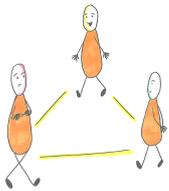**The Triangles game**

Context and purpose

Triangles is an energetic, engaging physical activity which gives people to chance to participate in and experience a simple complex system.

It can be used to:

- Demonstrate the behaviours and characteristics of complex systems and encourage participants to draw parallels in their own organisations or communities;
- Explore issues around power, control, leadership, personal versus systemic experience, tipping points, disruption, and change.

Setting up the game

It works best with between 15-30 people.

Done as an energiser or introduction to systems thinking, allow ten minutes. You can run the game as a more in-depth review for up to an hour.

Ask everyone to stand in a circle so the whole group is clearly visible to each person.

Everyone must choose to stay the same distance from two people that they PRIVATELY choose to follow (do a short demo with three volunteers).   I always add "if you stand 2 metres from one, stand 2 metres from the other" just to be clear. It also anchors them in using a spacing that doesn't end up with group squashed together.
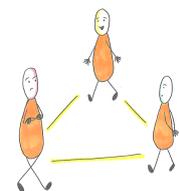
Choose privately and don't share.
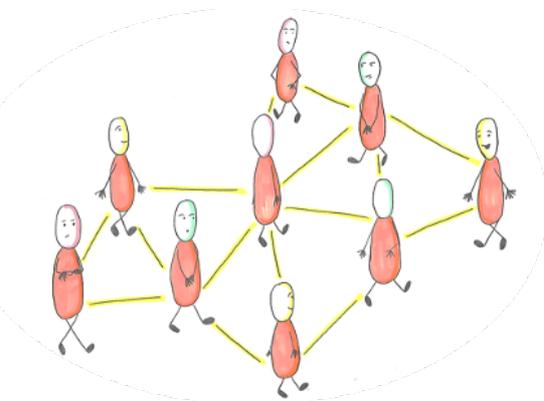
Everyone should start walking around randomly within the circle area. What follows is an un-choreographed dance around the room as each member tries to position themselves equidistant from their selections only to find as they move their

selections move to do the same. You'll find the speed varies, that there are some pauses but that the system is never still. Allow the game to run for five minutes, or long enough for patterns and phases to emerge and for everyone to get a solid experience of the system and their part in it.

Ask everyone to pause and stay in position.

Discussion

Options for generating and guiding discussion:

- What was your experience? How did it feel? What happened?
- Any observations about the behaviour of the whole system
- Who has power? Who feels powerful? Who was controlling the system?
- Who thinks they know who was following them? (Check if they're right)

Ideas you can input for learning and to summarise:

- Talk about the behaviours you observed eg people focusing in on the task and the detail of their individual experience versus watching the 'system' as a whole

- You could talk about the characteristics of complex systems eg
  Balance, pace and dynamism, disturbance, interconnectedness, feedback, time delays and the episodic nature of change. What's obvious, familiar or unexpected about these characteristics?

- Point out how simple this system is yet there is a richness and complexity of what emerged. What does this suggest for more complex systems like communities and organisations?

- You could also introduce interdependence highlighting in this system you know who you are dependent on but not who is dependent on you. Then maybe add a nod towards emergence by highlighting when the parts of this system interact something new emerges (an un expected movement) which changes the subsequent behaviour of the parts.

- If you are feeling brave and energy is still high, talk a little about dispositionality, the fact that complex systems are disposed to a particular kind of outcome and aren't completely random.