

Welcome to the OSLIST Frequently Asked Questions List

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This FAQ has been prepared to outline some of the “givens” around the OSLIST, the online list for Open Space Technology practitioners. This FAQ does not represent the official position of the OSLIST membership, but rather, is the result of observation and participation by a few list members who had the passion to create a FAQ.

1. What is Open Space Technology?

You'd be surprised how contentious a question that one can be. Over the years on OSLIST list members have gone through spells of defining Open Space Technology both explicitly and implicitly. In fact one of the benefits of being subscribed to this list is that over time a definition will emerge for each individual that makes sense.

Having said that, in 2000 a group of list members wrestled with the challenge of crafting an Open Space Technology definition that was 25 words or less, and among the results were the following:

“Open Space is based in the belief that organizations and communities run on passion and responsibility. It allows groups of any size to self-organize around what they really care about to get things done.” – [Peggy Holman](#)

“Open Space Technology is a natural communication process that recognizes that people take responsibility to pursue what they are passionate about, and it ensures that what is important to each participant will be discussed.” -- developed by a small group during a [Birgitt Williams](#) Open Space training workshop in Halifax May 15-18, 2000

That is the short answer. How this happens is the interesting part

Open Space Technology meetings begin with all the participants sitting in a circle, and no items on the agenda. The meeting opens with an agenda setting exercise following which the group self-organizes into smaller discussion groups. Discussion group conveners are responsible for providing a report of the discussions, which is immediately added to a book of proceedings. At the conclusion of the meeting, or very shortly thereafter, participants receive a copy of the proceedings including all of the discussion groups' reports and any action plans that were developed.

Open Space Technology meetings operate on four principles and one law. The principles are:

- Whoever comes is the right people
- Whatever happens is the only thing that could have happened
- When it starts is the right time
- When it's over it's over

And the law is known as The Law of Two Feet (sometimes referred to as "The Law of Mobility"). It states that “If you find yourself in a situation where you are neither learning or contributing, go somewhere where you can.”

As a result, Open Space Technology meetings are characterized by self-organization and high degrees of freedom for participants.

If you want to know more about Open Space Technology visit the site of the international Open Space Technology community at <http://www.openspaceworld.org> (a companion site to this list) where you can find an Introduction to OST in many languages and resources and links to other materials about OST on the Web.

For the record, Open Space Technology was developed by [Harrison Owen](#), a Maryland USA based consultant who was searching for a way to create better meetings after hearing that the best parts of a conference he organized were the coffee breaks. Open Space Technology meetings are still known for capturing the "buzz" that permeates the gathering and turning it towards action. Open Space Technology meetings have been held with groups as large as 1200 and as small as 5.

Harrison wrote "the book" on Open Space Technology, called "Open Space Technology: A User's Guide" which serves as an important articulation of the mechanics and meaning of the process. In 2002, 37 Open Space Technology practitioners contributed to a book called "Open Space Technology: A User's Non-Guide," edited by [Michael Herman](#) and [Chris Corrigan](#) which is a compilation of some fascinating foundational thinking about Open Space, gleaned entirely from conversations on the OSLIST.

- Link to the User's Guide: <http://www.openspaceworld.com/literature.htm>
- Link to the User's Non-guide: <http://www.globalchicago.net/ost/nonguide.html>

2. What is OSLIST?

OSLIST is the international mailing list for Open Space Technology facilitators and those interested in the process. It is a lively forum with 399 members (as of December 19, 2003) and generates around 10-15 messages per day, during its most active times.

3. How do I change my list settings?

To join OSLIST, or to change your settings, visit <http://listserv.boisestate.edu/cgi-bin/wa?SUBED1=oslist&A=1> and fill out the form. You may also unsubscribe using this page.

You may also join OSLIST by sending a message to the following address: <mailto:listserv@listserv.boisestate.edu>. IN THE BODY of this message type ONLY the following text: "subscribe oslist" (don't type the quotes!). Enter nothing in the SUBJECT field and nothing else in the message (including, for instance, signatures, addresses, etc.).

To unsubscribe from OSLIST Send a message to <mailto:listserv@listserv.boisestate.edu>. IN THE BODY of this message type ONLY the following text: "unsubscribe oslist" (don't type the quotes!). Enter nothing in the SUBJECT field and nothing else in the message (including, for instance, signatures, addresses, etc.).

Upon successfully registering for the list you will receive a piece of mail containing useful information about OSLIST including how to unsubscribe. It's worthwhile saving this treasure!

If you have any problems, our list moderator is [MurliNagasundaram?](#) He is at <mailto:murli@boisestate.edu>. Murli helps out with any technical issues that need to be resolved with the list, but he does not "moderate" in the traditional sense of filtering messages. All messages mailed to the LISTSERV are posted to the list.

4. Is the list archived and publicly accessible?

Yes, the list is archived, and all material posted to the list is also posted to the archive. The archive is publicly accessible, so you may wish to keep this in mind if you choose to post to the list.

The archives can be read and searched by visiting <http://listserv.boisestate.edu/archives/oslist.html>

From time to time, discussions and postings to the list find their way into other forms, such as the User's Non-Guide, onto websites, or forwarded to others who are not on the list. List members should be aware that posts to the OSLIST are public, and posting to the list is generally understood to mean that your thoughts are okay to be shared with the rest of the world.

If you would like to use material that has been posted to the list, please quote the source of the material, and maybe let that person know how you are using their words.

5. What is the etiquette for posting to OSLIST?

There are no hard and fast rules about what to post to OSLIST, but in general people appreciate the following:

- Questions about working with Open Space Technology
- Answers to relevant questions
- Stories about Open Space Technology meetings
- Poems (there is a regular poetry contest that happens every six months or so)
- Notices of upcoming Open Space Technology training or conferences
- Resource material that may be of interest to Open Space Technology facilitators
- Opportunities and calls for OST facilitators.
- Introductions from new subscribers
- Discussion about theories and ideas that can help to improve the understanding and practice of Open Space Technology
- Experiences working with Open Space Organizations
- Accounts of other ways of "opening space."
- Posts in languages other than English are acceptable. OSLIST has readers who speak Cantonese, German, Swedish, Danish, Mandarin, Hindi, Russian, Portuguese, Hebrew, Haitian Creole, Spanish and French among others and items have been posted in several of these languages in the past.

In general, OSLIST users seem to prefer that people avoid the following:

- Attachments. Please either post these to a website and provide the link to the list, or ask people to indicate if they wish to receive them off list. Viruses are sent as attachments, and so most people will routinely delete them if they are not sent personally.
- Flaming. We are a pretty congenial group, and flaming is relatively unknown amongst us. It would be nice to keep it that way. If you have negative things to say about individuals it would be appreciated if you could keep them off list.
- Virus warnings. If you absolutely feel the need to post a virus warning to the list please ensure that the warning is not a hoax by first checking with the Symantec Anti Virus Centre at <http://www.symantec.com/avcenter/>
- Please try to avoid sending messages in HTML. Plain text is preferred on this list. All mail browsers have this option.
- It must also be said that the jury is still out on small personal notes of appreciation or support to individuals. Some feel that these are a waste of bandwidth and add to an increasingly heavy personal email load. Others feel that personal messages of support sent to the list provide valuable affirmation to individuals by recognizing them within the worldwide community of Open Space Technology practitioners. It's best to use your own judgment on this. If you do post notes like this to the list, be aware that the reception of others may be mixed.

6. Dealing with viruses

Like many email lists, the OSLIST is occasionally vulnerable to viruses being circulated by its members. Although very rare, it has been known to happen from time to time. While there is no fool proof way to stop viruses being sent to the list, there are a couple of things you can do to avoid being affected by viruses. There is an excellent FAQ on dealing with email viruses at (

<http://www.onenw.org/bin/page.cfm?pageid=14>). This includes instructions for making Microsoft Outlook safe.

In addition, OSLIST users have offered the following pieces of advice:

- Never open an attachment from an email sent to the list, even if it comes from a source you know and trust. If you are curious about an attachment, ask the sender to send it to you off list.
- Don't use Microsoft Outlook as your email reader. Choose Eudora (<http://www.eudora.com>) or some other free mail program instead.
- Use Anti-virus software such as Norton Anti-virus produced by Symantec (<http://enterprisesecurity.symantec.com/content/productlink.cfm#0>), or the free software produced by H+BEDV (<http://www.hbedv.com/>)

7. What other online discussion forums are there for Open Space Technology practitioners?

The most heavily visited online forums are as follows:

- Worldwide Open Space at <http://www.openspaceworld.org>
- Open Space World.NET - an online space for practitioners and participants projects.
- The Meta Network at <http://www.tmn.com/new>. Follow the link to "make a new account" and fill out the form. Where you are asked for your host or sponsor on The Meta Network enter "Openspace" This forum has not been used heavily for more than a year but there some rich archived discussions there.

8. Where can I find out more about Open Space Technology?

The best place to start is at the Open Space World website which can be found at: <http://www.openspaceworld.org/>. Here you will find resources for facilitators, links to websites of Open Space Technology practitioners, stories, poetry, training opportunities, conference information and more.

9. What is [OSonOS](#)?

[OSonOS](#) stands for "Open Space on Open Space." It is an annual event that gathers together 150 or so Open Space Technology practitioners to spend two or more days discussing issues related to the practice of Open Space Technology.

The next [OSonOS](#) will be held in San Francisco, California in July 2008. Exact locations and dates are to be determined. Once the invitation is finalized, more information about that event will be found at <http://www.openspaceworld.org/osonos.html> along with links to the proceedings of previous [OSonOS](#) events.

10. Finally a word from our sponsor

Here are some parting words from Harrison Owen:

"From the very beginning (1985) Open Space Technology has been free and freely available. I can't possibly remember how many times I have said this in print, verbally, and online - but I am reasonably certain that whenever I said it, I followed with the words -- But there is a cost. That we freely share what we are learning. The mechanisms of sharing are multiple including training programs, public presentations, private emails and of course OSLIST. The substance of what we share is even more diverse: Technical "How toss," Philosophical meanderings, and deep feelings from the heart. And in many ways, I think the deep feelings are the most important. It is from those feelings that we learn who we are, what we are doing, and what the true value might be. Were Open Space simply a technical approach to better meetings, we might avoid both the philosophy and the feelings. I believe we have discovered, however, that OS as a meeting methodology is but a tiny part of the reality. Over time we have wandered into the strange world of self-organizing systems, questions of peace making, human dignity, personal sense of worth, constructive conflict. And our journey has always been a shared one.

No single person has, or could have, the total experience. And no one has the interpretive capacity to explain and elucidate that experience. We can only do this together, freely and openly.

"Occasionally I am asked why I never trademarked, patented, or franchised Open Space Technology. A flip, but honest answer would be that I was too lazy, in addition to the fact that I had better things to do than spend my time defending the sacred precincts. The same might be said for my refusal to "Certify" OS Practitioners. More to the point, and closer to my heart (true feelings :-)), I really felt/feel that OS does some good in ways that this funny world of ours can truly benefit from. Therefore I wanted it to be freely available to whomever, wherever, and however. . . And I don't just mean Open Space Technology as a narrowly prescribed methodology. I mean the whole enchilada - Method, Philosophy, Feelings, and anything else that has popped up along the way.

The OSLIST has been one critical part of the Open Space experience, and the evolution of the global Open Space community. From the very beginning it was open to anybody who cared - with no questions asked about why they cared or how much. People have come, people have gone, and some have just hung out. There has never been any promise of privacy or exclusivity, indeed just the opposite. Anybody who thought they had joined a private, exclusive club was operating under a severe misunderstanding. Indeed, the nature of the Internet, of which OSLIST is an infinitesimally small part, fosters this openness, for anything that appears anywhere in cyberspace is quite likely to show up somewhere else. In the case of OSLIST, all of this has been profoundly and wonderfully true. Messages forwarded and copied have gone around the world multiple times making Open Space, and the possibilities of Open Space, available to people and places we will never know."

Welcome to the OSLIST!

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<http://listserv.boisestate.edu/archives/oslist.html>