

Duration of Open Space events

Comparing a 2-Day (a full day and a morning - 12 hours total) with a 3-Day (half a day, a full day, half a day - 16 hours total) Open Space event.

The Open Space process is useful in various situations. It supports different Objectives:

- Discussion of a Topic
- Conferences with experts
- Development of a project
- Working on organizational structures, culture of leadership and cooperation
- Development of perspectives, ideas and strategies for regions and fields (future of rural areas, european cooperation, youth, school without racism, conflict resolution, peace, cross-border cooperation, quality development, prevention)
- Constant development of existing organizations (company, school, social service, university, church, foundation, consultancy, academy)
- Further development of communities (city district, township, green areas, playground, transnational regions, village, town)
- Agreement on concrete robust action steps to realize plans, perspectives and ideas

For hundreds of examples from our practice go to www.boscop.org and for over 500 examples of Open Space facilitators worldwide with filters for field/sector and who facilitated the event go to www.openspaceworldscape.org.

The duration of an Open Space event is informed by the expectations for envisioned results:

- Shall a „Topic“ be discussed?
- Soll ein „Thema“ diskutiert werden?
- Shall a „project“ be realized?
- Soll ein „Projekt“ vorangebracht werden?
- Shall new paths be found?
- Sollen neue Wege gefunden werden?
- Shall something be planned and implemented?
- Soll etwas geplant und umgesetzt werden?

In practice a variety of Open Space designs have worked. Best practice is a duration from 3,5 hours to 16 hours spread over three days. Briefer and longer events have not stood up.

In our practice we observed the following:

When a thorough discussion (including working through the past) and robust sustainable action steps with concrete agreements are expected an event which stretches out over three days (half a day, a full day, half a day) is perfect. This design enables:

1. Up to 6 or 7 break-out sessions with the possibility for all participants to participate in 6 or 7 break-out groups.
2. Three points in time to raise new issues in front of the whole system (at the beginning, on the evening of the first day and the morning of the second day) Working on all issues raised
3. Experiencing and full unfolding of the dynamik of self-organization, auto-responsibility, networking, learning, cooperation, development of perspectives for action, agreement on concrete robust and sustainable action steps Two evenings and two nights to digest/work through ideas, thoughts and plans

4. Production of a documentation with all results
5. Reading of already published break-out group reports
6. Working on all break-out group reports during the ongoing event with the possibility to receive stimuli for ones own issues, to identify networks and to receive augmentations (ideas, suggestions, action steps, questions) from everyone
7. Documentation of augmentations for all break-out group reports
8. Thorough analysis of results by all
9. Outlook on and action planning on the morning of the third day by all with concrete and sustainable agreements for all projects that shall be carried on

Every abbreviation implies curtailments of or omitting particular features and results. Therefore it is important to clarify what the sponsor is reaching for by organizing an open space event - that implies the length of the event.

With regard to a 2-Day event (a full day and a morning - 12 hours total) instead of a 3-Day event (half a day, a full day, half a day - 16 hours total) the following characteristics result:

1. Up to 3 or 4 break-out sessions with the possibility for all participants to participate in 3 or 4 break-out groups
2. One point in time (on the morning of the first day) to raise issues in front of the whole system
3. Working on all issues raised
4. Experiencing and unfolding of the dynamik of self-organization, auto-responsibility, networking, learning, cooperation, development of perspectives for action, agreement on concrete action steps
5. One evening and one night to digest/work through ideas and thoughts
6. Production of a documentation with all results
7. Reading of already published break-out group reports
8. Omitted
9. Omitted
10. Thorough analysis of results by all
11. Outlook on and action planning on the morning of the second day by all with concrete agreements for all projects that shall be carried on

That means:

- With 3 to 4 break-out sessions individual participants have less opportunities to co-develop all issues of interest to them
- With 3 to 4 break-out sessions the use of two sessions to work on one issue reduces collaboration to 2 or 3 issues
- With 3 to 4 break-out sessions the option to let one session „go by“ still exists but it reduces collaboration to 2 or 3 issues
- With 3 to 4 break-out sessions instead of 6 to 7 with about the same number of issues the number of break out spaces doubles. For instance with 250 participants and 60 issues raised for 3 break-out sessions 20 break-out spaces are necessary whereas with 6 break-out sessions 10 break-out spaces are sufficient a much more manageable situation for individual participants to perceive the whole system
- The observation is that experiencing and unfolding of the dynamik of self-organization, auto-responsibility, networking, learning, cooperation, development of perspectives for action, agreement on concrete action steps are limited in other words the complete quality of open space unfolds less
- The dynamic developing in the process of the event, which also leads to the discovery of

new and possibly important issues is limited above all because there is only one instead of three structured opportunities to raise new issues in front of the whole system

- Sleeping twice – according to practical experience and research findings – results in a deeper understanding of the subject matter along with clearer, robust, sustainable agreements engaged with mutual trust as when sleeping only once it also creates more level-headedness and peace throughout the whole event
- Only one day for break-out groups leads to the omission of the augmentation of the break-out group reports by individuals who were not present while working on the issue (experience shows: there is a lack of time to productively participate in working through the already published reports on the newswall during the ongoing event or even in the evening in order to receive stimuli for one's own issues and then also contribute thoughts through augmenting)
- At a 2-day event many participants only see the results of other break-out groups for the first time on the morning of the second day when the book of proceedings is issued. That results in a narrower understanding with regard to cooperation, networking and the quality of the agreements to be made.

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