

Inviting Organization

evolution is now and open space

The following pages are reprinted from a collection of stories and resources that are shared freely as a browsable 'online book' at www.michaelherman.com.

Please email any comments or questions to Michael Herman at <mailto:michael@michaelherman.com>.

Thank you, and enjoy!

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Open Space Technology: An Executive Summary

What is Open Space Technology?

Open Space Technology is one way to enable all kinds of people, in any kind of organization, to create inspired meetings and events. Over the last 15 years, it has also become clear that opening space, as an intentional leadership practice, can create inspired organizations, where ordinary people work together to create extraordinary results with regularity.

In Open Space meetings, events and organizations, participants create and manage their own agenda of parallel working sessions around a central theme of strategic importance, such as: What is the strategy, group, organization or community that all stakeholders can support and work together to create?

With groups of 5 to 1000 -- working in one-day workshops, three-day conferences, or the regular weekly staff meeting -- the common result is a powerful, effective connecting and strengthening of what's already happening in the organization: planning and action, learning and doing, passion and responsibility, participation and performance.

When and Why?

Open Space works best when the work to be done is complex, the people and ideas involved are diverse, the passion for resolution (and potential for conflict) are high, and the time to get it done was yesterday. It's been called passion bounded by responsibility, the energy of a good coffee break, intentional self-organization, spirit at work, chaos and creativity, evolution in organization, and a simple, powerful way to get people and organizations moving -- when and where it's needed most.

And, while Open Space is known for its apparent lack of structure and welcoming of surprises, it turns out that the Open Space meeting or organization is actually very structured -- 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 blocking) best work. In fact, the stories and workplans

woven in Open Space are generally more complex, more robust, more durable -- and can move a great deal faster than expert- or management-driven designs.

What will happen?

We never know exactly what will happen when we open the space for people to do their most important work, but we can guarantee these results when any group gets into Open Space...

1. All of the issues that are MOST important to the participants will be raised.
2. All of the issues raised will be addressed by those participants most qualified and capable of getting something done on each of them.
3. In a time as short as one or two days, all of the most important ideas, discussion, data, recommendations, conclusions, questions for further study, and plans for immediate action will be documented in one comprehensive report -- finished, printed and in the hands of participants when they leave.
4. When appropriate, and when time is allowed for it, the total contents of this report document can be focused and prioritized in a matter of a few hours, even with very large groups (100's).
5. After an event, all of these results can be made available to an entire organization or community within days of the event, so the conversation can invite every stakeholder into implementation -- right now.
6. AND... results like these can be planned and implemented faster than any other kind of so-called "large-group intervention." It is literally possible to accomplish in days and weeks what some other approaches take months and years to do.

The good news, and the bad news, is that it works. Good news because it gets people and work moving, bad news because that may mean lots of things are going to be different than before. Wanted things can appear, unwanted things disappear, and sometime vice versa -- but that's how life is.

In short, then, Open Space brings life back to organization and organizations back to life.

Michael Herman, founder and principal of Michael Herman Associates, specializes in Open Space Technology and other methods for working in new directions and creating inviting organizations. To learn more about Open Space Technology, call Michael at 312-280-7838, <mailto:michael@michaelherman.com>.

Worldwide Open Space is a website created by the Open Space Institute USA which serves as a portal and gathering point for Open Space friends and practitioners from everywhere. <http://www.openspaceworld.org>