

Opening Space for action

Chris Corrigan

How to quickly move to sustainable action planning in Open Space.

For many years in the Open Space community we have talked of different methods for moving to action. Over the years I have developed this very basic approach, which takes the results of conversations and moves them into sustainable action. The basic process is this:

1. Participants receive a copy of the proceedings with the instructions to review them and note pieces of action which stand out, things that must be done, projects and patterns that seems to want to emerge from all this work.
2. Participants are asked to reflect on which of those pieces of emergent action grabs their attention and passion to the extent that they feel like they could take responsibility for moving it forward.
3. Open Space, as per usual, and with comments about how this is a space for action planning, and that anything that happens in this space wants to find a way out of the room. So invite maximum responsibility. The resulting bulletin board represents an agenda for action.
4. The recording form for the discussions should have spaces for things like "Next steps" "Who/when" "resources needed" "Other people we need to bring into this project."
5. The results are posted or added to the proceedings. In the closing circle people are invited to share their next steps as well as their reflection on the process.

The theory behind this is straightforward:

- Divergent OST represents passion, convergence represents responsibility.
- Moving from OST to voting feels to participants like we are going from something amazing to "business as usual." Not always a bad thing, but my experience says that once people taste OST they want more of it. Creating categories of action based on proceedings from the previous day (the traditional convergence process) limits the patterns that might emerge as people step up to take leadership. Also it often happens that things become so converged that there is no real target for responsibility. It seems like there is often a group or two which everyone agrees is important but not important enough to champion. That never happens with non-convergence.
- Non-convergence therefore IS convergence, except that instead of the convergence process happening outside of individuals, it happens within individuals, as people each perceive patterns and feel the pull to realize them collectively.
- Voting doesn't always tell us where the action commitments will actually lie. But using your two feet to move to the groups that are creating next steps is a very concrete and personal statement of commitment.

Priority setting in Open Space

Diana Larsen

More and more often, in any kind of action planning (OS or otherwise) I have abandoned the idea of finding group consensus on the “important” issues. What’s “important” is much too abstract and often involves what we think _other_ people, the proverbial “they” should do. So I don’t ask about importance anymore.

Instead I’ve begun to rely more on the group asking itself two fast rounds of questions, about impact and energy:

First, each person votes on which issues would have the most “impact” if worked on further. That provides some additional data to the group. (I usually use some kind of stickers rather than colored dots - dinosaurs anyone? It just adds some fun. I also like the idea of tickets instead of dots here...I’ll have to try that.)

Then second, I ask each person to put a small number of different stickers (1-3) on whichever issues they personally have the “energy” for moving forward (or if there is room, to stand next to where those issues are posted). We notice where the pattern of energy lies compared with their overall perspective on impact. And we follow the energy, which more or less equals passion.

After that, groups of people create action plans on anything someone has the energy to work on, in another round of OS-style sessions, complete with Law of Two feet, bumblebees, etc. And each group reports out ‘first next steps’. Not the whole plan, just the first action or two, because we know the plan will necessarily change as people implement the first steps and learn more. In the Agile software world, we say “inspect and adapt” and “respond to change rather than following a plan.” So that’s the expectation. People will try a few things, learn more, adjust the plan, try a few more things, etc.

Post-Open Space project work

Jack Martin Leith

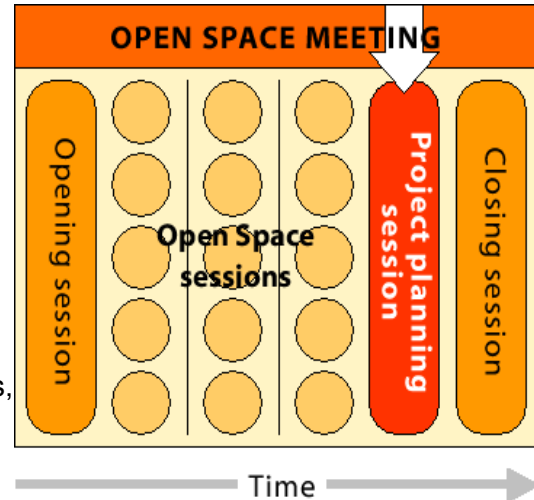
When planning your Open Space meeting, you'll need to think about how you'll ensure that ideas emerging from the meeting will be brought to fruition, and how the issues identified by participants will be resolved effectively once everyone is back at their workplace. Please be fully aware that this is a very big challenge.

My project planning process should help. You'll need to run it between the final round of Open Space sessions and the closing circle, as shown in the graphic below.

The project planning process has six steps:

Step 1: Summarise actions

- As the session reports are displayed on the wall, write any action points and proposed projects on flipchart paper.
- When people are back in the big circle, ask the leaders of the final round of Open Space sessions for any additional actions and projects, and add them to the list.
- Read out the complete list to ensure that it's correct and complete, and remove any duplicate items.



Step 2: Prioritise actions

- Identify high-priority actions and projects using sticky dot voting, special voting software or some other voting process.

Step 3: Formation of project teams

- When the high-priority actions and projects have been identified, create a flipchart poster for each project and dot these posters around the room.
- Ask participants to select a project that they would like to spend a little time scoping out. Once they've decided, they go and stand next to the relevant poster.
- People who want to opt out of the Step 4 activity can provide ad-hoc assistance.

Step 4: Inaugural meeting of project teams

- Ensure that each embryonic project team has a volunteer leader. This will generally be the person who led the Open Space session that generated the action or potential project.
- The task of the teams is to broadly scope out their projects. Typically they answer the following questions:
- What is the name of your project?
- What is the desired outcome?
 - By when?
 - Who is the team leader? And the other team members? Who else needs to be in the team?
 - What resources are likely to be required?
 - What key challenges do you foresee?

- What is the next step?

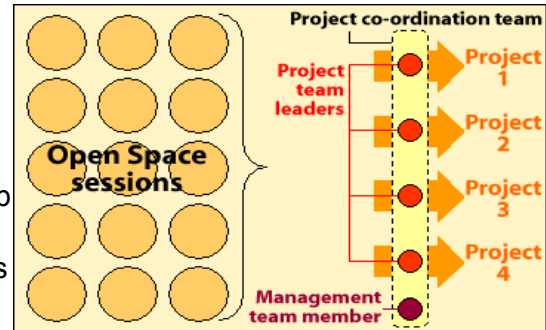
Step 5: Presentation of project team decisions

- One person from each team, usually the project team leader, quickly announces the answers to the set of questions.

Step 6: Inaugural meeting of project co-ordination team

The purpose of the project co-ordination team is to:

- Provide regular progress reports to all interested parties
- Enable project team leaders to share information and resources with each other
- Serve as a forum for action learning and act as a lab for developing new ways of getting things done
- Keep the post-event projects on the formal business agenda
- Create a direct link to the organisation's resource allocation process
- Ensure that the projects receive ongoing management attention



This is the process for the inaugural meeting of project co-ordination team:

The project team leaders sit in a small circle in the centre of the big circle, goldfish bowl style – as illustrated in the photo below – and invite a member of the senior management team to join the project co-ordination team as an equal member. (This will have been agreed in advance with the senior management team.)

The project co-ordination team now holds its inaugural meeting, with everyone else silently listening in. Its task is two-fold:

1. Agree when and where the team will hold its regular project co-ordination meeting in which project team leaders will discuss the progress of their projects – for example, on the first Monday of the month in the staff restaurant.
2. Decide how the team will keep all interested parties informed of the progress of the projects – for example, through the organisation's Intranet.



Closing session

The traditional way of closing an Open Space meeting is with a period of reflection and feedback, using a talking stick or similar device. Participants are invited to say whatever they need to say in order to complete their Open Space experience. The talking stick is placed in the centre of the circle and anyone who wishes to speak must walk into the circle and pick up the stick. Everyone else listens. When the speaker has finished, the stick is returned to the centre of the circle ready for the next speaker.

The Open Space meeting normally concludes with the sponsor (e.g. the CEO) thanking everyone for their active participation and making a commitment to support the projects that have been initiated.