

COME TO THE FEAST 2006

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OPEN SPACE TECHNOLOGY

Open Space Technology will be featured during the final lab session of Part II. Instruction and direction will be given in the session; you do not need to prepare in advance. This is a brief summary of open space from the book considered the 'primer' for this methodology.

What is Open Space Technology?

Open Space Technology is a highly democratic and self-managing meeting methodology. First developed by Harrison Owen in 1984, it has been used successfully with groups of 5 to 500 -- including corporations, community groups, professional associations, government agencies, and religious organizations. In Open Space, the individuals that come together for a meeting are responsible for both designing and convening work groups based on their individual interests related to the topic at hand.

How does it actually work?

First, a facilitator orients the group to the day and states the central question or focus. (*For example: How do we create and sustain healthy communities?*) Participants propose areas of discussion and take responsibility for designating a time and place to convene sessions. Participants do not have to be experts or give any kind of formal presentation.

Does that really work?

Yes. When participants decide that they want to pursue a particular theme, they give it a short title and post it on the wall (this is known as the Community Bulletin Board). Any other participants who would like to join in that particular exploration just sign up. After a little negotiation, time and place are arranged (this process is called the Village Marketplace). Then, everyone gets to work.

What if participants didn't like the session they picked?

If, during the course of the gathering any person found him or herself in a situation where they were neither learning nor contributing, they could go to some more productive place (this is known as The Law of Two Feet).

What happens if there are scheduling conflicts?

As soon as groups are together they go to work. If one person wants to go to two sessions that are scheduled at the same time, they must find the two conveners, convince them to combine their sessions, sequence the sessions, or choose accordingly.

How large can the sessions be?

Session size is determined by the available working space. There may be two or more sessions doing similar work. It's better to have two sessions with 10 people each than one with 20 people who are frustrated not to be able to contribute often enough. Sessions may also be very small, with only one or two participants.

How do we share our small group work with the whole group?

Toward the end of the day, participants gather as a whole group to share learnings about the central question or focus initially presented. (Additional means of capturing resources will be available at the event and via the event website after the Feast.)

Adapted from Harrison Owen's book:

Open Space Technology: A User's Guide, Abbott Publishing, Potomac, MD 1992.