

OUT OF THE TOOLBOX

Swarming and Crowd Tactics

Swarming is a natural phenomenon—ants colonize, birds flock, fish school, animals herd, and bees swarm. It is a form of intelligence that emerges from decentralized interactions within a large group.

Swarm tactics are when a dispersed group of people suddenly converge for an action at a specified time and place, like our “ballpark” strategy in Cancún. It can also be more spontaneous or revealed at the last second, like a flash mob or flash meeting.

Similar to the swarm tactic is the *dispersal tactic*, when a crowd suddenly separates and disperses quickly in different directions. This keeps the opposition off guard and unprepared for what you will do next. This is also good for when people get cornered and surrounded by cops. New opportunities are created the second you start moving. With *random crowd tactics*, the general idea is to keep moving, as this creates possibilities you cannot foresee. Never sit still, even when they block your way or when you don’t have a plan. The challenge is capitalizing on opportunities once they

appear. How do you communicate contingency plans to the larger group: Flags? Texts? SMS? Random tactics can incorporate lots of carnival-like elements.

Tips for Swarm Tactics

Remember that in swarms there is no centralized control, but there is a decentralized process of following and leading.

For swarms to work well, we need to use our judgment and make choices based on the information we have in the moment. We need to avoid fragmentation, where we’re not in touch with what others are thinking or doing, and we want to make sure we have built trust so that everyone feels like they’re a part of the group.

When beginning a swarm, look at the diversity of options and identify a range of possibilities. From there, narrow the choices and select based on what will work well in that moment in the local conditions.

Stick together, but not too tight. Avoid crowding and collisions.

Go in the same basic direction.

If the swarm is under attack, scatter in a flash in many directions.

You might also encircle the attacker or split into multiple groups. Come back together when the threat has passed.