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Description:

Open Space is a strategy that can work with groups of 5 to 1000 to work through a central theme of importance. This strategy can be implemented in a variety of formats: one-day workshop; three-day conference; weekly staff meeting; etc. The Open Space format works best when the work to be done is complex or conflict-ridden. This meeting format requires people to work together as equals to decide how they will bring something new into being or make a mutually-desired change occur. In Open Space meetings, participants create and manage their own agenda, which manifests itself in parallel working sessions.

Uses:

Open Space is typically utilized to create a new vision, figure out how to implement a strategy, plan a significant change, solve a complex problem, or simply to get people talking with each other that may only interact once a year or less.

Materials:

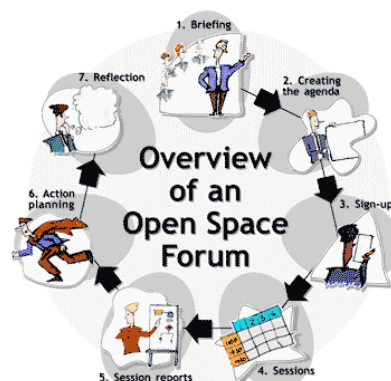
Materials needed will vary depending upon the size of group being led through this strategy. Key materials, regardless of the size of the group are:

- Space. The amount of space required will be determined by the size of the group you are working with. Generally, the space used needs to contain plenty of blank wall space and be able to accommodate participants seated in a circle.
- Enough flipchart stands and flipchart paper so that each room used for the implementation of the strategy contains at least one flipchart stand with paper and pens.

If working with large groups, a variety of other materials are suggested, which can be found in the reference materials.

Instructions:

Detailed instructions can be found in the reference materials. In general, the flow of the Open Space process looks like this:



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In the briefing, the facilitator states the theme/purpose of the event. During this briefing, the facilitator describes the principles/rules that must be adhered to during the process:

- Whoever comes are the right people
- Whenever it starts is the right time
- Whatever happens is the only thing that could happen
- When it's over, it's over
- The Law of Two Feet (if you find yourself in a situation where you are neither learning nor contributing, it is your responsibility to use your two feet to go someplace else to use your time more effectively)

Once the briefing is over, the participants are given the opportunity to offer issues to tackle by writing the issue on a piece of flipchart paper, announcing the issue in the center of the room, and then posting the issue on the wall.

Once all issues have been posted, participants begin the process of signing up for the issues they'd like to participate in.

Times and locations (sessions) for the discussion of each specific issue are determined, and then participants move from session to session.

Each session is recorded, and notes from each session are posted in a central location.

The large group reconvenes at certain points (like beginning or end of day) to share what has transpired.

At the end of all of the sessions, everyone involved receives a set of reports from all of the sessions.

After the process has been completed, projects and actions, which emerge from the process, must be monitored, coordinated and nurtured, with status communicated to all interested parties.

Tips:

Although it may seem on the surface like little planning is required to implement this strategy, the contrary is true.

References:

Bunker, Barbara and Alban, Billie (1997). *Large Group Interventions*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.

<http://www.openspaceworld.org/english/openspace.html>

<http://www.martinleith.com/openspace>