Aus dem Newsletter des „Young Leaders Forum", Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Kabul Office

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Introduction of Open Space Technology in Afghanistan

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 20+ years it has also become clear that opening space can create organizations where people work together to create extraordinary results with regularity.

In open space meetings and events participants create and manage their own agenda of parallel working sessions around a central theme of strategic importance.

With groups of 5 - 2000+ working in one-day workshops, three-day conference, or the regular weekly staff meetings 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.

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 the most.

While open space is known for its apparent lack of structure and welcoming of surprises, it turns out that an open space is actually very structured. May be it comes to your mind that What Will Happen in an open space?

We never know exactly what will happen when we open the space for the participants, but we can guarantee these results when any group gets to an open space:

1. All of the issues that are MOST important to the group 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, discussions, 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 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 (100s).
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 in to implementation right now.
6. AND...results like these can be planned and implemented faster than any other kind of so-called 'large-group intervention.'

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Humaira Sadeqyar

Over the years some experienced open space workers have developed a design that really takes seriously the old saying: "Open Space can neither be taught, nor learned but possibly remembered".

As an introduction, for the very first time in Afghanistan the open space technology was brought to 27 participants from the different backgrounds by the open space trainer Mrs. Jutta Weimar, from April 9th-10th 2008 at the Afghanistan office of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung in Kabul.

The training design consisted of one open space event and a number of parallel activities to support self-organized learning spread over 2 days.

The book of proceedings produced during this open space event represented an integral and important part of the whole meeting. It contained the table of contents, all reports of issues worked on, the action steps planned with a detailed description of what to undertake with respective time frames, contact persons, the contact list of all participants and photos. The entire content of the meeting is reflected in the book of proceedings.

Another portion of the outcome of that meeting was the contact between participants.

As phase one, the training started with the preparation of the open space event within the training. The group went through the traditional planning meeting, the main purpose of which was to find a theme that is congruent with the prerequisites under which Open Space Technology works best:

– A common theme of concern that is complex and tends to conflict.
– Nobody knows the answer...

And the theme selected by the group was: "HOW CAN WE ENSURE THE ROLE OF YOUTH IN THE CHANGE PROCESS?", which was the title of the Open Space there.

The trainer did the classic open space introduction in six phases: welcome, focus the group, stating the theme, introducing the principles, collecting the issues, open the market place.

At the end of this first open space 21 reports were brought by the participants at the news wall. The most important ones were:

– How can we choose a suitable profession for ourselves?
– How can we ensure the role of youth in all levels of decision making in Afghanistan?
– How to invent a suitable communication pool among youth?
– How to overcome men-women differences inside a family structure?
– How to bring awareness around the country about democracy and peace?
– How to create political awareness among youth?
– How to build mutual trust among youth?
– How to reduce the ethnical differences and provocations among the youth and then throughout the country?

Afterwards there was action-planning phase. During this planning the participants announced 18 projects; some of those were as following:
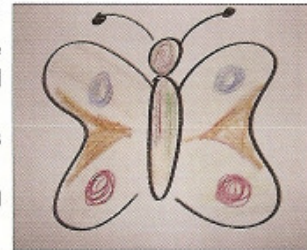
– Holding a workshop on open space technology for my colleagues.
– To reach to a clear mechanism for editing and publishing the "book of proceedings" with interested colleagues.
– Discuss with YLF members the idea of how to create a suitable communication pool among the active youth in Afghanistan.
– Introducing the open space technology to a larger group of youth.

Afterwards it was up to the project groups how and when they are going to implement these plans. This is a common phenomenon for most of open space events and even more in such a dynamic field.

Parallel to the consecutive open space events the following learning spaces were available for the participants for individual studying and reflection during the entire time of training: library, audio and video room, questions-and-answers wall.

The last hour of the training was a press conference. A common conversation about remaining questions and the chance for the participants and the training team to exchange ideas, stories, questions, and wisdom about open space technology.

By Humaira Sadeqyar

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