

Protocols

Open Space Technology

Overview

Open Space Technology, a tested approach to the enhancement of group effectiveness, is a protocol to use when situations include a diverse group of people who must deal with complex, and potentially conflicting material in innovative and productive ways. With OST, people tend to be creative, synergistic and self-motivated. It is a method in which people can identify specific issues on a given topic, self-select into discussion groups, and work with the issue with people also concerned with that issue.

Directions

Open Space Technology can be used with groups of 5 to 500. It is particularly effective when a number of people must address complex and/or conflicted issues in a short period of time, with high levels of innovation, ownership, and synergy.

Circles

Groups meet in circles. The circular chair arrangement signifies that all are equal here--both as knowers and learners. Participants all face each other equally, with the opportunity to work together to discuss and resolve issues, if they so choose.

Passion and Responsibility

OST runs on two principles: passion and responsibility. Without passion, nobody is interested. Without responsibility, nothing will get done. Different people feel passionately about different things and it is also obvious that people will not take responsibility for something they are not passionate about. In OST, people come together around topics they care about; therefore voluntary, self-selection is absolutely necessary for participation in OST.

Brainstorming Themes

Ask the group to identify some issue or opportunity related to the specific workshop or conference theme (such as "Increasing Student Voice"), issues for which they have a genuine passion and for which they will take real responsibility for discussing (and not everyone has to). Participants should think of powerful ideas that really grab them to the point that they will take the responsibility to make sure that something gets done about that issue. Remind the group that if nothing occurs to someone, that is OK, and if someone has more than one issue or opportunity; that is OK too. They will share these later.

OST Concepts

1. Four Principles

- Who ever comes is the right people
- Whatever happens is all that could have
- Whenever it starts is the right time
- When it is over, it is over

2. Law of Two Feet

If after being in part of a session you no are longer interested in it, you have permission to leave. The law puts responsibility for your own actions on your own shoulders (feet).

3. Bumblebees and Butterflies

A metaphor for people who wish to use their two feet to "flit" from meeting to meeting, they can pollinate and cross-fertilize, lending richness and variety to the discussions.

Selecting Topics

Ask the group to come to the center of the larger circle, grab a piece of paper and marker and write down a short title and sign their name. Once done, each should stand in front of the group and say, "I'd like to address _____", or "I'd like to talk with people about _____". After each person has announced their theme, they should take the piece of paper and tape it up on the blank wall.

Community Bulletin Board and Agenda

After people have announced their sessions, they should pass by a blank chart and affix their issue to it. Once the community bulletin board is created with all the possible discussion group topics, move on to talk about the "market place". With all the possible topics on the wall, people determine when and where the sessions/discussions will be held. Give time to discuss together, negotiate, combine similar session topics, and move sessions around so that most people can attend the key sessions of their choice. By the time the agenda is complete, the community should have specific discussion groups determined, as well as the time and place for each group.

Recording and Timing

Determine if the group wants each session proceedings recorded. If so, designate the facilitator/proposer of the session to use a recording form and ask for a volunteer to record critical and important ideas and points raised during the meeting.

Take ~15 minutes for the overview and ~30 minutes with the group creating the topics and working through the bulletin board and the market place. These sessions can take as long as necessary within the constraints of the larger collaboration time.

The above is taken from the San Francisco Coalition of Essential Small Schools and adapted from Open Space Technology: A Users Guide, Abbott Publishing