

# Session

**Providing Open Space**



**OST**



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## About the Session



**Time:**  
**1 day**

In this Session, participants take part in networking and partnership activities essential to furthering the cause of human rights. This takes place in the form of participant-directed workshops based on "Open Space Technology". During this session, participants have the opportunity to discuss relevant issues and network with participants with similar interests. Participants will also have the opportunity to discuss in greater detail topics that were brought up in previous Streams.

Read the **Overview of Open Space Technology** in the **Resource Manual** the evening before.



## Objectives

By the end of this session, participants should be able to:

- explain the concept of Open Space Technology as a tool for addressing complex issues
- determine how Open Space Technology can be used in their own contexts



## Overview of Open Space Technology

Open Space Technology (OST) is an effective strategy for organizing and managing meetings of between 5 to 1000 participants for the purpose of addressing very complex issues.

A strong point of Open Space Technology is its ability to unite groups of enormous diversity in terms of education, ethnicity, economics, politics, culture, social position, or all of the above. An example of its multicultural power is a meeting sponsored by the Together Foundation that brought together 178 people from 28 countries speaking 17 languages to discuss global unity. Participants ranged from presidents of countries to ordinary citizens and in one hour created 82 workshops which they self-managed for the duration of the 5-day conference. There was no simultaneous translation, one facilitator, and preconference planning was limited exclusively to logistical details.

### Why use OST?

While Open Space is known for its apparent lack of structure and welcoming of surprises, it turns out that the Open Space meeting is actually very structured -- but that structure is so perfectly fit to the people and the work at hand, that it goes unnoticed in its proper role of supporting (not blocking) best work.

Open Space Technology meetings are:

- easy to organize, thus requiring very little lead time;
- effective for small or large groups (20-500);
- interactive;
- conducive for leadership to surface naturally;
- effective for existing organizations, coalitions, associations, or those that are newly formed;
- facilitated by only one or two facilitators, no matter how large the group;
- less expensive and less complicated than other large group methodologies.

## When should OST be used?

Open Space works best when the work to be done is complex, the people and ideas involved are diverse, the passion for resolution (and potential for conflict) are high, and the time to get it done was yesterday. It's been called "passion bounded by responsibility", the "energy of a good coffee break", "intentional self-organization", "spirit at work", and "chaos and creativity".

This methodology is used for almost any type of issue including:

- strategic direction setting;
- envisioning the future;
- identifying the issues and opportunities to realize the desired future;
- conflict resolution;
- morale building;
- organizational transformation to a high performing and high learning organization.

Using this methodology will ensure that:

- all of the issues that are MOST important to the participants will be raised;
- all of the issues raised will be addressed by those participants most qualified and capable of getting something done on each of them.

## What makes OST so successful?

The success of the OST could be attributed to the **Four Principles** and **One Law** which guide behavior in Open Space.

The Four Principles are as follows:

1. **Whoever comes are the right people.** This reminds people in small groups that getting something done is not a matter of having 100,000 people and the chairperson of the board. The fundamental requirement is people who care to do something. And by showing up, that essential care is demonstrated.
2. **Whatever happens is the only thing that could have happened.** This keeps people focused on the here and now, and eliminates all of the could-have-beens, should-have-beens or might-have-beens. What is, is the only thing there is at the moment.
3. **Whenever it starts is the right time.** This alerts people to the fact that inspired performance and genuine creativity rarely, if ever, pay attention to the clock. They happen (or not) when they happen.

4. **When it's over it's over.** In a word, don't waste time. Do what you have to do, and when it's done, move on to something more useful.

The **Law of Mobility** which states simply that if at any time you find yourself in any situation where you are neither learning nor contributing – join another group more to you liking. No matter what, don't sit there feeling miserable.

One of the most profound impacts of the law is to make it clear who is responsible for the quality of a participant's learning. If any situation does not encourage learning, it is incumbent upon the individual participant to make it so. There is no point in blaming the organizing committee, for none exists. Responsibility resides with the individual.

## Facilitators

The role of the facilitator is to open the space and to hold safe space open.

**Sources:** Dalar International Consultancy. [Dalar Open Space Technology Meetings](http://dalarinternational.com/mtg_open_space.html). Available from: [http://dalarinternational.com/mtg\\_open\\_space.html](http://dalarinternational.com/mtg_open_space.html).

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