

Open Space Technology



What is OST

Open Space Technology (OST) is an approach, sometimes referred to as a technique, which allows groups, small and large, to self-organise to effectively deal with complicated or complex issues in a very short time. In considering whether or not to apply OST the following four preconditions should be met:

- High levels of diversity
- High levels of complexity in terms of the issues to be resolved
- Potential for conflict
- Urgency – the need for a quick decision/action

OST has been used in meetings of 5 to 2100 people worldwide - working in one-day workshops, three-day conferences, or the regular weekly staff meeting - and with youth organisations abroad as a means of helping young people to structure and lead their own conferences on matters that affect them, and to take ownership of the solutions. The common result is powerful and effective, connecting and strengthening of what's already happening in the organisation: planning and action, learning and doing, passion and responsibility, participation and performance.



The OST approach, which is most distinctive for its *initial* lack of an agenda, is characterized by five basic mechanisms:

- 1) A broad open invitation that articulates the purpose of the meeting;
- 2) Participants chairs arranged in a circle;
- 3) A "bulletin board" of issues and opportunities posted by the participants;
- 4) A "marketplace" with many breakout spaces that participants move freely between, learning and contributing as they "shop" for information and ideas;
- 5) A "breathing" pattern or flow, between plenary and small group break out sessions.

Open Space operates on the following **four guiding principles and One Law**:

- Whoever comes are the right people
- Whenever it starts is the right time
- Whatever happens is the only thing that could have
- When its (not) over its (not) over
- The Law of Two Feet.

The Law of Two Feet encourages people to stay in one place for as long as they are contributing or feel they are learning something and to move on to another parallel group where they feel more engaged.



In effect OST offers a new way of organising that can infuse entire organisations. The benefit of Open Space is that people get involved in contributing to, and working through, the areas that they are truly engaged in and committed to. The danger, to some, is that freedom is given to people to choose their response and involvement without being controlled by a planner or organiser.