

OPEN SPACE

Session Leader Guide



Working within an “Open Space” is meant to offer an open, creative exploration into topics that people choose to be relevant and important within a certain, defined, context. The agenda-items are often created on the spot. This, the open space facilitates a joint process for organizations and/ or groups to identify passions and concerns, share and learn from each others’ experience to find meaning and creative approaches. The method works best in a situation when the following criteria are being met: a real need to explore, a diverse participation, complexity, both responsibility and passion (and/ or conflict) and a need to move on. This approach is not to be used when desired outcomes are already determined or when sponsors aren’t prepared to take the meeting-outcomes into account.

PURPOSE

Open space offers a participative platform, where within a limited time-frame, a medium or a larger group of people, explores complex issues or a transformative topic and comes to deeper, shared understanding and potentially recommendations.

OBJECTIVE

At the end of this session this exploration might lead to a more connected picture of reality, shared understanding and sometimes recommended elements for building a new vision or a new approach, where multiple stakeholders will be taken into consideration.

TIME

The estimated time for this exercise is approx. 1 – 2 hours.

BEFORE THE SESSION

1. Prepare the session by exploring if/how it will contribute to a certain situation. It is important to ensure that the success-criteria are being met and that various stakeholders will participate during the session.
2. Define participant-group (there could be 20-1000) and book a meeting room with enough space to create a “market place”: moving chairs around in order to sit in small groups and reporting back from different sides of the room. There should be numerous ways to capture information, for example on whiteboards or flipcharts.
3. Decide whether you or a guest speaker will introduce the workshop and/or create the right atmosphere.
4. Send out an invitation, communicate purpose and objective, when, where, and who.
5. Select the slides you intend to use. Look for ideas and select the supporting slides at www.valuescentre.com/getconnected or search the web for open space technology.
6. Make sure the meeting room is ready with all the support material needed.
7. If you intend to use a meeting evaluation or reflection-sheet, have it prepared in advance (see page 172).
8. Try to come at least 20 minutes before everyone else.
9. Write the Purpose, Objective and an agenda with time-schedule on one or multiple flipcharts so that everyone can see it during your whole session.

DURING THE SESSION

1. Present the purpose and approach of the meeting. Highlight when you intend to end the meeting. Ask if everyone will be able to stay for the whole meeting.
2. Ask the sponsor or manager to express his/her personal view on how important it is for each participant to clearly understand and articulate their view.
3. Introduce the exercise by sharing the 4 open space principles and the process steps to be taken.

Speak about the open space principles and roles:

- a. Whoever comes to join your topic-group, are the right people.
- b. Whatever happens is the right thing
- c. When it starts is the right time; some groups might split and/ or start during the session, that is all welcomed: we do ask that the wall-agenda captures the groups/ topics, for people to be able to identify where they want to go (next)
- d. When it's over, it's over: there's no need to keep on talking if a group feels that the conversation has delivered the defined outcome;

Then there's also certain roles and the law of two feet.

The law of two feet: in case you feel that you need to move topic/ group, please do. This creates both butterflies (participants that go in and out of a session to individually reflect) and humblebees (someone "hopping" from one session to another, sharing ideas and insights between groups).

Other roles are: an initiator or sponsor for the overall meeting, a convener: someone who calls a certain topic to be discussed and puts it on the agenda - often this person is also reporter for the conversation in that particular dialogue session.

A report is created during/ after the dialogue and will be captured in some form at the end of the session.

AFTER THE SESSION

Make sure actions are taken to meet the reporting back and follow up on the commitments that came out of the meeting.

Agenda

(proposal and facilitator notes)

1. Introduction

15 min

Go through purpose, objective, principles and open a place for agenda-items to be posted. Be open for questions.

2. Small Group Dialogue

30 – 60 min

Form groups of 4-15 persons and ask the participants to share their thoughts and experiences around this topic, as well as invite ideas. Make sure that each participant is invited to share and point out that it is the dialogue itself that is as important as any outcomes.

Steps to take

- Present the small group approach and roles
- Open a “market place” agenda eg on the wall for topics to be posted
- Allow time (/a break) for people to form groups and define how long the dialogue sessions will take (eg 45 mins). Each of the groups to be in a visible place, preferably all in the same room.
- For the small groups the instruction needs to be that there is someone that facilitates the conversation and someone to capture the outcomes. Make sure everyone gets the opportunity to voice his or her view. Be assertive and probe for questions. Remember that the process of a joint sharing is as important as the outcome.
- Conclude the small group exercise with a shared reflection of the experience and learnings. Some groups prefer a creative reflection eg in the form of a visual, even a cartoonist or poet to shine a light on the work as well.
- Allow time in the plenary for a debrief of the experience. This could be a reflection on the process, comments from the audience, but is not necessarily a report from each of the small groups.

3. Whole Group Reflection

15 min

Have the group reflect on what was the major thing they learned and took away from this exercise?