

Building Dynamic Groups



Open Space Technology

An Overview

This facilitation technique is fairly new. It was developed by Harrison Owen and encourages broad discussions with employees or members without notice taken of rank in the organization. It has proved useful in groups of 200 up to 1000 persons. The most difficult part of this type of meeting is the advance planning for space and organization of times for the small group discussions, because people engage themselves in the discussion about the topic at hand.

First, an overview of the direction of the meeting is presented to the total group. This will take ten to 40 minutes, depending on the size of the group. One direction for the outcomes of the discussion should be stated, such as how can we reduce errors in shipments, or how can we encourage similar systems of operations for each of our field offices. In the overview, verbal support must be given to the participants that their ideas will be used in making the necessary changes.

Participants are encouraged to write a topic for discussion in large copy on a full sheet of paper that will help the group attain the goal. Participants who have completed a group discussion sheet are asked to line up to present their topic. As ideas are listed, they are added to the board or wall. Following the presentation of all ideas or topics, the group will need a short break so the ideas can be sorted into time slots for discussions.

Different groups are set up to meet along with their meeting location and a beginning time. Groups who choose that session are encouraged to stay involved with the discussion as long as the discussion works for them. One person in each group needs to lead the group (the person who posted the session on the wall), and the lead person needs to select an individual to take notes. Groups stay intact until they have exhausted the discussion around the topic and have come to some conclusions. The conclusions are presented either verbally or in writing to a specified person. If only one person is in a group, they can spend the time thinking about the topic, or choose to join another group in progress.

Please find the conclusion and remarks in the presentation outline. All summaries of groups can be compiled for distribution at the end of the meeting or at a later date.

PRESENTATION OUTLINE

- I. **Welcome; Create space**
 - A. [Introduction by sponsor]
 - B. Sit back, take a deep breath (begin walking the circle)
 - C. Introduce myself, honored to be here
 - D. Look around, I know the skills, ability, knowledge, caring are in this room

- II. **State the Theme**
 - A. State it clearly, succinctly and provocatively (e.g., create better service for large customers)
 - B. Expectations for outcome (e.g., get as specific as you can so that you can leave here and act)
 - C. Constraints and commitments (e.g., Rich will support you in anything you come up with within his span of control; he will work with you to make happen anything that involves contractual, budget or items that cross department lines in service to customers)

- III. **How does this work?**
 - A. Point to the blank wall; here's your agenda, I promise in the next 30 minutes you'll wonder how we'll do it all
 - B. Pick some useful examples to express the potential for magic: Rockport, Native Americans, Canada, USW labor-management
 - C. Passion and responsibility
 1. Write issue, name, announce, post
 2. When everyone who cares to has done so, sign up for as many as you are interested in
 3. Not brainstorming
 4. Responsibility: to convene group, document session
 5. Will create a book with all the sessions
 - D. Housekeeping
 1. Food, breaks, logistics
 2. Evening News, Morning Announcements
 3. Bells for gathering everyone together

- IV. **Principles**
 - A. Whoever comes...
 1. Don't need the CEO, or hundreds of people; just who cares
 2. Only one? When was the last time you had quiet time to think and write about something you really cared about? Go for it!
 - B. Whatever happens...
 1. About letting go of expectations: could, should; whatever is, is; work with it

- C. When it starts...
 - 1. A reminder that creativity does not happen according to schedule
- D. When it's over...
 - 1. Done in 10 minutes? Great! Move on.
 - 2. Corollary: when its not over, keep going until you're done
- E. Law of 2 Feet
 - 1. Define it: when you are neither learning nor contributing
 - 2. Fundamentally about personal responsibility: its up to you to get your own needs met
 - 3. Three animals
 - a. Death to Boars: moderates their behavior knowing that people can leave if they hog air time
 - b. Bumblebees: Cross-pollinate ideas. That's why you can sign up for things at the same time; its possible to be in multiple places at once
 - c. Butterflies: they look very delicate and they're deceptive in their impact
 - 1. May never attend a session; they hang out in the coffee shop, by the pool, in the bar
 - 2. You sit down and have a quiet, reflective talk with one of them; a chance remark may impact your thinking and you take it back into the larger group and it affects others
 - 3. So, if you're irritated by people who never go to the sessions, know they do serve a useful purpose; if you're one of them, you don't need to feel guilty about it – in open space you're valued.
- F. Be prepared to be surprised
 - 1. Never before, never again will this group be together

V. Do it

- A. Its time, remember, if your issue or pet peeve is not addressed, look to yourself
- B. My hope for you, that you reach your goals...that magic happens
- C. So, I invite you now to come into the circle, write down your topic, your name, announce it and we're underway
- D. [Keep up patter; encourage them to keep sessions separate even if similar]

CLOSING

Keep in the style and spirit of the gathering.

There are two basic areas to process with people:

What content related things came out for them?

What did they learn about the principles in action? (How does this process apply back in the real world?)

Closing Outline

1. Are there stories anyone wants to tell?
2. What common ideas emerged?
 - A. Try doing a quick “around the circle” question: Name the most important priority that emerged for you.
3. Consider asking them to write down something that they think would be useful to remember: a task, a commitment, an idea and put it above their desk or someplace where they can reference it later.
4. Acknowledge their accomplishments: They’ve just blown their cover: you have demonstrated that you can work together; give examples from the session; now you have a choice.
5. Make my request of them: be the change they want in the world: bring this way of working together back to the work place and share it with others.
6. Say thank you ...it’s been an honor to be with you.

Adapted from www.tmn.com/openspace/describe.html