

# Planning an Open Space Technology meeting

Planning an Open Space Technology meeting is pretty straightforward, and much simpler than preparing for a traditional conference, although it can still be a lot of work. An Open Space Technology meeting requires **minimal infrastructure**, only one facilitator, no presentation scheduling problems and other logistical headaches and no pre-planned agenda. Costs are kept to a minimum and time spent planning the meeting is greatly reduced. Sponsors need only focus most of their time and attention at crafting and supporting an effective invitation.

Having said this, there are a minimal number of requirements that need to be met for a successful Open Space Technology meeting to occur. These include, choosing the right room, choosing a skilled facilitator, and ensuring that rigorous pre-planning occurs.

## Facilities Logistics

In order to provide enough room for an Open Space Technology meeting, you should secure a room that holds double your expected attendance, theatre style. This means that in general, if you are expecting 50 people, you need a room that is rated for 100 "theatre style" at a minimum. This is a minimum; the bigger the better. If you cannot get a room big enough, a room rated for at least the number you are expecting can do in a pinch, provided that you have a variety of breakout spaces available. These could include other rooms, nooks and crannies, gardens, restaurants and other meeting places.

It is essential that the room have one large blank wall that posters can be affixed to in some way. It pays to check this out in advance, as some facilities will not allow groups to stick things to the wall. It is also essential that the room be free of tables. Tables are not used in Open Space Technology meetings, even small ones, so it's important to find a room without a board room table in the middle. This is especially important for smaller meetings, that is our case in France.

For meetings with large groups a quality sound system is important, as is a cordless microphone. Non-essential, but useful room characteristics include:

- A squarish shape - the more square a room is, the easier it is to form a circle inside it.
- Windows - natural light helps to create a relaxed atmosphere.
- A door to the outside world - if your room has doors that lead outside, it is easier for people to take breaks in the fresh air. Also, groups may be tempted to use the outdoor space to meet if the weather is co-operative. This is a good thing!

## Room setup

Setup for an Open Space Technology meeting requires the following:

- Chairs in a circle in the middle of the room. One ring of chairs is ideal, concentric rings can be used if space is tight, but one should avoid more than two rings of chairs. Make sure there are lots of spaces for people from the back rows to get to the middle of the circle.
- A couple of 6 or 8 foot tables along one wall for laptops, if you are using them for recording the proceedings.
- A couple of tables either in the room or outside for food to be served on.
- One large blank wall kept free of obstacles so that people can reach it to post their agenda items.
- Breakout rooms should be free of tables and should have smaller circles of chairs arranged in a circle.

## Equipment

There are a few pieces of equipment that are required to run an Open Space meeting. These include:

- At least 20 flipchart markers

- Several pads of 3x5 inch post it notes, preferably in different colours
- One pad of flipchart paper
- A few rolls of masking tape
- Scissors
- Laptops or other computers for recording discussions, if you are using them, and a portable printer with plenty of 8.5x11 inch paper. These can sometimes be more trouble than their worth, especially for events that run for a day or less. If you are running a 1.5 or 2.5 day Open Space and there are a lot of people, having laptops is useful. Plan on about 5-7 per 100 people. Instead of renting laptops, invite people to bring their own and share them or offer to take notes.
- Forms for recording discussions on. These don't have to be complicated.
- Something to use as a "talking stick" for the closing circle. If you're stuck, then a flipchart marker makes a good piece. But it is worth trying to find an object that holds some

## What about food?

Ideally I like to encourage groups to eat and work at the same time. The food should be somewhat portable and not too prone to spills. Soup can sometimes work, but it can also be a problem. Sandwiches are ideal. Provide coffee and tea and snacks in the morning and more in the afternoon.

## Here it is a checklist on equipment:

<b>Open Space Technology Planning Checklist</b>	
Space	
Main Room (adequate space = room capacity/2)	
Optional Breakout Rooms	
We need a big room in wich we can put all the chiar in circle and in wich we can create small circle groups (Set up circle for main room, flexible breakout room configurations)	
We need 2 walls in wich we can put tape on	
Get list of breakout room names (if using), maps to rooms	
Plan meals (buffet; food that can be out for several hours)	
Computers	
printer	
Adequate power, tables for computers	
Software for compiling proceedings	
Paper for Issues (quarter chart paper; more than of people)	
Post-its (2 packs per breakout room)	
Cover for proceedings (we'll produce an istant report)	
Posters:	
1 poster on the law of two feet	
1 poster on 4 principles	
1 poster "Be reade to be surprised"	
1 poster with the imagine of a bumblebee	
1 poster with the imagine o a butterfly	

## Posters (examples)

### The Law of Two Feet poster

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



#### The Law of Two Feet Open Space Technology

If people find themselves in situations where they are neither learning anything nor contributing, they are responsible for moving to another place — using their two feet to find a place where their participation is more meaningful.

<http://www.planeta.com/web/ost.html>



### The four principles poster:

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

### Bumblebee poster



## Butterfly poster



Essentially an Open Space meeting proceeds along the following process:



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.



How it could look like the center of the circle



2. Facilitator invites people with issues of concern to come into the circle, write the issue on a piece of quarter size flip chart 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.



For further information:

<http://www.openspaceworld.org/>

<http://www.ho-image.com/>

<http://openspaceworld.ning.com/>

Owen Harrison, Open Space Technology: A User's Guide , Berrett-Koehler Publishers Inc. San Francisco

Owen Harrison.. Expanding our now: The story of open space technology. San Francisco : Berrett-Koehler, 1997

Wheatley Margareth. Leadership and the new science: learning about organization from an orderly universe. San Francisco , CA : Berrett-Koehler Publishers Inc. San Francisco , 1992

Peggy Holman and Tom Devane, The Change Handbook : Group Methods for Shaping the Future, Berrett-Koehler Publishers Inc. San Francisco

(from <http://www.chriscorrigan.com>)

## **Sample 1 day Open Space agenda**

**Note that all agenda items discussed in the dialogue sessions will relate to the overall theme.**

- |       |   |
|-------|---|
| 8:00  | Coffee and tea available  |
| 8:30  | Convene and set agenda <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Sponsors welcome participants and explain reason for meeting</li><li>• Facilitator explains process</li><li>• Participants identify issues for discussion in the dialogue sessions</li></ul> |
| 9:30  | Dialogue session A  |
| 11:00 | Dialogue session B  |
| 12:30 | Lunch   |
| 1:00  | Dialogue session C  |
| 2:30  | Dialogue session D  |
| 3:30  | Closing circle  |
| 4:00  | Adjourn   |

## Sample 1.5 day Open Space agenda

**Note that all agenda items discussed in the dialogue sessions will relate to the overall theme.**

### Day 1

- 8:00 Coffee and tea available
- 8:30 Convene and set agenda
- Sponsors welcome participants and explain reason for meeting
  - Facilitator explains process
  - Participants identify issues for discussion in the dialogue sessions
- 9:30 Dialogue session A
- 11:00 Dialogue session B
- 12:30 Lunch
- 1:00 Dialogue session D
- 2:30 Dialogue session E
- 4:00 Close for the day
- Dialogue session reports are completed and copied overnight

### Day 2

- 8:30 Reconvene for convergence and action planning exercise
- Participants review dialogue session reports
  - Participants identify priority issues for action planning
  - Convenors propose areas for immediate action
- 9:30 Action planning
- Participants reconvene in groups to develop action plans
- 10:30 Closing circle
- During the closing, action planning reports are copied so participants can take them home.
- 11:00 Meeting adjourned

## Sample 2.5 day Open Space agenda

**Note that all agenda items discussed in the dialogue sessions will relate to the overall theme.**

### Day 1

- 8:00 Coffee and tea available
- 8:30 Convene and set agenda
- Sponsors welcome participants and explain reason for meeting
  - Facilitator explains process
  - Participants identify issues for discussion in the dialogue sessions
- 9:30 Dialogue session 1
- 11:00 Dialogue session 2
- 12:30 Lunch on your own
- 1:00 Dialogue session 3
- 2:30 Dialogue session 4
- 4:00 Evening News

### Day 2

- 8:00 Coffee and tea available
- 8:30 Morning News
- Participants identify further issues for discussion in the dialogue sessions
- 9:30 Dialogue session 5
- 11:00 Dialogue session 6
- 12:30 Lunch on your own
- 1:00 Dialogue session 7
- 2:30 Dialogue session 8
- 4:00 Evening News

### Day 3

- 8:30           Reconvene for convergence and action planning exercise
- Participants review dialogue session reports
  - Participants identify priority issues for action planning
  - Convenors propose areas for immediate action
- 9:30           Action planning
- Participants reconvene in groups to develop action plans
- 10:30          Closing circle
- During the closing, action planning reports are copied so participants can take them home.
- 12:00          Meeting adjourned

If you want to have some more information you can look also to this videopresentation of an OST  
<http://www.openspaceworld.org/news/cat/podcasts/>