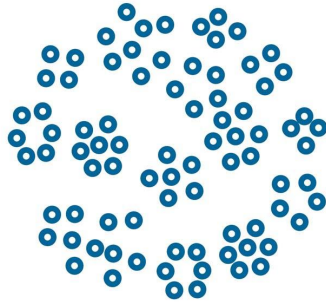
Each network starts with individuals as a unit of measurement and structure.

CLUSTERS
With high degrees of
trust & interaction

MOVEMENT
NET☼LAB

Individuals then form around areas of work or interest.

Clusters are small groups with dense personal relationships and high degrees of trust.
These are usually groups of 3-20 people who know each other and work together,
and are bound by some common interest, either an issue they care about or skill they
have.

EXAMPLE: Affinity Groups

Recombination is key - clusters form/connect differently depending on the need of the
moment - disassemble/reassemble - with different clusters emphasized, and clusters
which support that emphasis

Hierarchical systems can't disassemble and recombine - that's why FEMA and
Red-Cross couldn't do what Occupy Sandy did. At a moment of need, groups from
New York and New Jersey focused on mutual aid and long term rebuilding, instead of
charity, in affected areas for a more sustainable mutual aid network.

So what/how does this apply?: Clusters can be formed around affinity or projects or
identity or skills or whatever.
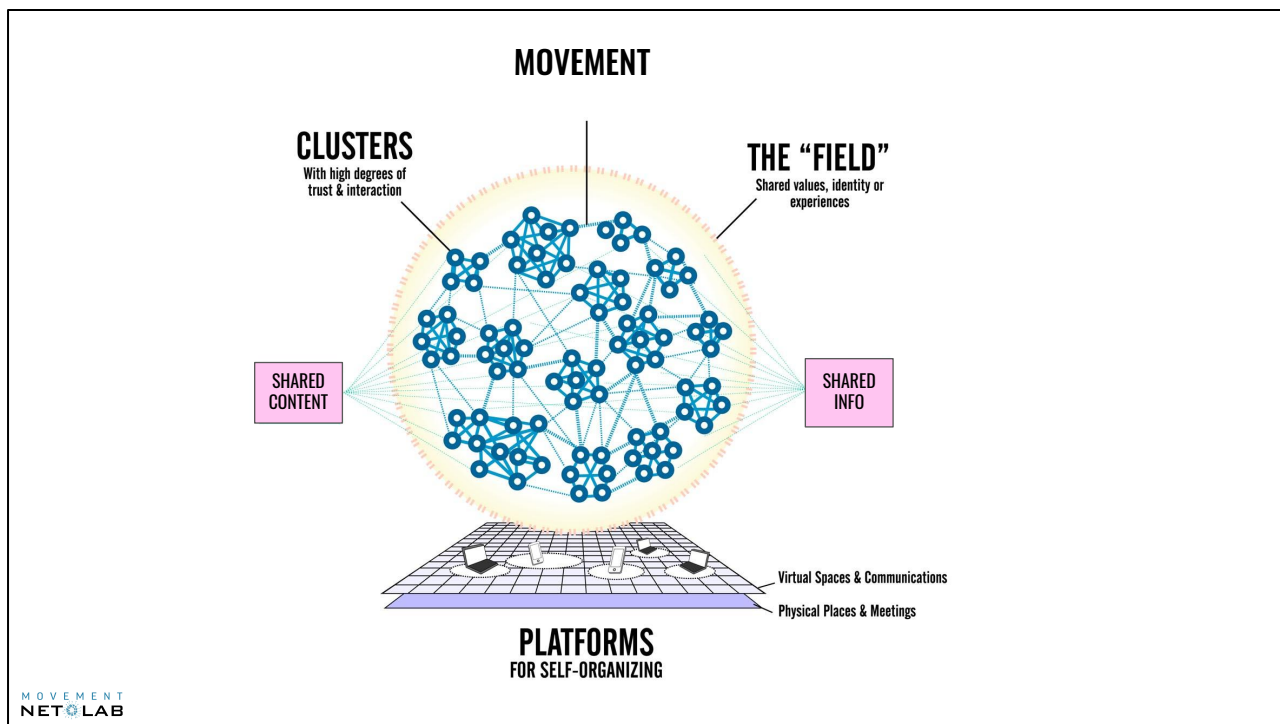
All of this requires a container that facilitates its growth...the cauldron in which all the ingredients are mixed, or the platform upon which all of this is built. They allow people to find like-minded people, form their own groups and continue working together. These platforms can be virtual spaces (like social media, email list serves, or text loops) or physical places like an ongoing occupation.

However, platforms are most powerful when they are *both* virtual and physical acting together.

Why are my relationship important in my endeavors to transform systems?

"One thing you can count on.
If you isolate yourself in order to win, you already lost."
- Eli Armstrong, Dream Defenders

"Build homes. Not bunkers."
- Movement Netlab

Good leaders need to make the time and effort to talk with new people, shy people, people who hold less status in the group, and, especially, people who are not even "in the room"; for example, people who are part of the group's intended social base of support.

This helps to keep the group's attention oriented toward the periphery instead of the center; toward the tasks of welcoming newcomers, plugging people in, and turning *potential* allies into *active* allies.
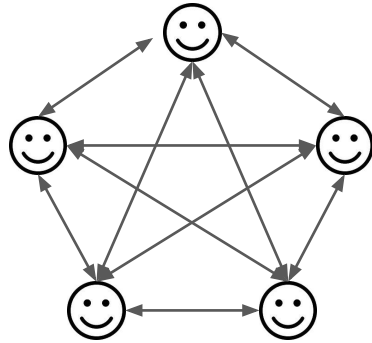
Circles of Connection:
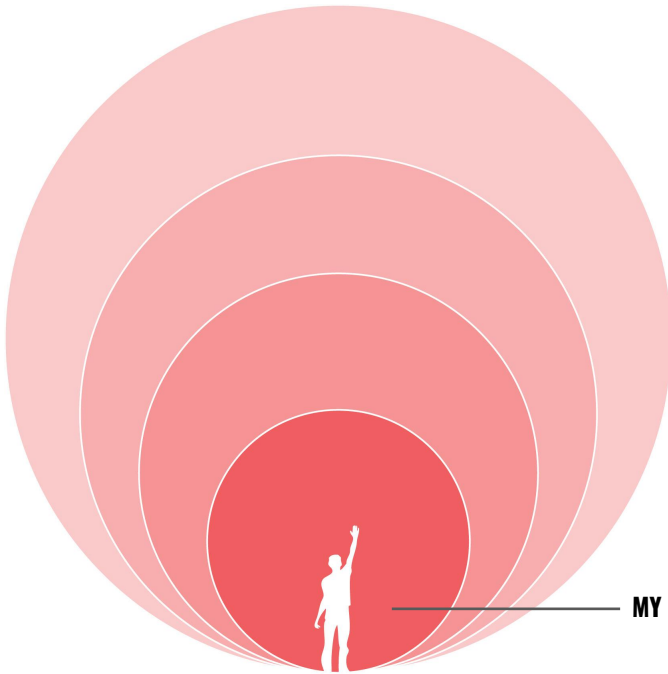
THAT'S ME!
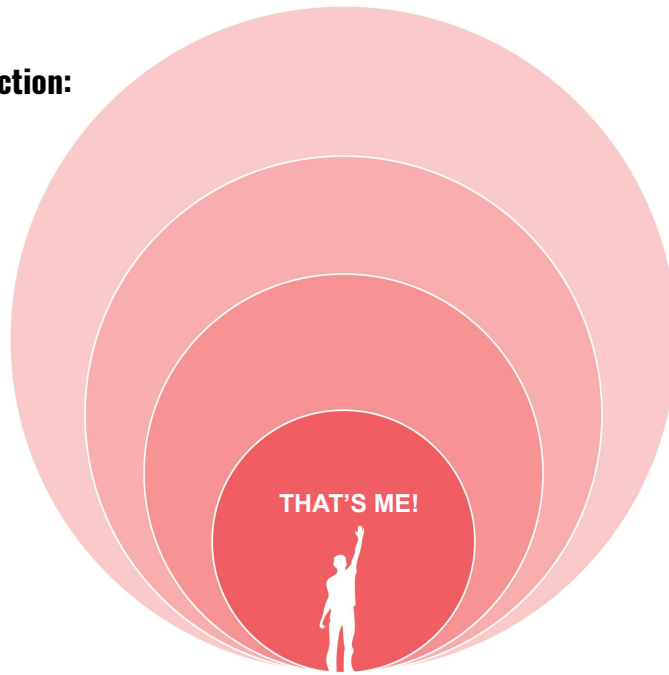
Interpersonal

Ability to
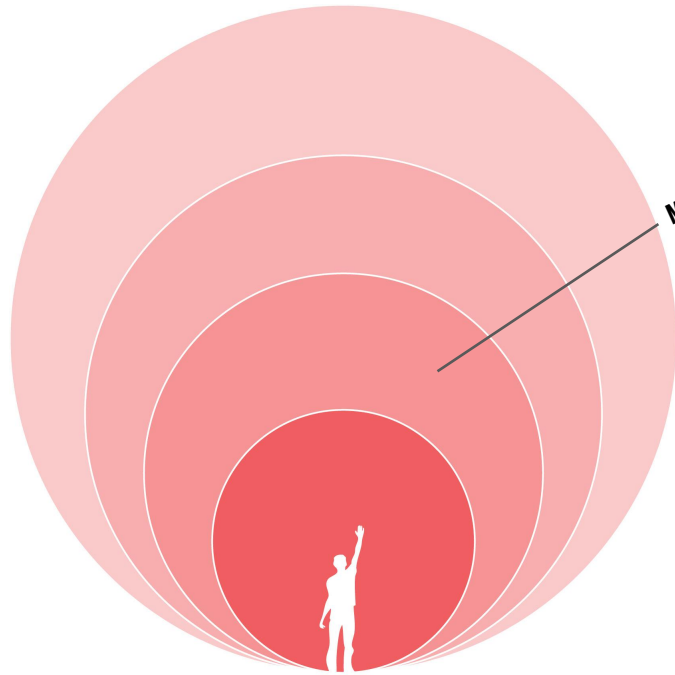understand and act
on information
exchanged

Political Home/ Cluster

To engage each other in meaning making of
perspectives in cultivating shared experiences, values,
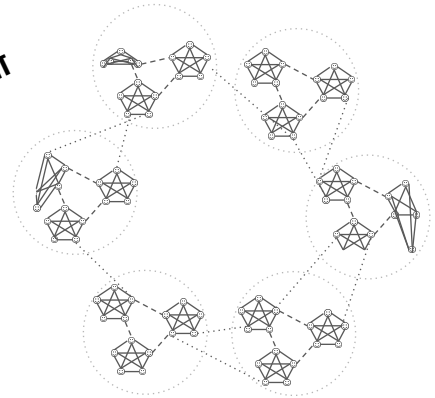with customs, and practices, culture and power building
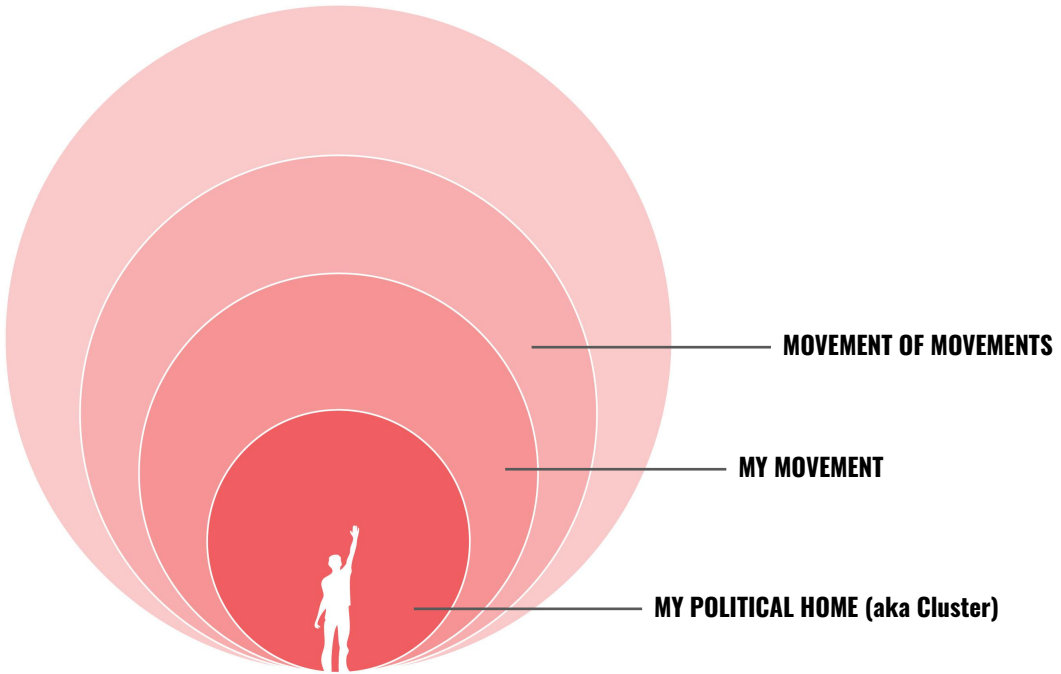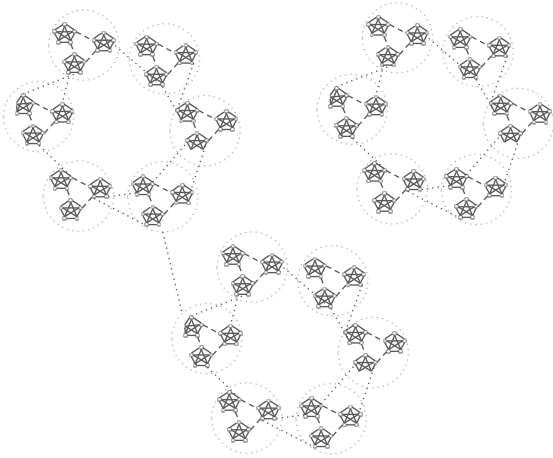
MY POLITICAL HOME (aka Cluster)

MY MOVEMENT

Movement

The ability of interconnected networks to understand each other and act on information exchanged.

MOVEMENT OF MOVEMENTS

MY MOVEMENT

MY POLITICAL HOME (aka Cluster)

Different Levels of Scale Across Movement Networks

Movement of Movements

The ability of interconnected network to use information exchanged to have a large impact on how we we govern ourselves.

- **Level 1:** Build local networks for experimentations
- **Level 2:** Build networks for *viralness* so that local innovations can spread, inspire, and learn from others
- **Level 3:** Build networks for *flow* so infrastructure and policy to support innovations can be developed

AdAstra Collective

THE GENERAL PUBLIC

MOVEMENT OF MOVEMENTS

MY MOVEMENT

MY POLITICAL HOME (aka Cluster)
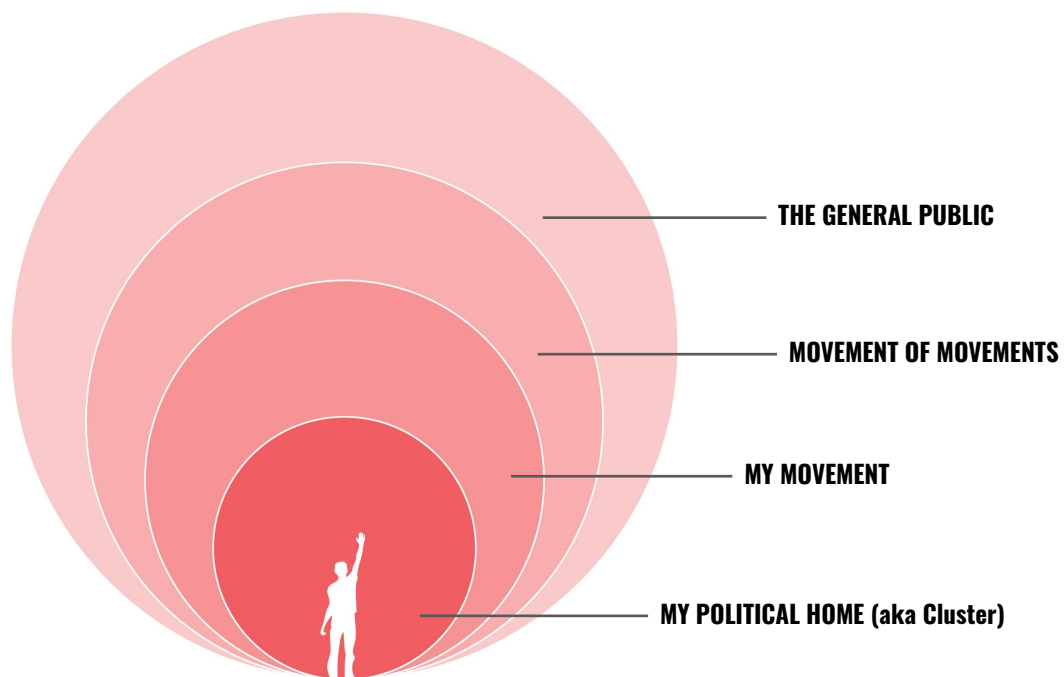
The Movement Cycle
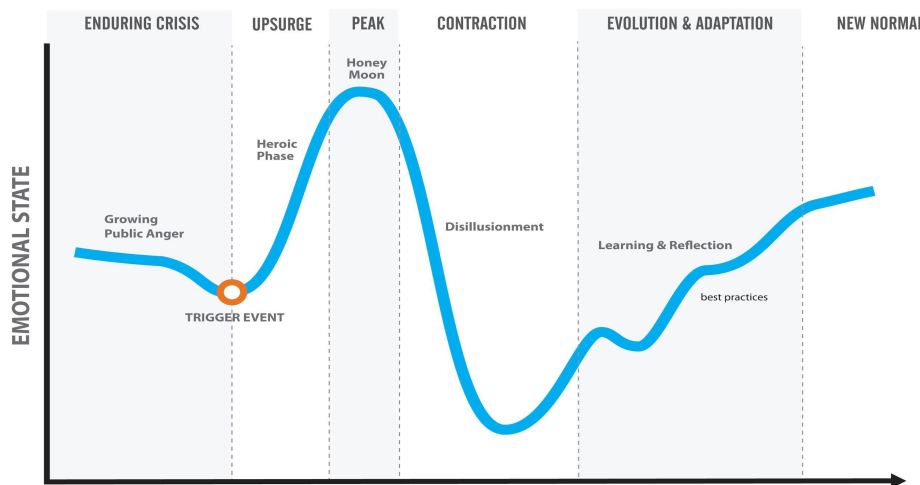
Movements all move through cycles as time unfolds and momentum waxes and wanes in natural ways. As we have seen with the call to defund police after the trigger event of the George Flloyd murder, growing public anger led to a trigger event, which led to a forticiation and growth of the movenet. Since then, we have seen the numbers of people involved with the movement has contracted as relationships and strategy have deepened.

Activity

What are *my* Circles of Connection?
Fill out the worksheet on your own

Debrief In Small Groups

1. Where does most of your political work take place? First, locate your network: is it a local network (based in place), a movement network with a specific focus, or a network of different networks (movement network across different movements- state, regional or national level)?

2. Is your network part of the other two types of networks? If you are a local project, have you worked to develop a local network of organizations and individuals? Are you connected to a national network? If you are a local network, are you connected to other networks working on the same issue? Are you connected to networks that are different, that provoke you to expand your thinking and reach?

3. What are opportunities to connect to individuals or organizations across other networks?

How do you relate to other networks?

1. Networked: You know this organization and you have occasional communication
2. Coordination: You have a defined partnership with this organization. There is some formal communication with this organization and some shared decision-making.
3. Collaboration: You share ideas and resources with this organization and work together closely. There is frequent communication characterized by mutual trust, and decision-making is done jointly.
4. Another type of partnership: ?