

Some useful information on the Open Space technology

Harrison Owen, an US-American organisational consultant, found out, organising conferences in the early 1980es, that the most rewarding discussions take place during coffee breaks and that the most sustainable results and networking effects are achieved by informal talks rather than by lectures or slide presentations. As a consequence, he developed the Open Space Technology. It is based on the dynamics, intensity, informality and self organisation of spontaneous gatherings.

Open Space is an approach for hosting meetings, conferences, symposiums etc. and is working with groups from minimum 20 up to 1000 persons. It is focused on a specific and important purpose or task—but begins without any formal agenda. A well structured agenda of parallel working sessions is created and managed by participants at the outset of the conference.

Structure of this Conference

Day 1	Day 2
Opening	“Morning News” Reflection of Results
Setting the Agenda	Forming of New Groups Further Steps
Working Sessions, Phase I	Final Reflections (Plenary)
Working Sessions, Phase II	
Working Sessions, Phase III	
“Evening News” Collection of Main Outcomes from all Working Sessions	

Open space meetings may last form 1 up to 3 days and consist of 3 phases: Setting the agenda, working sessions, documentation of results.

Open Space works with a small set of principles and one law that allow groups of people to interact in a simple, productive, organized way to create valuable exchange addressing participants' most important issues. It is essential that everyone who comes to an Open Space conference should be passionate about the topic and willing to take some responsibility for creating things out of that passion.

The four key "principles" of the sessions that happen during Open Space conferences are:

- ♦ **Whoever shows up is the right person**
No matter how many people attend the session, it will always be the ones concerned with the issue at present and ready to contribute
- ♦ **Whatever happens is the only thing that could have**
Keep focused on the here and now, forget about the could-have-beens, should-have-beens or might-have-beens. The real thing takes place in the moment and be aware, creative solutions often emerge from something unexpected
- ♦ **Whenever it starts is the right time**
Open space takes into account that human energy is not a matter of timetables, it may take a while until conversations and ideas start to flow, thus patience and confidence should outweigh haste and pressure
- ♦ **When it's over, it's over**
It is not required to stay on until the scheduled time of the session is over. If there is nothing more to be said, close the session or move onto another interesting group discussion.

The law of two feet

Every individual has two feet, and must be prepared to use them. Responsibility for a successful outcome in any Open Space event resides with each participant alone. Individuals can make a difference and must make a difference. If that is not true in a given situation, they alone must take responsibility to use their two feet, and move to a new place where they can make a difference.

This departure need not be made in anger or hostility, participants should rather indicate by word or gesture that they have nothing further to contribute to the ongoing discussion and go to do something useful.

To lead an Open Space working session

- ♦ Come up with an interesting topic and title for your discussion
- ♦ Write the topic, your name, time and place for the meeting on a provided sheet
- ♦ Post the topic on the Agenda Wall.
- ♦ If you see topics that have something in common, consider combining them into a single time slot.
- ♦ If a significant number of people want to attend your discussion and another discussion in the same time slot, try to trade into another time slot to ensure maximum dialogue and participation
- ♦ In case that only the topic announcer shows up for the session, there are several options: use the session as free time to think the issue through and record your thoughts as a contribution to the proceedings, join another discussion on a related topic or drop the topic altogether

To attend an Open Space working session

- ♦ Check the schedule and sign up for a talk or just drop in if you wish
- ♦ Use the 'Law of two feet.'
Allow the initiator to conduct his/her topic. If you have an opposing opinion that may need a full time slot, feel free to add your own topic to the agenda

Read more: http://www.openspaceworld.com/users_guide.htm