

# Open Space Technology\*

The goal of an Open Space technology 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. Typically, open space meetings result in transformative experiences for the individuals and groups involved. It is a simple and powerful way to catalyze effective working conversations and to truly invite organizations to thrive in times of swirling change.

## What is Open Space Good For?

Open Space technology is useful in almost any context, including strategic direction setting, envisioning the future, conflict resolution, morale building, consultation with stakeholders, community planning, collaboration and deep learning about issues and perspectives.

Open Space technology is an excellent meeting format for any situation in which there is:

- A real issue of concern
- Diversity of players
- Complexity of elements
- Presence of passion (including conflict)
- A need for a quick decision

Open Space can be used in groups of 10 to 1,000 — and probably larger. It's important to give enough time and space for several sessions to occur. The outcomes can be dramatic when a group uses its passion and responsibility, and is given the time to make something happen.

## The Law of Two Feet

If you find yourself in a situation where you are not contributing or learning, move somewhere where you can. Follow your passion and take your responsibility.

## Principles of Open Space

- Whoever comes are the right people
- Whenever it starts is the right time
- Whatever happens is the only thing that could have
- When it's over it's over

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

## Roles in Open Space

- Host - announce and host a workshop
- Participant - participate in a workshop
- Bumblebee - “shop” between workshop
- Butterfly - take time out to reflect

### General Flow of an Open Space Meeting

- The group convenes in a circle and is welcomed by the sponsor
  - The facilitator provides an overview of the process and explains how it works.
- The facilitator invites people with issues of concern to come into the circle, write the issue on a piece of paper and announces it to the group.
- These people are “conveners.” Each convener places his or her paper on the wall and chooses a time and a place to meet. This process continues until there are no more agenda items.
  - 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.
  - Dialogue sessions convene for the rest 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 harvested in some way and returned to the larger group.
  - 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”
  - The group then finishes the meeting with a closing circle where people are invited to share comments, insights and commitments arising from the process

### Material Needed

- Circle of chairs for participants
- Letters or numbers around the room to indicate meeting locations
- A blank wall that will become the agenda
- A news wall for recording and posting the results of the dialogue sessions
- Breakout spaces for meetings
- Paper on which to write session topics/questions
- Markers/pencils/pens
- Posters of the principles, law of two feet, and roles (optional)
- Materials for harvest

