



TOOLS & METHODS

OPEN SPACE TECHNOLOGY

"IF YOU FIND YOURSELF IN A SITUATION WHERE YOU ARE NOT CONTRIBUTING OR LEARNING, THE MOVE TO WHERE YOU CAN." *The Law of Two Feet*

DESCRIPTION AND CORE PRINCIPLES:

Open Space Technology is method of meeting that has been defined as:

- a simple, powerful way to catalyse effective working conversations and truly inviting organisations to thrive in times of swirling change.
- a methodological tool that enables self-organising groups of all sizes to deal with hugely complex issues in a very short period of time.
- a powerful group process that supports positive transformation in organisations, increases productivity, inspires creative solutions, improves communication and enhances collaboration.
- the most effective process for organisations and communities to identify critical issues, voice to their passions and concerns, learn from each other, and when appropriate, take collective responsibility for finding solutions.

The goal of an Open Space meeting is to create time and space for people to engage deeply and creatively around issues of concern to them. The agenda is set by people with the power and desire to see it through, and typically, Open Space meetings result in transformative experiences for the individuals and groups involved.

How does an Open Space meeting work?

Open Space operates under four principles and one law. The four principles are:

1. Whoever comes are the right people
2. Whenever it starts is the right time
3. Whenever it's over it's over
4. Whatever happens is the only thing that could have happened.

The Law is known as the Law of Two Feet:

"If you find yourself in a situation where you are not contributing or learning, move somewhere where you can."

The four principles and the law work to create a powerful event motivated by the passion and bounded by the responsibility of the participants.

What does Open Space look like?

A meeting room prepared for Open Space has a circle of chairs in the middle, letters or numbers around the room to indicate meeting locations, a blank wall that will become the agenda and a news wall for recording and posting the results of the dialogue sessions.



Essentially an Open Space meeting proceeds along the following lines:

1. Group convenes in a circle and is welcomed by the sponsor. The facilitator provides an overview of the process and explains how it works.
2. Facilitator invites people with issues of concern to come into the circle, write the issue on a piece of paper and announce it to the group. These people are "conveners."
3. The convener places their paper on the wall and chooses a time and a place to meet. This process continues until there are no more agenda items.
4. The group then breaks up and heads to the agenda wall, by now covered with a variety of sessions. Participants take note of the time and place for sessions they want to be involved in.
5. Dialogue sessions convene for the balance of the meeting. Recorders determined by each group capture the important points and post the reports on the news wall. All of these reports will be rolled into one document by the end of the meeting.
6. Following a closing or a break, the group might move into convergence, a process that takes the issues that have been discussed and attaches action plans to them to "get them out of the room."
7. The group then finishes the meeting with a closing circle where people are invited to share comments, insights, and commitments arising from the process.

Further Resources

Open Space Technology: A User's Guide by Harrison Owen. This is "the book" on how to conduct Open Space Technology meetings. It is available in large bookstores, or online from indigo.ca. If you can't find the book, you can download an older version of the guide for free from Harrison Owen's website at http://www.openspaceworld.com/users_guide.htm.

Open Space Technology: A User's NON-Guide edited by Michael Herman and Chris Corrigan. This book is a deep dialogue between 37 leading practitioners of Open Space Technology on a wide range of underlying principles that inform Open Space Technology. You can download the book for free here: <http://www.globalchicago.net/wiki/wiki.cgi?OpenSpaceTech/UsersNonGuide>.

Inviting Organization: evolution is now and open space by Michael Herman. This book forms the backbone of the material covered in the practice workshop. It is available for free at: <http://www.globalchicago.net/ost/invitingorg/index.html>.