

# Open Space

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## Open Space

Bring together a group of folks, empower them to blaze their own trail, create just enough structure to ensure progress, and hit the Start button &ndash; that&rsquo;s Open Space Technology, a style of self-organized &ldquo;un-conference&rdquo; that reflects the spirit and ethos of Agile.

Organizational consultant Harrison Owen originated Open Space in the mid-80s, after he observed--during a conference he had organized--that most of the really meaningful conversations and active learning seemed to take place outside of the formal presentations. Since then, groups of 5 to 2000 members across a host of disciplines have used Open Space meetings to address complex and varied themes from how to build a software product to how to deliver aid to Africa.

In the practice of Open Space, participants gather together with only a stated &ldquo;Theme&rdquo; and a minimal framework. Their goal is to build the conference they want to attend: Individuals propose sessions they&rsquo;d like to lead, or sessions they&rsquo;d like to see someone else step up and lead. Through the alchemy of self-organization, a schedule emerges, composed of sessions people feel passionate about pursuing.

Like Agile itself, Open Space Technology is built on a set of guiding principles and can appear deceptively simple at first glance &mdash; a phenomenon familiar to any scrum practitioner. As noted in Open Space World, &ldquo;&hellip;while Open Space is known for its apparent lack of structure and welcoming of surprises, it turns out that the Open Space is actually very structured &ndash; 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 impeding) best work."

Here&rsquo;s How it Works In the practice of OST, the event is formally Opened and Closed&hellip; the magic happens in the &ldquo;open space&rdquo;.

### Opening the Space

During the initial session of the Gathering, the facilitator &ldquo;opens the space&rdquo;. All participants attend and sit in a large circle or concentric circles. The facilitator begins by introducing Open Space and explaining the Principles, the Law of Mobility & Responsibility, other aspects of Open Space, and how they all integrate to create an environment for self-directed learning.

### The Four Principles:

- Whoever comes are the right people.
- Whatever happens is the only thing that could.
- It starts when it starts.
- It&rsquo;s over when it&rsquo;s over.
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The Law of Mobility and Responsibility (also known as the &ldquo;Law of Two Feet&rdquo;): &ldquo;If you are not learning or contributing where you are, find a place where you can learn or contribute.&rdquo; Creating the Sessions

When the introduction is over, the facilitator explains how to create sessions and then invites participants (you!) to present sessions they would like to convene. All you need to do is come forward and talk briefly (less than a minute) about your proposed session. There are many types of sessions possible and you don&rsquo;t need to be an expert to convene. For instance, you might propose a session about:

- a question or topic you want information about
- a concept to be developed or idea to discuss
- a tool or technique you&rsquo;d like to explain
- a problem that needs solving
- an experience, lessons learned, best practices to share. After announcing your proposal, you&rsquo;ll select a time and location for the session from the available options and post a session notice on the wall.

Since there will be more sessions introduced than anyone can remember, the session postings need to state clear intentions. Be sure to include words like help, share, need, explain, discuss, present, etc. A posting like &ldquo;How we

were successful with TDD&rdquo; or &ldquo;What tools can help with TDD&rdquo; is likely to draw a more focused group than &ldquo;TDD Talk&rdquo;.

### The Marketplace

When there are no more sessions to propose, the Market Place process begins. Participants move to the wall to browse the posted sessions (the Marketplace), and sign up to show interest (not commitment) in attending. While people mill around and discuss what they might want to attend, hosts may combine or reschedule their sessions. People leave the Marketplace whenever they are ready - the space and time are now open for holding sessions.

Check the Marketplace frequently - session hosts may update the Marketplace at any time during the Open Space. Existing sessions may be moved only by the session host; new sessions may be added by posting a notice in an open time/location.

### Closing the Space

All participants come together again in a circle for the Closing. As the last session of the gathering, the Closing includes a time for thinking about and/or proposing action going forward that will put into practice the energies and insights that emerged from sessions. We conclude by sharing reflections about the Open Space experience.

To learn more about the history and practice of Open Space Technology, see:

- Open Space World - <http://www.openspaceworld.org/>
- Open Space Technology: A User&rsquo;s Guide Third Edition by Harrison Owen