

# Changing our Cultural Climate

*We are wildly ambitious to change the mainstream culture,  
but curiously scared to change our own.*

Climate Camp is one of the most energising and open processes that's come along in the non-hierarchical 'culture' for a very long time. So far it has survived the stress of running the 2006 camp on an absolute shoestring, the move of several key figures into other essential projects, and the very welcome influx of new people (despite some aching obvious attempts at intimidation and infiltration.)

But 'we' have several long-running problems.

One is with "inclusivity"- how welcome do (especially) new people feel in our movement? The answer isn't as positive as we would like and hope it to be. For example, at Leeds two newcomers were accused of being police [they probably aren't :)] These same two people were treated rudely by someone else when they asked how the food system works

Throughout last year we had people leave gatherings and neighbourhoods frustrated that they were cliquey.

Occasionally, good suggestions from new people were shot down, injuring the mood.

There is already a 'inclusivity group' doing sterling work on this; this rant doesn't have anything to add to the questionnaire that has already been sent out.

The proposal deals with two other problems:

1. punctuality and time-keeping in meetings
2. accountability (and minimising the occurrence of "lunching things out")

Challenging and changing any group's behaviour is tricky. It means challenging some ingrained habits, and occasionally having uncomfortable discussions with our friends *and ourselves*.

So far, the two key reasons given for not tackling punctuality and accountability seem to be.

**"You can't change it/it's just the way things are/it's always been like this"**

Well yeah, but the rich have pretty much always been on top. Humans have always been degrading their environment. We have never let the '*it was ever thus*' argument stop us challenging the people and structures who are destroying the planet. Why should anyone use the same argument when talking about our culture? Don't we have the courage and confidence to make things better? Isn't that what we are all about?

**"You want a fascist dictatorship/hierarchical structure"**

This is the other classic argument that gets used against us.

*"You are anti-democratic, you want a Stalinist/green tyranny"*. In technical terms, it is setting up a 'straw man'

and then knocking it down. It's the creation of a false choice which no sane person would take.

We don't accept it when people smear anarchy as chaos, so why use the argument that the only alternative to the status quo is a dictatorship?

*"The definition of  
alternatives is the supreme  
instrument of power."*

E.E Schattschneider

## Punctuality

*Time is a limited resource. Limited resources need to be rationed. Time we spend on one thing is time we do not have for others.*

Alternatively, the argument **"you can't force creativity into a time-table"** has been used.

This is absolutely correct. There is a famous story of a big Hollywood mogul storming into the script-writers' office, picking up a pencil and insisting the writer couldn't go home until it was worn down to half its current length.

That's insane, and certainly not what is being proposed. It is also another example of a false

comparison. In big set piece meetings, we are very rarely trying to be creative. Usually we are trying to exchange information, chew through a 'problem' (which may need a creative solution, it's true) or else come to a consensus decision.

And when we let those big set-pieces drag on, then we have LESS time and LESS energy left for the genuinely creative stuff, which mostly happens in small groups where you can make eye contact and bounce ideas around without having to turn-take. In big groups you can wait ten minutes to make your point and are then too busy trying to remember it to listen to what anyone else is saying.

For example- the two hours on Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> February for working group time and cross-over was reduced to about 45 minutes because the previous item(s) massively over-ran.

There are specific tools and tactics that we could take from other groups, without adopting their ideology, their structures. These tools need not be 'oppression by the back door.'

In her famous critique of 'The Tyranny of Structurelessness' back in the early 1970s, Jo Freeman pointed out that lack of hierarchy doesn't mean there's no power operating. It simply means those with the confidence and education to put their points across can get away un-challenged

## Accountability

*Enthusiasm and credibility are limited resources. Limited resources need to be protected. When we do not examine the times our plans fail, and the reasons why, then we create a culture of 'yeah, whatever, it doesn't really matter.'*

But it does. If we are serious about averting catastrophic climate change we have to be monumentally effective. We have to set the most amazing example. And obviously we have to protect everything that is best about our culture.

When things get lunch-ed out then newcomers get the sense that things don't matter that much. More experienced people get frustrated that their hard work comes to nothing not because of the police, or bad luck but because other people haven't been reliable/bothered to say in advance that they wouldn't be able to do what they said. They decide, without saying so, to avoid working with the lunch-outer. They only work with other busy people. An (in)visible clique forms, of the insiders who Do It and the mistrusted outsiders. It becomes very difficult for those outsiders to get 'in', and the insiders get busier and busier till they burn out. Then things can collapse...

And the persistent lunch-out people become the public face because they have more time to hang out and drink beer while the inner clique are being busy.

## Concrete proposals

### Punctuality

1. In our meetings someone volunteers to be the official 'time server'. Throughout a gathering it is their job to announce when we are half way through the allotted time for a discussion, one tenth left and at 'full-time'. This should concentrate minds a little!  
If the facilitators of the meeting want to ask for more time, they have to explain to the whole meeting that the time will have to be taken out of something else, and specify it.  
The "time server" will also be charged with telling people when lunch/other breaks are almost over and where things are starting. At the moment this task is given to whoever cares most about punctuality and/or has the loudest voice. This is not satisfactory.  
Ideally the 'time server' role will get taken on by different people during a weekend.

2. For discussions which are information only, we agree a 'maximum number of sentences' rule that all are bound to. For example, in a 'what's happened since the last meeting', which could be really empowering and energising, people should be able to explain what happened in three sentences. If anyone wants more info, they can ask afterwards
3. For discussions which are likely to go on for a while longer than scheduled, there should be a decision at the outset about the maximum accepted over-run. There should be an agreement about whether to institute an 'everyone gets to speak once only' rule (this really concentrates people minds!) Other tools could include a 'break into small groups to chew the issue over for 3 minutes, or a 'do we have to decide these finer points now in a big group' question. There are heaps of others that experienced facilitators will be able to show us. Once it's clear we're in overtime we should have this expectation that the facilitators will turn to a toolkit of different techniques to speed things up.

## Proposed Workshop on Accountability

### 0 to 10 minutes

We start in a big group, each person having pen and paper.

The facilitator explains that the next hour is actually going to be a little bit tough emotionally and that a) anyone who wants to step out at any point can do so and b) there should be no finger-pointing. We can't change the past and the whole point of the workshop is to figure out constructive and productive ways of supporting each other and ourselves so we can reduce (NOT eliminate) lunch-out behaviour. This means that although other people may be able to guess what/who you are talking about, you should NOT use names of individuals.

The facilitator asks us to sit silently and think before writing.

The facilitator asks that everyone thinks of at least one, and as many as three times, that each person in the room lunched something out themselves

Write down what the task was.

Why did it get lunched out?

Did you explain to the group other/person before or after the meeting that you weren't going to achieve the task/meet the deadline?

Did the task still get done?

How did you feel about it overall?

What were the consequences for

- a) the project
- b) the group
- c) you yourself

What was the last major time you were on the receiving end of a lunch-out?

Write down what the task was.

Why do you think it get lunched-out?

Did the lunch-outer explain to the group other/person before or after the meeting?

Did the task still get done?

How did you feel about it overall?

What were the consequences for

- a) the project
- b) the group

Finally, give a number to the size of the lunch-out problem, on a scale of one to ten, where one is "no problem at all" and ten is "will destroy the movement before the police/corporations do"

## 10 minutes to 25 minutes

With those bits of paper, split into small groups. If you are in a group where there is a person whose name has come into your head while you were answering the above questions, think about one of you moving to a different group. If you want to talk to that person then consider that a) you have to make sure that person wants to talk to you and b) having that talk in a small group it wouldn't be appropriate or productive anyhow.

In small groups (maximum of five per group)  
ask someone to take minutes and also report back to the plenary.

Very quick go round;

your name

how you are feeling right now (probably a little nervous, self-loathing, depressed)

what your number from one to ten is.

Brainstorm answers to the following questions:

1. Why do things get lunched out?
2. How we can support each other to lessen the frequency of lunch-outism
3. What, if anything, can be done about persistent lunch-out behaviour from the same individual over and over again?
4. Would the following commitments help?
  - a) *I will only take on what I can do, given my time and current skill-levels*
  - b) *If it turns out I cannot complete a task I said I would, then I will tell the rest of the group as soon as possible, so the task can be re-allocated or the project changed.*

Two minutes before end of session, ask groups to PRIORITISE their answers to number two.

## 25 to 40 minutes

The minute taker from each group shouts out/writes up their top three suggestions to question two. If another group has already said one, then go to the next suggestion.

Open discussion about the issue (everyone gets to speak once, unless no-one else wants to speak again. Ask people to try to phrase their point/question as succinctly as possible; two or three sentences)

How do we implement the suggestions here? Does it need a few people to look in more depth?

Do we need to re-visit this discussion at any point in the future?

How could the session have been run better/differently?

The sheets from each group are collected, typed up and distributed via email.

## 40 minutes

Facilitator closes the session by thanking everyone for their input and hard work in tackling a really difficult subject.