

HOW DO WE RETAIN PEOPLE

Building a tree of
engagement

The Tree of Engagement

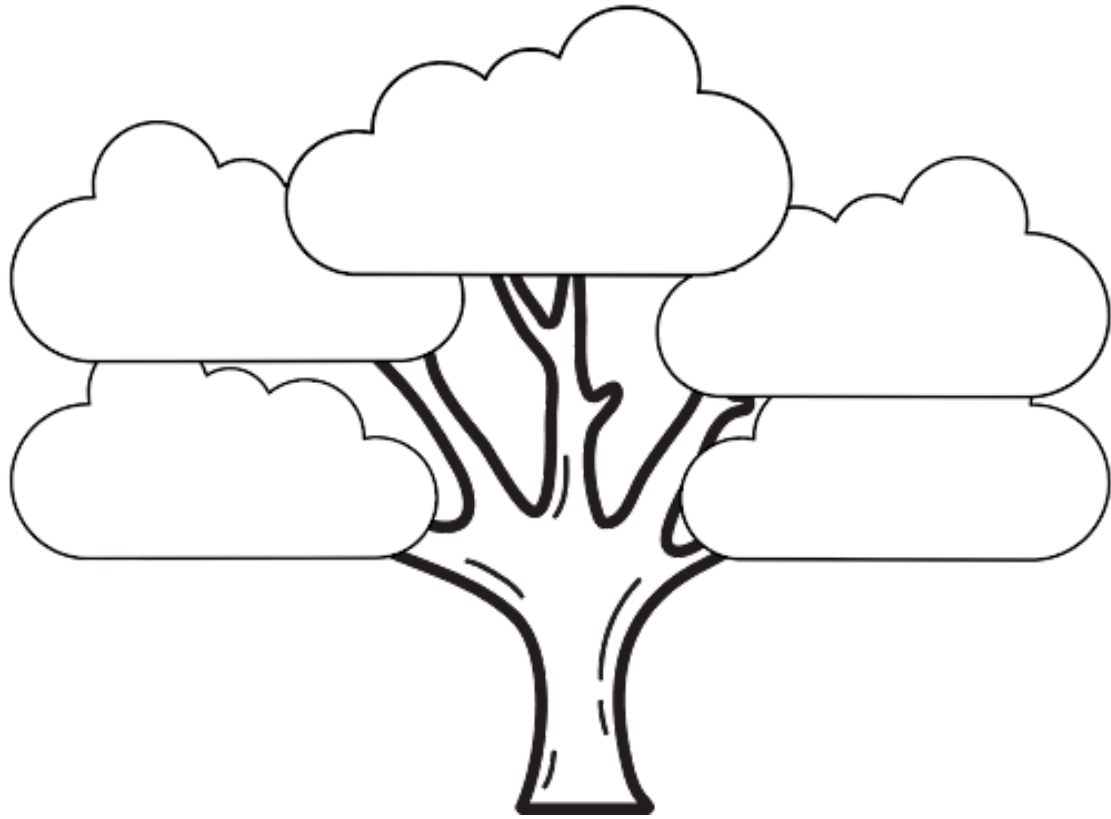
The tree is a great symbol of our movements - the roots represent where we come from, what our values are and what we stand for. The trunk represents ways and processes that enable people to join our groups. The different branches are the different working groups and activities that groups engage in and the tree must grow “equally” on all sides to be strong and resilient.

Unlike a ladder, there is no ‘one way’ to climb a tree. You might like to get to the top of it, hug it from the base, you might sit on one branch half way up. Similarly, there is no ‘one way’ to participate in transformative organising. Just as a tree provides so much to the ecosystems and people, so should the organising groups provide different spaces for people interested in changing the world.

We need to find the right balance in the growth of our tree in all directions - the smaller branches provide the support structures and make it easier to get deeply engaged in a strand of work. This way the responsibility is better spread amongst people, rotating functions are enabled, people can take different roles and are supported when trying out and learning new things.

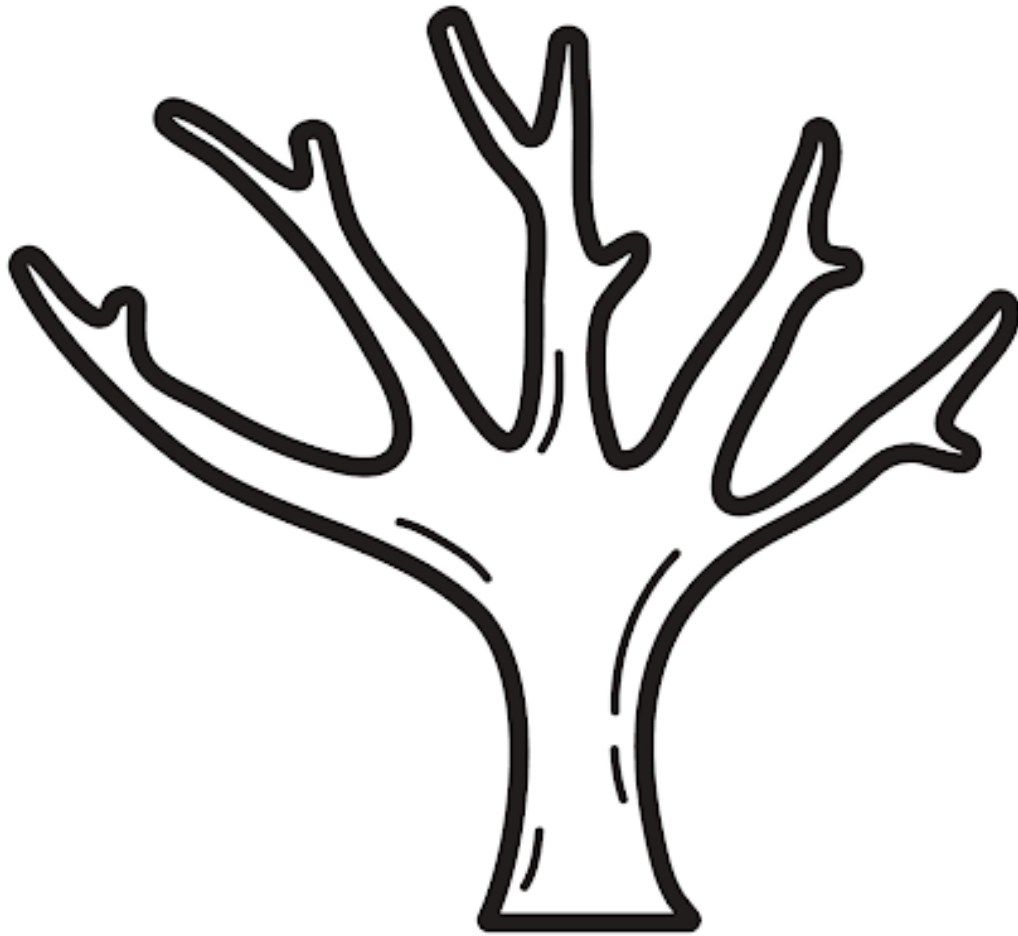
Creating a tree of engagement means exploring two different aspects of your organising group. There is the question of how people get involved and feel supported - what helps people climb onto the tree? There is the question of what to do when on a tree - what kinds of responsibilities are available?

The Branches



The branches stand for various activities that are in the core of the group's work. People can join them, depending on their preferences, capabilities or time availability. This could include working groups such as those around communication, activities, or finance. But also regular events or support functions. In essence, the branches represent the different ways we might engage peoples' different interests and capacities.

The Trunk

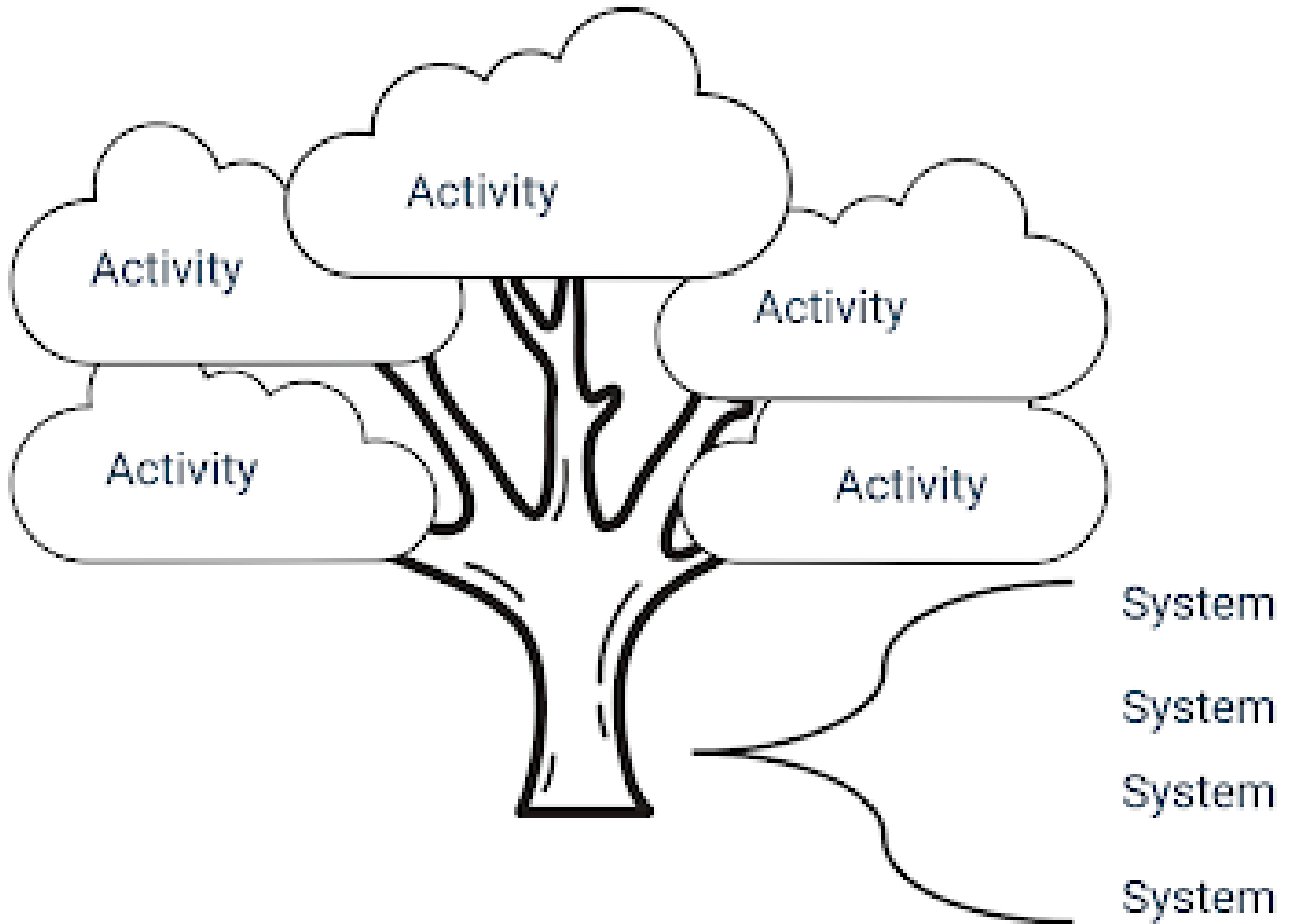


Systems, processes, norms, group culture or activities that help new and old members find their way to different branches and engage with work they find fulfilling. This could be regular meetings, 1to1s, information sharing between working groups or informal hang outs that let people get to know each other.

Other Additions

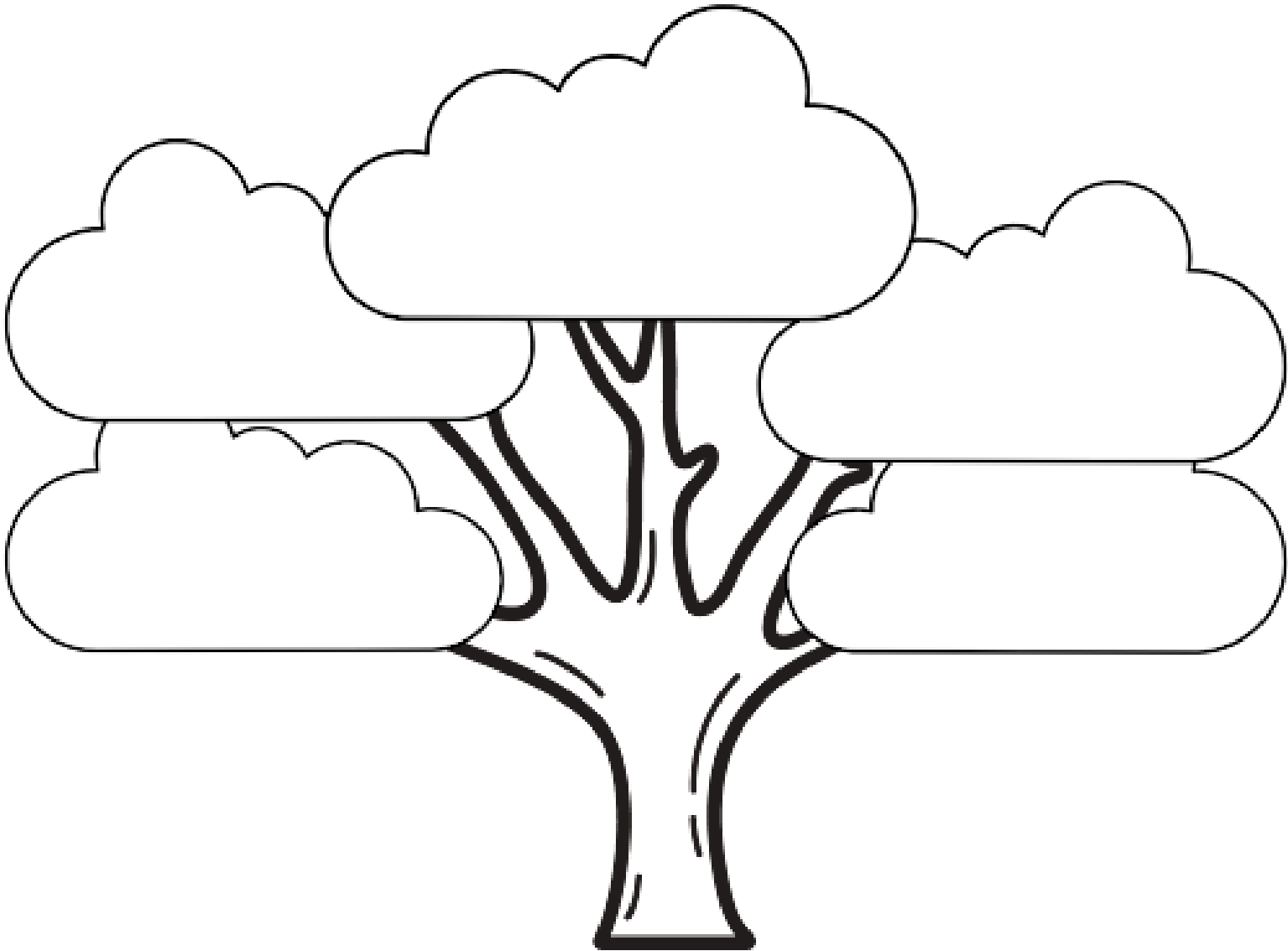
- Falling off the tree - burnout. When you are holding on to too many branches and micromanaging, staying on one branch for too long or spreading yourself too thin you run the risk of falling.
- Unable to climb - leaving the group. When the tree seems too complicated it is hard to find a way to start climbing, you feel like you're not accomplishing anything or growing yourself. So you climb down, take a rest or climb another tree.

A Complete Tree



A complete tree might look like the above.

The Exercise



Try developing a tree of engagement for your own group! It will help you assess how your group is working whilst individually and collectively reflecting on how you see your group. The exercise has two steps.

Step One

Can be done individually or in small groups.

First fill out the branches - the different working groups and activities people currently can engage with in your group.

- What working groups or task areas exist formally or informally?
- What roles, responsibilities and tasks can they take on?

Then try to fill in the trunk - the systems and processes that allow people to climb the tree. What structures, values and processes are in place that help people climb the tree?

Step Two

How do we improve our tree? Discuss as a group. Some useful discussion questions are:

- What obvious patterns arise? What similarities do you see when looking at other people's tree?
- Where are the differences?
- Where does your organising structure need improvement? Is it easy for people to get involved and to leave in a nice way if they want to? Can people give feedback and how is it absorbed?
- What processes of collective care do we apply, to prevent burnouts?
- What in your organising do you find problematic, but cannot solve?
- What are the obstacles for getting involved?

About The Movement Hub

The Movement Hub was founded in 2018 from within Greenpeace and Civil Rights Defenders to bring together European activists working on social and climate justice

The Movement Hub empowers anyone fighting for positive change in the world – by providing a platform for learning and sharing stories, tools and techniques.

Visit themovementhub.org to learn more or email us at info@themovementhub.org

