

TOOL | Open Space Technology

TIME REQUIRED: VARIABLE

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OVERVIEW

This is a highly flexible and participatory methodology that allows participants to co-design and self-manage their meeting around topics that they feel are most important to them. It's a process that is fuelled by passion, synergy and shared responsibility.

Open Space is best suited for situations where a diverse group of people are dealing with complex – potentially conflictual – issues with no simple or obvious answer that require innovative, solutions by people interested in participating in meaningful activity to co-produce tangible results.

Conversation Topics | sujets de conversation

CONVERSATION TOPICS sujets de conversation							
Conversation #1 9:30 – 10:35 am (65 minutes)				Conversation #1 15 h 35 – 16 h 10 (35 minutes)			
Room #	Room Salle #1	Room Salle #1	Room Salle #3	Room Salle #4	Room Salle #5	Room Salle #6	Room Salle #7
TOPIC SUJET	Assessing Various Structures to Support Our Collaborative Work Évaluer les différentes structures pour soutenir notre travail de collaboration						
HOST HÔTE	Sylvia						
Conversation #2 4:15 – 4:50 pm (35 minutes)				Conversation #2 16 h 15 – 16 h 50 (35 minutes)			
TOPIC SUJET							
HOST HÔTE							
Wrap Up in the Main Space 11:50 – 12:00 pm (10 minutes)				Synthèse dans l'espace principal 11h50 – 12 h (10 minutes)			

USING THIS TOOL WILL HELP YOU:

- Engage participants in co-designing and sharing leadership for an event
- Allow participants to propose and choose topics for further exploration
- Offer a way for participants to prioritize issues they want to discuss and potentially act on

TOOL HOW-TO

- 1. Establish a clear focus & intent** – Before hosting an Open Space session, the hosts must be clear about the focus and purpose of the meeting. This requires them to state, in concrete terms, what they want to accomplish. This is often best phrased as a question. For example, What is needed to sustain and grow the momentum of our collaborative work?
- 2. Determine who should attend** – Effective Open Space events have been held for groups as small as 20 and as large as 500. Participation cannot be mandatory. Attendees must care about the issue and want to be there. Ideally all participants should commit to attending the entire meeting.
- 3. Create the space** – The space needs to include a comfortable room that is large enough to hold the entire group. This space should have at least one blank wall large enough for the entire group to stand in front of it no more than 3 or 4 rows deep.

There should also be moveable chairs and/or include plenty of additional common spaces for conversation. Participants need flexibility around when they eat and drink. Food and drinks are therefore best served as buffet style and available over several hours. Needed supplies include post-it notes, markers, flipchart paper, and painter's tape.

- 4. Open the space and outline the process** – The facilitators' task includes providing an overview of the theme and purpose and outline the process including various roles participants can play, as well as guidelines and logistics for participants to self-facilitate their conversations.
- 5. Open space roles and guidelines** – Below is a list of the key roles and responsibilities of participants. They are deliberately simple yet provide enough structure for participants to work well together and contribute to the purpose of the overall event.

4 Principles of Open Space

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

The Law of Mobility

- *Anytime you feel that you are neither learning from, or contributing to, a conversation, feel free to move on to where you can contribute most*

Participant Roles

- *Conversation Host: The role of the host is to recap the topic & get the conversation started*
- *Conversation Participants: Contribute thoughts, ideas, questions & insights to the conversation and help facilitate the quality of the dialogue*
- *Bumblebees – In keeping with the “Law of Mobility”, some participants choose to move between conversations and “pollinate” them with new ideas*
- *Butterflies – Create spaces for silence & “non-action” by choosing not join a conversation*
- *Notetaker – A volunteer participant who offers to capture high-level notes of the conversation to post in the main space*
- *Timekeeper – A participant who agrees to monitor time so the group can plan whether or not to move to a new space to keep their conversation moving forward.*

Guidelines for Effective Dialogue – *Open Space dialogues are meant to be self-managed and self-facilitated as much as possible. The following 5 guidelines can help ensure that conversations are productive:*

- *Listen – Listen with care and compassion*
- *Hear – Ensure everyone has a chance to speak, offer ideas and/or share experiences*
- *Be Curious – All are responsible for the quality of the group’s conversation*
- *Respect Differences – Be considerate even when you do not agree. Notice your reaction to ideas and experience that are different from your own.*
- *Care for the Quality of the Conversation – Make time for silence. Pause when needed to refocus or savour an insight.*

6. **Co-create the agenda** – Once the group has prioritized their Critical Shifts, they may want to engage other key stakeholders – both within and in addition to their own organizations or groups – to gather further input and feedback on their proposed priorities. This provides an excellent opportunity to broaden engagement and identify other interested people who can help advance and/or join the group’s collective work.
7. **Open announcements & evening News** – Each day of an Open Space meeting – particularly in multi-day events – is “book-ended” by Opening Announcements and Evening News. These are short periods of time intended to bring people up to date on what’s been happening and what’s next. These are not times for report outs or speeches, rather they are just about sharing facts and providing information.
8. **Close the space** – Closings ideally should be simple and meaningful. Ideally this should be done in a circle with no formal presentations or speeches. It’s a time for participants to make commitments, announce next steps, and/or share observations about their experience of the event.

DIVING DEEPER

To learn more about Open Space:

- Read *Open Space Technology: A User’s Guide* by Harrison Owen
- Visit the [OpenSpaceWorld.ORG](https://www.openspaceworld.org) website