

Why

Often meetings are filled with all kinds of topics that are not the real issues. So, there really is a lot to gain in conducting open-ended meetings with no agenda to let people express themselves and to tackle subjects and issues that are alive within the team or the company.

What

More or less open-flow meetings (half or full day) where small or very big groups (from 8 up to a few hundred) define the agenda on the spot. All topics are allowed. The groups then choose what topics on the agenda they feel passionate about and are interested in and they then discuss these issues.

How

- Everyone sits in a circle.
- A question is posed, e.g. given our purpose, ambition or current results, what do we need to talk about today?
- In the middle of the circle lies a pack of big, blank cards and markers.
- Everyone who has a topic comes to the middle of the circle and writes their topic on a card (one topic per card).
- People walk around and show the topics to each other explaining them if necessary. No discussion yet! If two topics are the same ask the participants to choose one or to write a new card capturing the different formulations.
- Against the wall you will have placed a blank agenda with hours listed to indicate when different discussion rounds will take place and locations (rule of thumb: 8 participants per location).
- The minimum number of rounds are: 2 discussion rounds, at the end of which is a summary round. For the summary round, the larger groups divide into small groups to answer the question: which 2 or 3 core themes were present in every discussion? Smaller groups write down these themes on a piece of paper and present them to the other groups.
- Once all topics are written on cards and different groups have showed them to each other and merged them where possible they are then added to the agenda.
- Then, define when the first round will start and off you go! Ask people to note as much as possible on a big piece of paper (reflections, observations, possible solutions etc.).
- Do rounds of about 40 minutes each.
- After each round everyone puts their papers in the main meeting location. Leave 10 minutes between rounds to allow people to read the results of the previous round.
- After the discussion rounds do the summary round as described above.
- At the end of the day you can ask who wants to invest in solving which theme/topic. You can define output and criteria (management funnel) and ask people to use their own initiative to solve the problem.



When

When you want to connect a large number of people at the same time in the same room by allowing them to discuss important topics in an open way. Or, when you want to create a strong buzz around a certain topic.

Skills and necessary training

Look for some extra information on the net about open space methodology.
Have a look at the book *Open Space Technology* by Harrison Owen.

Critical success factors

Being able to let go and have little control over the themes people want to address.

Possible workshop exercise

Organize a small open space meeting during training.