

Rhizome guide to Opening Open Space

This is a short example opening outline for Open Space facilitators. Take it and make it your own.

1. Welcome, share theme & create space

Introduce yourself

Introduce the purpose / theme of the Open Space: *"We're gathered to talk about the theme [state . . .]"* Make eye contact with the group, and encourage them to do the same as you move around the circle... *"Look around the group and know that we're all here because this theme means something to us. Each and every person in the room has the experience, knowledge, passion and the stories to guarantee that we have the right ingredients for a powerful, dynamic and creative session."*



High-up signs are crucial for people to see where each conversation is taking place. Here it's a helium balloon.

"Make sure it's a topic that you really want to host a conversation on and not just a possible idea for a conversation – let's go with what we have real energy for."

"Please remember, there are some responsibilities for conversation hosts so don't suggest conversations lightly."

"When you've announced your conversation, post it on the agenda wall." Explain how the time/space matrix works.

"If 2 or more of you have similar ideas you should get your heads together and decide whether to cohost a conversation, but don't be afraid to hold out for your idea being a separate conversation if you can see a clear distinction."

2. How does this work?

Point to the blank agenda wall: *"That's what we're going to talk about - it's your agenda and unless you fill it this meeting could be short! But that's not going to happen - you'll soon be asking yourself how we can possibly get through all of the conversations in the time that we have together."*

"Open Space is a self-organised space. Once I've guided you through the agenda setting process you are absolutely in charge. It's down to you to take responsibility to make sure you get to have the conversations you care about with the people who most want to have them with you. Here's how that works."

"We'll pause to allow everyone a chance to think about what conversations they might want to have. When you have an idea for a conversation topic that you want to host, come to the centre and write the topic and your name on one of these pieces of paper." Hold up a pre-prepared example sheet: "Then announce the topic to the group."

Each and every person in the room has the skills, knowledge, passion and experience to guarantee that we have a powerful, dynamic and creative session.

"When the agenda wall is complete, sign up for as many conversations as you are interested in – it gives hosts a sense of the popularity of their conversation. It's not binding."

"The host's responsibilities are to be there for the duration of their conversation, to ensure notes are taken on report forms or on flipchart, and to make sure those notes are displayed on the News Wall after the session. You also need to relinquish your space to the group scheduled to follow on in that space, but feel free to keep your conversation going elsewhere."

"And if no-one turns up to your conversation? When was the last chance you got this much time to just sit and think about an issue that's important to you? Use the time to think and take some notes, wait to see if someone joins you later, or simply take your offer of a conversation down from the agenda wall, accept that the time's not right and join another conversation"

Continued overleaf...

3. Housekeeping for longer Open Spaces

Introduce the logistics of food, breaks, plenary sessions for announcements and news. Share whatever means you'll use to gather people back together (eg: a bell).

4. Laws and roles

Introduce the Law of 2 Feet. (NB: if any participant doesn't have two feet, it might be more sensitive to rename it as the Law of Personal Responsibility).

"Don't find yourself stuck in a conversation that's neither dynamic, creative nor useful for you. Open Space gives us full permission to use our feet and move whenever and wherever we want. Remember it's a self-organised space."

There are also 2 roles that are particularly recognised by the Open Space process: bumblebees and butterflies.

"Bumblebees move from one conversation to the next, cross-pollinating between them. There's no need to stick with one conversation for the full time – remember the Law of 2 Feet and move whenever that works for you."

"Butterflies appear to be sunning themselves, often hanging around by the refreshments. They may decide never to attend a formal conversation throughout the whole Open Space. And that's fine. Open Space came about as people recognised the value of the informal interactions they had at conferences, over meals and coffee breaks, in corridors, and the butterflies keep that possibility alive in Open Space."

5. Declare the Space open

Recap the process.

Declare the space open and step back.



Good Open Space sessions have a mix of Butterflies (flitting outside conversations) and Bees (cross-pollinating between groups)

Further resources

Books

Open Space Technology:

A User's Guide by Harrison Owen.

Explains how to conduct Open Space meetings.

Written by it's creator. An older version of the guide is available on his website at:

www.openspaceworld.com/users_guide.htm

Websites

OST: Practice Resources for Inviting Organization

www.michaelherman.com/publications/PracticeGuide.pdf

Tools for Opening Space:

A Collection of OST Resources

www.opencirclecompany.com/ToolsForOpeningSpace.pdf

Planning an OST meeting

http://chriscorrigan.com/parkinglot/?page_id=1515

Open Space World website – a collection of resources on OST

www.openspaceworld.org

*The
Law of Two
Feet: If you're
not learning or
contributing,
move on*

Rhizome is a co-operative of experienced facilitators, trainers and mediators. We work with co-ops, and campaigning and community groups across the UK, and with those national organisations that support activism and participation in all its forms.

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