

Commemorative Book

- Festschrift -

**25 years of
Open Space Technology**

PUBLISHED BY ANNA CAROLINE TÜRK & JO TÖPFER

Preface

This year Open Space Technology exists for a quarter of a century. Over the time it has spread around the world. In many organisations, communities and networks it has contributed to productive collaboration, high performance and peace – and less soul pollution, burnout and stress. It is impossible to measure the economic and social impact of Open Space Technology. The information and knowledge to do so is fragmented and partly forgotten and it is not the intention of this Commemorative Book to measure. By no means the selection of authors and topics represents the entire diversity of the Open Space community.

But we are proud to present you stories and pictures of practitioners who are part of the natural Open Space Technology experiment. Realising that we celebrate the 25th anniversary of Open Space Technology in 2010 the idea for a Commemorative Book emerged. We invited colleagues and friends around the world to submit their memories. This is what we got: An impressive variety of expressions voluntarily submitted by 15 authors from nine countries.

Like a Book of Proceedings all contributions are in the order as received. And they are kept in its original fashion: We did not edit nor streamline the pieces of the authors.

Enjoy reading!

Anna Caroline Türk and Jo Töpfer

Berlin, May 12th, 2010

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Baby Steps

In a gusty seaside town not far from Belfast
but far enough
maybe
from sites which resonate with injury and hurt

A space is opened
and a group of neighbours meet
who do not call each other neighbour

Take small steps into the space
to make their place
Livable.

Like a baby learns first to totter,
then to walk.
to gain the world.

In September 2009 an Open Space was held in north Belfast that brought together a small group of residents, community activists and ex-combatants from neighbouring, but estranged, communities as part of an ongoing process to establish dialogue.

Geraldine Wilkins
January 2010

OST at WohnGeist - a personal story and a case study

by Catherine Pfaehler

We have been using OST in our woodworking company WohnGeist since 2007. In our first OS event in June 2007 named “Vision 2020”, which lasted one day and invited 45 persons of our whole system (all our woodworkers, office and sale staff, clients, suppliers, the graphics person, the press, friends, consultant friends and family), it became clear that we need to find a larger building to bring our 3 woodworkshops together in one place (www.wohngeist.ch) and that we really had a future to work towards. Up to then, my husband Stefan and I had often felt overwhelmed by the responsibility for our growing company, feeling like it was only the two of us who carried it forward. The feedback we got in the OS event was very motivating. Peter and Pia Glanzmann were our facilitators – thank you again!

Then in October 2007, my daughters died in a flooding cave in Thailand . The OST principles greatly helped us in accepting what is, as I have written to you earlier. Paradoxically, this somehow gave us the last necessary impulse to be courageous enough for that next big step with WohnGeist – the “worst thing” had already happened, and if something were to go wrong with our plans for the expansion of WohnGeist, it couldn't possibly be as devastating as their death...

So we eventually really found a suitable larger place with as much inspiration as our old place in the historic center of Basel , and in April 2008 wrote a letter to our 1500 clients and friends, offering sustainable investment possibilities (becoming a shareholder or giving us a loan with nice conditions). We got 1 million Swiss francs! What an incredible sign of appreciation for what we do... With this money and some help from the bank, we were able to buy a great windows factory from 1963 nearby, which we are now renovating and setting up to suit our needs.

In summer 2008, I needed to take a time-out of half a year to grieve and start integrating my new situation. I came back to work a day a week this January, and am becoming stronger again as time goes by.

Stefan and I appointed two members of our staff to become part of the management team, thus finally being able to let go of some of our responsibilities.

In May 2009, we were allowed to hold another OS event of half a day in the new place, which didn't belong to us quite yet, this time with 30 participants – our staff, some clients and some members of our strategic council (see below). I facilitated it myself. The topic was “Our design house – designing it the way it will be fun to work in”. Our staff started to love the place and took initiative for some of the upcoming projects. Some of the other participants also took initiative – one of the results was a strategic planning group, which is still working with great commitment to develop the strategy of the next years for WohnGeist. And our staff commented that it was a pity to be together only for half a day – so many interesting topics all at the same time... they had much preferred the longer event from June 2007.

Our project is well under way since then. Two members of our woodworking staff postponed their civil service resp. their further studies to help with the setting up of the new place. There is a renovating team in the new place, using the agenda wall for announcing and selecting jobs of the day to be done, and an everyday woodworking team in the old place. All of our staff are taking full responsibility for their new jobs, and we are deeply amazed at how well this really works, even if we have been familiar with and living in OST since 1989 (myself) resp. 1996 (Stefan)... The move has started and will be completed by February 2010. Even if there will be more commuting (13 min. by train from Basel main station to Frenkendorf) and less bicycling, we are all looking forward to the new era of WohnGeist – being more efficient and working with much more ease in the bigger spaces available there. We will also have a big showroom there – a space which in Basel city would be unaffordable!

In that letter of April 2008, we had also asked that people interested to become members of the board announce themselves. 11 wonderful people emerged, and we decided it would be a pity to select a few only. So we asked them if they would agree to become members of the strategic council for a year, in order for us to get acquainted with how they work, before electing our board. The first two meetings of the strategic council were mini-OS-events of 3 hours, us identifying 4 or 5 topics (our most urgent questions around buying and setting up the place), them completing to 6 or changing our topics as they found necessary. We worked by the principles of OST, but declared that this wasn't really OST and named the differences.

Now the strategic council just had its 3rd meeting, this time in our new place. It wasn't a mini-OST, even if we had a great ongoing buffet again J , but a more structured event to prioritize and detail the strategies which the strategic planning group had identified this summer. We wanted to have the input of our strategic council for the next steps. Their feedback in the closing circle was that they much preferred to work in OST... and quite a few of them agreed to continue the work in the strategic council, for almost no pay, but because they find it fascinating to be part of this project.

So, as you can tell, OST really gets people hooked. It really works if management (i.e. my husband and myself) is open for whatever happens, too. So be prepared to be surprised...

Oh – as I write, it just dawns on me that in summer 2007, a friend has brought a shiny blue sticker from Findhorn which we had posted on top of our office door. It reads “Angels at work. Prepare for random miracles.” I guess this is true indeed. The support of our angels is always there, and OST is helping us to stay open to it.

Thank you all! With love, Catherine

Thank you, my friend, for sharing so generously the gift of getting out of the way so people can remember how amazing they are...With deep respect and love -- Lisa Heft WOSonOS2010 May, Berlin



What Open Space Technology Has Meant to Me
By Peggy Holman, peggy@opencirclecompany.com

I fell in love with Open Space the first time I experienced it. And I have never looked back.

Discovering Open Space Technology in 1993 was a turning point in my life. It changed the way I approached my work. No longer did I take responsibility for a client's experience. I left that burden behind, focusing instead on supporting my clients in taking responsibility for themselves.

While I can't begin to count the number of spaces I've opened over the last eighteen years, I can say that each one has taught me something about myself or about working with a group. I share a few highlights with you:

My first Open Space was in 1994, at U S WEST Communications. I saw 230 diverse people work through conflicts to uncover creative solutions. I knew something different was happening when a network technician spoke from a systemic understanding about the system he loved. Rather than holding the traditional union position against contracting non-union labor, he had come to a more nuanced view. He advocated heresy: using temporary non-union labor, freeing union people to build a new system while the temps kept the remnants of the old one functional until cutover. He and others had discovered answers that served both their individual needs and the needs of the system. Until then, I didn't know that was possible. Today, I consider it a measure of success.

Later that same year, I opened space for the first time. Only one session was posted during the opening time period. I wondered what the people who weren't interested in the topic would do. Still, I remembered Harrison's counsel to trust the people. I literally went to the back of the room and sat on my hands. What I saw inspired me and eliminated any doubts I had about the power of Open Space. There was only session because it was about "THE ISSUE". No one wanted to miss the discussion. I had the privilege of watching 30 people – mostly blue-collar workers – resolve a contentious matter through deep dialogue. There was no expert moderator or other outsider helping them. They found answers on their own. I was in awe.

Spirited Work, a community of practice that met in Open Space quarterly for seven years, took my understanding of Open Space to a whole new level. Conceived by Anne Stadler, we were pioneers, learning what it means to live your life in Open Space. Anne coined the phrase "take responsibility for what you care about", a powerful framing for the law of two feet. She introduced me to the notion of welcoming disturbance, something I now know is central to innovation. Open Space morphed from methodology to life practice.

My favorite Open Spaces include:

- The 2003 Practice of Peace - www.practiceofpeace.com
Inspired by Harrison's work with 25 Israelis and 25 Palestinians in Rome, he suggested doing a workshop in Seattle. We – Spirited Workers – turned the idea into a conference and brought together 130 people from 26 countries. Harrison opened each morning with his insights that by opening space, chaos, conflict, and confusion shift into wholeness, health, and harmony.
- One of the largest Open Spaces to date, held in 2004, 2,100 people, 1,800 of them street kids in Bogota, Colombia - <http://www.opencirclecompany.com/GOOD%20WORK%20FOR%202000%20STREET%20KIDS%20STORY.htm>.
Without the generous lessons I have learned since 1996 from the Open Space listserv, I never would have had the nerve to do this work. I had a virtual consulting firm at my back as these young people found their voice and took responsibility for themselves.
- The series of thirteen Open Space conferences called Journalism That Matters (JTM) that began in 2001 – www.journalismthatmatters.org
In an ambitious effort to change a social system, JTM has become a place for news and information pioneers to find colleagues and partners as the old system of journalism dies and a new system is born.

Beyond Open Space itself, four lessons I took from Open Space continue to guide me:

- Generosity of spirit
When Harrison chose to give Open Space Technology away saying it was everyone's birthright, he modeled extraordinary generosity. He said, "Open Space is free for the taking. Your only responsibility is to share what you learn." What a gift he gave us all! And share we do.
- Simplicity of design
The utter simplicity of the process is part of its genius! Harrison named the most valuable design question I know: *What is one less thing to do and be whole and complete?*
- Focus on essence
While other group process people may argue over mechanics, Open Space encourages us to strip away all but the heart of the matter.
- Inclusion/invitation
"Welcome the stranger," says Harrison. Whether the stranger outside or from within, the unexpected often brings

the unlooked for gem that makes all the difference.

- Abundance

Time and space are always expandable. Knowing that encourages generosity. And so we become more generous with our time, our knowledge, our love.

Thank you, Harrison, for making visible such a profoundly pattern of organizing. Thank you Open Space for holding us as we continue to evolve.

Transforming Facilitation: Opening Space

Larry Peterson* (Associates in Transformation, larry@spiritedorg.com, 416 653 4829)

Transformation

When I first experienced Open Space Technology, it was a personally transforming moment. Over a 25-year period, starting in University in the 60's, I had consciously developed group facilitation skills. For 17 years I had facilitated the formation and ongoing success of a Canada-wide network of people dealing with homelessness. I had designed and facilitated, with others, many 5-day national gatherings with over a hundred participants with few or no speakers, large and small group conversations often leading to renewed personal energy and new projects were emerging in cities across Canada.

It felt like a quantum leap to experience the next step beyond guided facilitation. When I experienced that a facilitator could set the context and principles of self-organization, and then have the whole agenda emerge from the participants it was exciting. It was also a bit threatening that the "facilitator" could then look like they were doing very little, clean up the room, read the paper or even take a nap, and the meeting went on just fine "without" him or her. In fact, it went on better than most meetings because the participants took on real responsibility for the agenda and the outcomes. At the close of the meeting people reported the most remarkable learning and personal breakthroughs.

I believe Open Space Technology takes "meeting" to another level and it requires a paradigm shift in our understanding of "facilitation".

Facilitation

Guiding Conversations

Facilitation is about making it "facile" or easier to get a group or organization to where they are going. It is also about making it as lively and interesting as possible. Good process facilitators learn a variety of techniques and approaches. We facilitators ply our trade using flip charts, post-it notes and a plethora of documented group techniques. The facilitator usually asks key questions to engage conversation, mixing whole group and subgroup conversations, pairs, triads, and independent work. Drawing, flip chart or dramatic report back as well as guided imagery or vision quests are sometimes included. Critical to the task are decision-making techniques such as consensus formation and voting approaches that enable a group to move to its next steps.

From my experience, the best of small group guided facilitation is not based on a packaged approach. It is based on the facilitator's ability to understand what the group is trying to accomplish and where it is on its journey, to listen, to connect to the flow or energy of the group and the accuracy of his/her intuition about use of appropriate conversation approaches.

Large Group Interventions

Group facilitation has lately been translated into larger, "critical mass" events where often hundreds of participants are in one room. Most of these "large group intervention" approaches are quite guided: For example, in Future Search events, the questions to be addressed in the event follow a predetermined pattern, as do the seating arrangements. In Real Time events, the design team working with the facilitators determines the

questions and flow. Some questions or topics will emerge in the discussion and then they will become topics for self-selected discussions. The facilitators then guide the use of those outputs. The table groups do self-organize their conversation by choosing facilitators and recorders, but not the topic of their conversation.

I see value in these approaches. I have facilitated Future Search events for clients when it was the most appropriate meeting form given their situation. I have used Real Time type processes in a variety of situations, especially where the sponsor requires that its authority and decision making is asserted in the event. Even with these guided processes, there can be real moments of breakthrough learning for individuals and for the "collective unconscious" of the group that is in the room. However, the facilitator guides this process in detail. The spaces for participants to experience initiative, self-organization or transformation by are usually limited to 1.5 hours or less.

Opening Space

Open Space Technology

The open space "facilitator" works with the sponsors to create the theme for the meeting and to clarify the understanding of the givens or parameters that shape the context for the event. At the event, the facilitator enables the participants to create their agenda and to self-manage their use of the time and space available. During an event the following takes place:

- The "facilitator" describes the principles that govern the meeting, the theme but not the individual topics to be discussed.
- The participants determine the theme-related topics that they will discuss, and the groups in which they discuss each topic.
- It takes an hour or less for the facilitator to "open the space" for these conversations for almost any size group. When the whole group goes to the wall, negotiates changes in topics and then proceeds to their conversations, they are then responsible for what happens.
- The facilitator "disappears" from both the content and the process of the event until the end of the day. The facilitator is behind the scenes "holding the space," ensuring the participants' process and space are respected. He or she is only visible to the whole group at morning and evening news to identify what else needs to be put forward as Open Space topics. The facilitator may spend time in the computer room ensuring that the recording of the discussions is taking place.
- A "talking stick" approach is often used in the closing of an Open Space event. The "facilitator" again states some operating principles but the content is from the participants and "time and space" are managed by participants using the object that is passed around or placed in the centre of the room.

The more guided parts of an Open Space meeting are the theme and container that is developed before the meeting and the convergence process that focuses energy at the end of Open Space meetings. Working with a sponsor or design team to develop a theme and clarify givens often demands my best facilitation skills and my ability to connect to the spirit of the sponsor group.

The convergence or focusing part of Open Space is a planning process based on the book of reports that is produced during the event. It usually involves some approach to focusing the energy that has emerged, setting priorities and clarifying the next steps. Guided facilitation approaches are often used at this point by facilitators, but the task is to work with both the spirited energy and the ideas that have emerged.

Some people do see Open Space as another technology for organizing a meeting, with just less facilitator intervention and more participant determination of what will be discussed. They see it as an extension of their tool kit and tend to use it for short periods of time. In fact, the "technology" part of Open Space does suggest some helpful group techniques. I have used some of the learning from Open Space to increase the self-organizing part of guided facilitation with real success. However, I do not call it Open Space.

A real Open Space meeting has the capability to transcend our attempts to guide and control our organizations and ourselves. In Open Space people realize that they have the capacity to experience real efficiency, team spirit and a sense of the whole without guided facilitation. Guided facilitation can restrain this high level of communication, creativity and productivity.

Translation and Transformation

Philosopher Ken Wilber talks about the dimensions of "translation" and "transformation". For him, "translation" is coming up with better conceptual and emotional understandings of what is happening. For example, understanding that our organization is a web of interconnected "entities" functioning at many levels, that it is an open not a closed system, helps to translate our experience so that we can learn to act accordingly.

The "transformation" dimension for Ken Wilbur is the direct taste of that interconnected reality and the recognition that we are part of it. It is not describing the "collective unconscious" or spirit but a direct experience of it. This can lead to new connections and new insights that are breakthroughs, beyond where we have been before.

We all need words, images and stories to put our experience in context and to give it meaning. A guided facilitation process can provide a pattern of input and conversation that can lead to a new "translation" of our experience. The design team and the facilitator provide the pattern based on what the sponsor wants to accomplish. Within that pattern there are often opportunities for facilitated conversation, self-organized group interaction and occasionally dialogue.

Through the dialogue that takes place in good guided processes, in either small groups or in plenary, some breakthroughs do happen. There are usually opportunities in the process for conversation and reflection that lead to new insights. However, they are short and the facilitator is always up front on a regular basis to say, "Do this next" implying "Without me this would not have happened".

In an Open Space meeting, most of the guided translation happens before the "space" is opened, including the principles and the law, or after it is closed. After the first hour, the role of the facilitator is to "hold the space", and in that way participate in the "collective unconscious" of the group. As participants take on more responsibility for their own agendas and productive workgroups, they begin to manage their own time and space. They create more opportunities for interconnection with others at the event, and through

those connections develop a greater sense or taste of the whole group or organization. The individual initiative and flow of conversations in and out of workgroups leads most participants to a surprising sense of interconnection and an experience of the direction of the organization or group. There is more space for transformative personal breakthroughs and learning that can be profound and moving. The experiences do contribute to more initiative, higher performance, trust and commitment on the part of most participants while at the event. There is evidence that this energy goes back into the workplace with productive results when the context encourages or at least permits this.

Participants also know that they have largely done this by themselves. This is demonstrated in the Open Space closing circle where participants spend much more time thanking each other than thanking the facilitator. They often thank the sponsors for taking the risk of engaging their leadership. They know they have, for the most part, done this through their initiative, leadership and their choice to work together in teams. Thus, there is increased confidence that they can have productive conversations and teamwork again.

They can also learn that this capability is available to them at any time, but that it is more accessible when certain conditions are present -- sponsor clarity and the principles and law of Open Space applied.

Open Space in Application

Groups and organizations are continuously learning, some intentionally and some not so intentionally. At one level, learning is about coming up with new translations – new understandings of experience -- that can inform increased performance. That is why there are so many books on management, organizations and change. We are constantly coming up with new ways to describe our experience and what we want our experience to be.

In my own journey and consulting work, I find that a lot of "translation" is necessary for me and for the organizations with which I work. I have to put what I do in a context of understanding and practice that enables me to be effective. Clarifying the history, the stories and culture, the measurement processes and data, the systems and work processes and the leading practices in an industry are often part of the learning required in an organization to assist the discovery of the next vision. This learning helps to challenge assumptions about what is possible in the future.

However, I also find that when sponsors, with my assistance, are able to provide the focus and the space for the people to discover their visions, roles and strategy in relation to the pre-determined theme then remarkable things can happen. Real transformative leaps in experience and understanding can lead to clear strategies for moving forward when there is sufficient time and space.

In that Open Space experience, my role does not feel like "facilitation" because it really isn't me, the facilitator, guiding a process that makes it easier. Instead, I am part of creating the conditions and holding the space within which the people in the room can self-organize and find the "collective wisdom" to find the vision, solve the crisis or plan the strategy themselves. In doing so, we all get a taste of what engaging the spirit of that organization can produce. The task is then to practice the interconnection so that the people and the organization can access that spirited performance all of the time.

- With thanks to Diane Gibeault for editing and Marcelene Anderson for support

A Personal Perspective: 20 years of Opening Space for Myself and Others

by Tova Averbuch*

1988 was my first year of choosing self employment as a consultant. I was open and ready to do professional Organizational Development work exactly and precisely as I saw fit. The expansion from working exclusively with the High Tech industry to working in more fields, such as educational systems and teaching, caused me to revise the paradigms I was using at that time. Ten years of working with highly intelligent and successful start-up and industry people, where my role as an OD consultant was executed very much from a standpoint of a “conventional doctor,” left me with a good reputation in the field and a sense of missing something. At this point in my life I knew it was not skill and expertise that I was lacking; it was more basic than that. There was something partial and maybe totally off in the basic paradigm and modus operandi I (as most of the OD practitioners) was using: Putting too much time and effort on diagnosis left too little energy and space for imagining and realizing better futures; creating diagnosis by listening to 20 different people or more, usually one at a time, and compiling it into a clever diagnostic paper and feedback conversation did not give way to a lot of the wisdom held there. The profound knowledge and wisdom of my interviewees was reduced to what I could understand. Even if we take into account my wisdom and respect the asset of my “objectivity” (a professional expert external to the system) we still lose a lot in this process. This didn’t make sense. This insight became stronger as I started training school principals in the educational systems. I was quite surprised to find that people who passionately agree that the educational system must be “child-centered,” could not find any practice that they agree upon to actually do it. Two parties could find some common ground and celebrate it just to find that all they had established was blown away the minute a third party came to play... I started fantasizing: What if we bring all school members and Community of Care – teachers, pupils, etc., and put them together for three days in Yad Eliyahu (a stadium in Tel-Aviv)? Would they come to an agreement of “how” over a matter they principally care about? I was desperate. Like Jacob awaiting Rachel, I knew there was a finer match for me out there. It took me ten more years of working and yearning to shift my basic work paradigm.

In 1998 I first met OST at work, and it felt like a missing piece finding its place – here was a way of holding ground for every voice to be expressed and heard with all its uniqueness, and at the same time contribute to the collective creation of wisdom. What a joy to find a practical way, teachers and road companions! I was ready to come back home in many ways.

2000, coming home from the US to Israel, aligning with Avner Haramati as a major road companion yet keeping a wide open contact with Harrison and the OST community, made it possible to initiate and hold Open Space in Israel. Always challenged by the density of the energies, the layers of history and multi-claim of every

centimeter of the land, we kept trying to find and refine our way, carving and experimenting so we could call it our own. Ten years from 2000 on I had spent being a member of OST community and “lineage”, learning and teaching while attempting to reach precision in intention and way of conduct.

I chose to bring a story of our recent work in Israel, completing a cycle that started 20 years ago.

A Story of Nationwide Education System Renewal, Israel 2008

In September 2007, the new General Manager of the Ministry of Education assumed her position believing in the great qualities of its people and their professional knowledge, yet knowing there was a lack of meaningful conversations and cooperation across the organization. Experienced with OST events and with our work, she called Avner and me to help her in the creation of a process that will enable networks to emerge and blossom. Knowing the Israeli political system, we knew we could only plan for one year.

A month later, in October 2007, a teacher's strike that would end up lasting over two months was announced in high schools all over the country. During this long strike, a growing public discourse on education began to take place, along with a real concern and care for the future of education. The feeling was that something urgent should and can be done, and the time was right.

This is how Hannah Shadmi, our professional partner in the ministry of education, describes the beginning in a summarizing document of our joint work a year later:

“Shlomit’s (the GM) phone call and her inviting me to partner in leading the Open Spaces for educational dialogue were for me a meeting with an old dream... in 2002 I participated ... in OST training conducted by Tova Averbuch, Avner Haramati and Harrison Owen... Later on we took part in AI training with Peggy Holman... My sense was that in these two approaches I found a response to my personal belief concerning organizations and these two approaches had also found me...”

Our attempt was to create a self sustainable field for genuine and continuous dialogue that will serve as a ground for sprouting local and nation wide initiatives; cross-pollination between people, and motion of ideas and creative energy throughout the system. We felt threatened by the improbability and attracted by the opportunity of trying to move a heavy and inerratic system in one year's time.

The basic approach and methodology used was an Open Space Technology, scaling it up to leverage a rapid change attempt in a large, heavy system with continuous inertia:

- **Focal attractor**, common theme: "What is the desired change in the education system 2008? What must we do in order to realize it?"
- **Self organizing**: A voluntary, participatory method (OST) was implemented and encouraged within and on the boundaries of a hierarchical structure. This enabled personal movement motivated by passion to take responsibility.
- **Simple fractal intervention unit**: OST was repeated in preparation processes, in nationwide and local gatherings and in training, repetition of pattern served to promote direct knowing.
- **Setting a field of resonance by using synchronization of time, place and focus on the same question** together with a constant flow of people, energy and information/ideas.

Process Milestones (in chronological order):

A. Preparation/Co creation on every step: an inquiry of the **purpose and intentions** of this process with the **Ministry of Education staff and management** (40 people); a management commitment to genuine and generative dialogues; and an Open Space gathering for the **large steering committee** (120) of the process, in which different stakeholders of the educational system in Israel took part. **Every** OST event out of the total of **11 OST events** had a preparatory process by which it was co-created.

B. A two-day initial national OST gathering in February 2008, with 420 participants from all over the country: 260 people from the Ministry (teachers, school masters, supervisors, staff and management), about 40 pupils and parents, and 120 stakeholders external to the education system (NGOs, academy, industry, training institutes, army, government and municipalities, youth movements and more, GM and minister of education included). They were all gathered around the question: **"What is the change to which we aspire in the education system? And what should we do in order to implement it?"** 14 implementation teams were formed, and within a year's time they created solid results in the educational system, not letting the bureaucracy run them down, and incorporating external and field leadership into the hierarchical system. **Three more cross organization Open Spaces** were born as initiatives for action in the initial OST: the first focused on **teachers**, the second on **pupils**, and the third on the **Arabic sector**. The leaders of the implementation teams and some staff members of the educational systems met every 6-8 weeks as the steering committee throughout the year.

The next two milestones were essential for scaling up rapidly and required a new level of faith and clarity alongside with a new level of letting go...

C. "The Butterfly Tree" intervention – a **synchronized motion of multiple local OST events**: six local Open Space Technology gathering events operated in sync in

different parts of Israel for two weeks in June 2008, all with the same question facilitated by volunteer graduates of Israeli training over the years.

I named this "the Butterfly Tree" to induce a pictorial image of monarch butterflies resting on a tree as they migrate every year. They look like beautiful flowers, and if you look long enough they all take off at once in flight. They make a synchronized effort in which they are not necessarily living to see the end of the effort, trusting the common sense of purpose and direction.

Using this model required a huge leap of faith on my part, since we did not have the time or money to do the preparatory process we usually believe is needed, we made this jump and never regretted it.

D. 45 people, educational system employees chose to train and serve as OST facilitators for the system alongside their regular job, as needed.

When Avner and I offered the training we were glad to discover the ministries' commitment to opening space by funding this training and we also posed one condition: part of the pay would be participant's personal money. Though salaries in the educational system are very low, we felt it was essential that people pay some money as a personal statement of passion to take responsibility. After we had to close the list with 45 registered participants, we knew that some personal leadership and passion for the creation of spaces that welcome self organization was alive and kicking.

Each of the 45 had opened space upon request at least once, continuing the flight of the monarch butterflies.

Results and Consequences

In March 2009 the minister and GM were replaced by a new regime, and a completely different set of objectives and new leadership style were installed. In March 2009 we also stopped collecting data systematically, but via the inquiry for this paper I found that more than half of the 14 major initiatives are integrated and institutionalized (i.e. bringing academics from all fields into teaching; value driven educational system, etc.). They have become part of the new organization in a way that does not trace them back as initiatives born in the open space. They survive and flourish over time and changes. Some initiatives made an interesting twist in terms of implementation; as an illustration we can take the story of eight high school teachers who created an initiative to institutionalize a process in which teachers in the field will be active in ministry decision making processes. I am not sure how much of their idea was implemented as institutional tool yet seven of them chose to become school principals this year! I believe they are walking their talk, opening space in many ways for themselves and others.

There are probably many more monarch butterflies with same sense of purpose and direction opening and holding space for self organization and emergence of wisdom in the educational system of Israel 2010.



25 years of Open Space – is OS old or young?

My name is Anna Caroline Türk. At 27, I am just two years older than OS myself. I guess I am one of the youngest OS facilitators, even if I'm not the youngest anymore... But I am in a phase of life most of you have passed already.

Recently, many people have told me how young I am. So I started to ask myself whether being twenty-something is old or young. Young can be associated with being naïve, inexperienced, immature and so on. But it can also stand for being fresh, alive, and open. Of some old people we say they stayed young in their hearts. Those of you who have seen Marvin Weisbord playing the piano might have had the same impression as me: I saw a young boy sitting there enjoying life at it's best!

Ten years ago I bumped into OS. I was still going to school, and I was a representative of my class. Along with the other representatives we were invited to spend a weekend discussing, negotiating and playing around with the topic "How can we make our school more creative?" Being rather pessimistic about the connection between creativity and school, I didn't have any expectations for the weekend.

We went to a small lake house, where Michael M Pannwitz facilitated our OS with Irmie Grünsteidel working as his assistant. After a short introduction the place was ours. What happened was surprising and fun: We danced and played, argued and made creative plans for our future in our school. We discussed freely like we never had before - even questions such as if school was really necessary came up. That impressed me. In the Action-Planning many projects were planned, like rearranging the school-yard, painting the cafeteria and the toilettes. We found parents to help us. I fulfilled one of my biggest childhood dreams and planned a carnival for our school.

Believe it or not – afterwards all of our projects were realised. The passion for work in an OS manner was there, too: the following meetings of the representatives of the classes had the agenda of a self organised OS.

One year after I finished school I joined a summer youth exchange camp in Romania. In the prep-meeting so many ideas for different projects were announced and planned. The question arose: How can we organise all of that? I suggested we have an OS with all the youngsters from Germany and Romania in the beginning of the holiday. The people agreed. I dug out my old documentation from the OS in high school, looked at the contact list, found Michael's phone number and asked for his advice. He was positive that I could facilitate the OS and helped me to find an assistant: Yaari Pannwitz. To make a long story short: I facilitated my first OS in the Fogarasch mountains of Romania.

Since the house was too small we had to have the OS outside. We hung up posters and the agenda board outside and hoped for sunshine. It was the only sunny day in two weeks! What happened after the OS is another story which I won't tell here, but one thing was clear: The fire of OS was burning in me and I wanted to find out more about it. And I did. I participated in OS trainings and learning-exchanges, went to a conference on interactive organisations, worked in OS teams around Europe and

facilitated several open spaces myself. I have wonderful memories of big and small groups coming together in conference centres or in nature.

The most beautiful and astonishing OS I worked for took place in Russia, beyond the Arctic Circle. The Saami people (indigenous people of the North) and friends came together from different countries in a tipi conference Yaari facilitated. Although we didn't speak Russian, the communication was not a problem. I am still thankful for the intense and joyful time we spent!

Another OS that deeply impressed me took place in Seville and was facilitated by Harrison Own. 100 imams and 100 rabbis gathered to discuss and argue about peace, which they did during the day, while they sang and danced together during the night.

I also enjoyed facilitating an OS with women only in Berlin. In the beginning they sat critical and full of doubt in a circle and in the end they laughed and moved their heads hands and feet.

To finish my studies, I had to cut down my OS activities but the knowledge of the never ending coffee break, the OS principles, the admonition, and the law of two feet helped me to complete my tasks in the given time. Overall I was relaxed didn't grow grey hair, suffer from insomnia or things that other friends of mine in the same situation were experiencing.

After I finished my studies I wanted to treat myself well and went to a farm in France where I lived in a little cottage, worked a lot, learned a lot and left when the things to learn weren't positive anymore and work stopped being fun. The day before I left I went to the bottom of the farm, where a small river passes by. While I was sitting in the first spring sun saying Goodbye to the romantic life in nature, a butterfly passed me. It was the first one of the year, but he didn't look young or immature while he was flying and enjoying the sun. He was simply beautiful.

And this is what Open Space is to me: simply beautiful, no matter whether it's old or young!

Happy Birthday!

Yours,

Anna Caroline Türk

The Genuine Contact Way

assisting organizational breakthroughs through a shift in consciousness



Accessing Collective Intelligence in Organizations

For years now, I have been intrigued by exploring collective intelligence and how to tap into the intelligence of a circle of people. I have been focused on this exploration for decades, believing in the power of the human capacity for finding solutions for the benefit of humanity, whether in a small enterprise or in global organizations. In the past I have witnessed organizations failing to thrive because the people worked in silos, lacking the organizational capacity to make use of collective intelligence. The intelligence was there. I knew that the intelligence was there because when people were out of their silos, for example in the local pub after work, the solutions flowed as easily as the beer, usually begun with phrases like “if they would only listen to me...; you won’t believe what *they* did now...; if we had our way, we would be able to work more efficiently but instead they have sent some expert trying to figure it out and *they* still aren’t listening to us...”.

My exploration has taken me through an interesting journey that often challenged my previously held perspectives, causing me to discard patterns of thought and behavior that no longer fit for me and my previous perspective of reality. I have met fascinating people around the world, and no matter what country I am in, I meet people who are also questing to find solutions for a sustainable, regenerative life nurturing existence. These many people have given me hope because there are so many who are in this quest and they seem to be located in every country.

We have learned the power of working with archetypes. An archetype is a pattern that all humans have some form of resonance with, almost as though it is in their lived memories even when it is not. When we lead our workshops, they are always led in a circle, with no tables or other barriers in between. In all countries, in all cultures, people thank us for bringing this format back to them and reminding them of their traditional way of working in a circle. The circle is a powerful archetype to assist people in remembering their wisdom. In the 1980’s, I entered into a deep exploration of the Medicine Wheel of the indigenous peoples of the world, sometimes called Medicine Wheel, sometimes given another name like Gratitude Hoop. In all indigenous cultures, there was a history of working in a circle divided up into four quadrants in the directions of north, east, south and west, also a powerful archetype. Whether as in ancient cave art or the later Medicine Wheel, this archetype was used to understand life and navigate to the unknown future as a community (organization) in order to develop an understanding of life, an understanding of community life, and agreed upon solutions to navigate to the desired future of the community.

During the 1980's, I also expanded my career from responsibility for public relations in one organization, to achieving a life dream of becoming CEO of another organization. Both organizations were in the non-profit health and social services sector. In my opinion, this is the most difficult sector to work in as a manager or CEO because there are usually insufficient resources for the task at hand, a great will to do the job well, and the need to be versatile, adaptive, and yet stay on course. I believe that the private and government sectors benefit when they hire people who have mastered leadership in the non-profit sector. I brought my learning with the Medicine Wheel into the organization, including the choice to have our staff meetings sitting in a circle. I did not get the results I was looking for and so I sought the council of native elders on the nearby Six Nations reservation. I had worked with these elders for some years in the late 70's on matters to do with the right for self governance in relation to matters of child welfare. At the time, I assisted in setting up the first child welfare agency on a native reservation in North America, run by native people for the purpose of attending to child welfare within the laws of Canada and also within the native culture. It was an end to the era of removing these children from the reservation and placing them in non-native foster homes and boarding schools, a practice that was abusive.

And so I went back to the elders. They listened to what I was wanting to achieve in terms of transforming the organization that I was now responsible for, from a charity model to a social justice model, so that it could work more with our client base, side by side, showing respect for their dignity and right to make choices. I explained how I was bringing decision making into a circle. They smiled and said, your heart and method are fine. The problem is that you hurry too much. When we have to find solutions, we take our time. We begin in a circle of chiefs, with the grandmothers standing behind. The chiefs must answer to the grandmothers and to the community they represent for their decisions. They understand that they have a lot of responsibility, not to their own egos, but to the grandmothers and to the community. And so, if it is not possible to find the right solution at one council, we wait until the next time there is a meeting. There is no shame in not finding the solution quickly. There is shame in not coming to the right solution for all who are affected. They then went on to tell stories of an annual meeting, in which a solution might be sought for ten years in a row until all could come to agreement.

I said that I needed to find solutions quickly, and that the transformation to a different way of operating by our whole organization (community) needed to be achieved in a way that the new way of working and being was sustainable. They wished me luck, with smiles and words that told me that hurrying was inadvisable and would not give me the results I was looking for. It would have been easy at that point to give up on the way I wanted to lead the organization, to give up on working with my staff, Board, volunteers, and community in a collaborative way that tapped into our collective wisdom.

I was also grateful to receive news in 1991 that it was time for the Medicine Wheel to be given by the red race of the native people? to be used by the full human race. The red race had so carefully preserved this knowledge for the human race for millennia so that it could again be used for the creating a life nurturing future for the human race. I am so deeply grateful for this gift to the human race. I recognize that not all native peoples are in agreement with this gift being used by the entire human race. I can only express my gratitude, and remember that at one time, we all had this knowledge. I am deeply grateful to the native peoples for preserving it, when the rest of us lost such knowledge.

Immediately upon this gift being released and my awareness of it, in rapid succession, I met Harrison Owen and learned about facilitating a meeting using his method of Open Space Technology; I met Angeles Arrien and learned more about cross cultural work with the Medicine Wheel in all indigenous cultures in the work she calls The Four Fold Way that transcends cultures; I met and learned from John Cobb about Process Theology that tied into what I knew about Quantum Physics; and, I met and learned from Marge Dennis about facilitating meetings using Process Facilitation. All four advocated working with groups sitting in circles with no barriers between. That was encouraging for me. All four believed that there was a collective intelligence/collective wisdom that could be accessed and that the solutions found could assist any group to achieve what might otherwise, in ordinary thinking, be deemed impossible.

Adaptive healthy growth requires that the organization has the capability to integrate the collective intelligence of everyone involved in the organization. It also requires that the means of accessing and using the collective intelligence is achieved by riding the waves of solutions rather than staying in the fixed, more limiting problem focus. Open Space Technology and Process Facilitation both provided methods for facilitating meetings that did not allow reality to be ignored, yet once reality was acknowledged, allowed people to use individual and collective intelligence to find solutions in a short time frame. At the time, Open Space Technology meetings were two day events, and later evolved to being successful in shorter time frames. I have no interest in how short a time frame eventually was achieved. My interest lay more in how short a time frame would allow the use of collective intelligence in a way that was useful. My experience was that this could be achieved in a four hour OST meeting although my preference to ensuring that the best wisdom has emerged remains in the two or more day meeting. If it took a long time to get to the situation at hand, and in one case in one organization I worked with, the mess had existed for eighty years costing them lots in time and money, then taking a full two to three days to find the solutions that could be successfully implemented by willing participants was a very small investment of both time and money.

Judging by the focus of people's thoughts and conversations, knowing what works seems to be harder to know than what doesn't work. The newly emerging field of positive psychology was formally birthed in the 1990's, highlighting that more than 90 percent of published articles in psychology were of something not working, with only a small percentage of articles focusing on something positive. Whether an individual is working on something in his or her life or organization, it is going to take a conscious disciplined effort to shift from the tendency to focus on the problem to focusing on the solution. A number of books and other resources exist to assist individuals to shift what their mind focuses on and to follow your intuition to find the right way for you, if you are interested in shifting from a problem focused pattern of thinking, to a solution focused pattern of thinking.

In my explorations, I was interested in discovering whether such a shift in viewpoint to riding the wave of solution rather than staying fixed in the problem energy is possible for the collective that make up an organization to achieve. I was interested in the emergence of theories in the 1990's to do with critical mass thinking and the percentage of people required in a system in order to achieve a shift in the whole group. Various researchers found that even if ten percent of a group shifted their thinking and behaviors, then the whole group could shift. The one significant proviso was that the group that made

up the ten percent had to be representative of a maximum mixture of the organization. The same shift did not take place with only ten percent if that ten percent were all within one layer or grouping in the organization. Critical mass thinking became a foundation for the emergence of a new stream of organizational development practice sometimes referred to as Whole System Meetings and sometimes referred to as Large Group Interventions. OST was accepted as a credible, reliable method for leading meetings of the whole system and was considered to be the most open, and in my eighteen year history with frequent use of OST, the most effective, of this new way of working to create shifts in organizations/collectives using the meeting as a catalyst. A shift from problem focus to solution focus in a collective was possible in a collective using OST and other whole system meeting methods. In my quest to assist organizations in benefiting from the wisdom of collective intelligence, it was important to be able to work with the collective in a way that the collective intelligence for solutions could be accessed quickly, even in a single meeting.

We have the opportunity to work with extraordinary leaders around the world. Extraordinary leaders are able to do non-ordinary thinking and are willing to expand their perspectives. When we suggest to them that collective intelligence is a resource that they might want to pay more attention to, they understand the old adage 'the whole is greater than the sum of the parts' and they want to know how to make use of the collective intelligence of their organization so that their organizations have better results. We encourage these leaders to lead their organizations from a perspective that includes the development of a life nurturing operating platform for their organizations including a liberating structure and a participatory architecture if they want to maximize the opportunities of working with the collective intelligence present in the organization.

The operating platform is usually the physical manifestation of the key formal leader's belief system of the organization regarding how much freedom she is willing and able to give her staff to develop their own solutions and make their own decisions, and the framework she chooses to allow this freedom. How liberating can the structure be, so that people can actually get their work done efficiently based on their personal empowerment? She would need to be willing to command, but not control. Command would include being very clear what her own non-negotiables or 'givens' are and what the degrees of freedom are for people in the organization to be innovative and to make decisions. In other words, she creates her own rules of engagement for the operations in the organization. It is amazingly wonderful to watch the improvements in the organization when the rules of engagement, the operating platform, are explicitly stated rather than having staff walk through a mine field of making assumptions about what is implicit in the operating platform. The beliefs of the leader and the liberating structure are two key ingredients of the operating platform. Another key ingredient is to create the time and space for highly participative meetings to access the collective intelligence of those gathered for the meeting. We refer to this as the development of a participatory architecture within the liberating structure.

Just as the individual needs to discipline her mind towards a solution focus - avoiding getting locked onto a problem focus - the organization needs to develop its own discipline to do so. Within this discipline, there must be a pattern of using meetings and other forums to find solutions by benefiting from this often overlooked capacity of the organization's collective intelligence. In 1992 I began experimenting with frequent use of OST meetings to tap into the collective intelligence of the

organization that I was responsible for. We had highly participatory meetings with good solutions emerging. In that respect, our use of OST meetings was highly successful for tapping into the collective intelligence. Our challenges were that the solutions kept running into barriers in our daily reality as an organization and that the energy for participating in the meetings started to wane as people discovered the problems in implementing their solutions. Fortunately, the staff size was about eighty and we thus had the luxury to observe ourselves, our organization, and to look at this situation together and make adjustments.

We developed a liberating structure that began with me as the formal leader developing explicit non-negotiables which we called 'givens'. I did not create these on my own but consulted with all of the staff. This was a choice based on my style. Every leader has her own preference for discerning what is truly a 'given'. We developed a way of working with OST, in which we kept the facilitation of the meeting true to the teachings of Harrison Owen, yet we added work before and after the OST meeting to ensure that the results of the meeting had the highest likelihood of being implemented. For every OST meeting, we held a planning meeting, the OST meeting, a debrief meeting immediately after the OST meeting, and then a peer to peer accountability meeting about four months after the OST meeting. The planning, debrief, and accountability meetings needed to be facilitated in a manner that was harmonious with the format of the OST meeting. I used what I had learned from Angeles Arrien and from Marg Dennis and developed Whole Person Process Facilitation (WPPF) for this purpose and to use in the organization at times that a more guided approach than OST was needed. Our participatory architecture included one whole system meeting using OST monthly, as well as team and division meetings using OST or WPPF for every meeting. I then used the framework provided by the Medicine Wheel to provide guidance to the whole organization regarding the operating platform within which this participatory architecture would function. We were able to triple our productivity, win awards for our quality performance, and do all this without increasing the tangible resources we used. We found solutions and we achieved an organizational transformation. All of this was done by working from the benefits of the collective intelligence within a life nurturing operating platform. Using OST in our meetings was a significant cornerstone of our success and of the success of numerous organizations that we have worked with as consultants since that experimental beginning in 1992. By 1999, our method for working with organizations had developed into the Genuine Contact Program with our way of working with OST remaining a cornerstone of this program.



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Can you help me to change my job?

Welcome to the 18th WOSonOS in Berlin. It will be my first WOSonOS, I'm very curious to meet all of you.

Before we start working together I want inform you that I'm trying to change my job and I would really appreciate your help in this venture. But don't misunderstand, I'm not writing this contribution to the WOSonOS *Festschrift* cause I hope that you could offer me a job. Not at all (even if I would be happy to evaluate any eventual proposal J)! I'm looking for a different support. In a moment I will explain you what I mean.

First of all let me introduce my present job. Well, as probably most of you, I'm a facilitator. But you know how difficult it is to explain what a facilitator does. When someone asks me "what's your job?" and I reply that I'm a Facilitator, my answer normally gets two different possible kind of replies. Most of the people starts raising a large number of questions - like "a facilitator?", "what does it mean?", "is there really people willing to pay for this"? - things like that.

The others look at me in a proud way and say - "what a coincidence, I'm a facilitator too" - and then they start describing what they normally do - which quite often is completely different from what I do. In both cases any further explanation adds very little to the game. I normally prefer to give some examples of the things I'm working on in that period, and to the *colleagues* asking some questions about their job which normally reveal both how much we use the same word (facilitator) to point at very different worlds.

But let's go back to my idea to change my job. You must know that I have been working as a facilitator for more than 15 years. And that in those years my work has changed a lot because it has changed my approach to facilitation. At the very beginning I had basically a *traditional* approach to group facilitation. By *traditional* I mean that I felt always in charge and all my work was addressed to try to control the situation. You know what I mean. I considered myself as a sort of wizard, someone that knew the secrets of the magic procedures and, using them, could lead people to improve the quality of their work together - in other words someone that could make the life of the people different. Could, but in fact never really did.

Then in 2003 I met in Berlin Open Space Technology. My first impression was that it could never be suitable for me. Too much freedom, too few control, too much different from what I was doing, too far away from what I was looking for. Three months later I was opening for the first time space in my home town - Naples, for one hundred participants belonging to the world of NGOs. Since then up to now I have facilitated a large number of Open Space and spent a lot of efforts in promoting the growth of the OS community in Italy - my country. But this is probably the less interesting part of my story.

More important is that Open Space (and of course all the other methods that in some way follow its approach) radically changed my way of working. My attention shifted from results to processes, from applying some procedures to respecting people by making space for them. And the more I work with Open Space, the less I feel comfortable with "traditional" facilitation techniques, those that according to most of my colleagues a facilitator should follow to enhance the quality of a meeting.

When I read on handbooks tips and procedures on how to increase the efficacy of the group decision process, how to enhance the creativity of a team, how to make people attention focus on something, the Open Space second principle comes to my mind - don't waste your time, if you keep the control participants will never feel comfortable with whatever outcomes you will get. Better to trust and respect those folks, just give them the opportunity to work on what they care and remember in any case that *what ever happens is the only thing we could have*. When the same books suggest how to manage group members who are silent, I wonder how do they know if they really need to say something and that in any case *who ever comes is the right people*. When during the discussion people goes off-track, in spite of trying to bring them back I think that we should welcome any new idea cause *when ever starts is the right time*. When I follow on newsgroups long discussions on where to sit (or stand) while leading a group, I can't stop thinking that probably the best idea is to go away and leave them free to work as they like. And when I'm facilitating a meeting, and I see the participants tired and not following the discussion anymore I think that *when it's over it's over*, even if we have not reached the expected outcomes of the meeting. In other words my actual feeling is that if you try to manage a team or a group in some way you make a "violence" to them. I feel not comfortable any more with the idea of imposing a procedure or tracking a discussion on what my clients would like to hear. An approach very well summarised by a client of mine from Argentina during a gathering: "I understand what you mean. You can bring an horse to the river but you can't force him to drink". He got it. Nothing to do with magic, a lot to do with active listening, respect, presence and self responsibility.

Now what's the problem you would say? The problem is that I feel in this way while most of my clients still look for someone - that's me - *magic*, able to transform they ordinary meetings in events that could change the way they work. People that still makes this sort of requests: "You have a couple of hours, 12 participants and we would like to get from the meeting the guidelines for developing our future strategy". How to deal with them? How to help your clients to understand the great opportunities that opening space can bring to them and their organisations? Is really a question of pre-work, or is something different? Or maybe it should be the other way round, and we are pushing them too far ahead using approaches that are not really sustainable for them?

My feeling is that sometimes we do, and in this way we get exactly the opposite of what we expect. They close their space.

So, while preparing to gather with more then 140 colleagues coming from more then 20 different countries of the world for the 18th WOSonOS, I must confess that I'm struggling with these sort of questions and wondering on the intrinsic nature of my job. My feeling is that I need to change something, but still don't know what and how.

Can you help me in doing that? I'm sure you will!

Gerardo de Luzenberger

harrison owen

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who is
the self ?
perhaps it is
any between
and any silence
like any listening,
any rest and any break,
the yearning for someone,
the expectation of some thing,
the space between we and they,
the between which happens among
and within the tiny minute moment in
between that which already had happened
and that which will probably happen soon,
not actually done but happening,
working within the void
which is it's home.
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My Way in Open Space

Artur Silva - Lisbon, 25/04/2010

I will begin this story in 1996, some two or three years before I heard about Open Space Technology or about a guy called Harrison Owen.

I could very well begin this story much earlier and explain some pre-conditions that made my later acquaintance with OST so easy, and remember my early days as a student activist, in the last fascist and colonialist country in Europe, and immediately after as a civic (it was called political at the time) and anti-colonialist activist, both in Portugal and in Angola, that culminated with the end of the dictatorship in my country, in the 25th of April 1974 - 36 years ago, counting from today - and the following independence of the Portuguese ex-colonies.

Or I could begin with my 20 years as a Systems Engineer at IBM, understanding each year more clearly that the "should be" technical systems were indeed socio-technical ones and that the social change part was the main one, and, hence, my discovery of Lewin and the Tavistock Institute. Or begin with the 6 Portuguese Congresses on Information Systems that I helped organize, and where, from 1980 to 1990, during each five days event, IT professionals, managers, users and some academics met to discuss those questions and where - guess what - the most important things did not happen in the Conference rooms, but during the meals and coffee breaks.

Or I could begin with the consulting company I created in 1989 which lasted for 14 years, until I came to understand that, in my line of business, corruption had become the normal way of securing large IS Planning contracts, in Portugal and in Europe, and decided to accept an invitation to join the University.

But I will begin - as promised - when, in 1996, I joined the University of Coimbra as an Invited Professor. Among my responsibilities I was to completely reorganize and run a two-semester course on "Management" for Information Systems Engineering Students, that until then consisted mainly of theoretical classes on general and financial management and "practical" classes on pencil and paper (or computer) financial assignments.

With support from the Dean, I changed almost everything and defined that my responsibility should be **to create a context where students could learn to do organizational work and to manage**, through their own organization of one large event (the full 40-something students of the class acting as the organizing committee), a lot of other smaller events organized in small groups - and some theoretical classes and assignments, of course. And everything only with as little rules and guidance as I could. Students loved the course, had a lot of fun and learned a lot, both individually and as a group. And the story was repeatable, and has been repeated several years. I will not describe the full story here (that is described elsewhere), but any Open Spacer can understand what happened - either by chance (most probably) or by experience and intuition (as sometimes I like to think) I had stumbled upon "self organizing systems" at work.

In a real business if you have done a good job, you are praised (or not) and it is finished. In Academia, doing a good job is not enough. One has to be able to explain what happened and why it happened. Anyhow, I was also curious about that.

Many years before, I had read Piaget and Vigotski and, in my years as a consultant, I got to know the writings of Arie de Geus. Being an *a posteriori* theory of Learning Companies, A. de Geus was of little help; the 5 disciplines of Senge were not also a help (either to understand my case or to create LO's); and Argyris and Schön were excellent to explain other features of Organizational Learning, but not my experience. On the contrary, Alberoni's work, *Genesis*, on "the birth stage" of civilization transformational movements and metanoia give me some direction on the social ground, but were not directly applicable to groups or organizations. I also subscribed to the LOlist and began reading and thinking about how transformational learning and change (or *metanoia*) could be explained and facilitated. A series of posts I sent to the LOlist on "A search for LO's and Metanoia" summarized my conclusions up to that point.

But that was never finished as there were still some missing points. Anyhow, as what I was doing was to **facilitate learning** (much more than teaching) I decided to spend some more money on Amazon and bought some 10 or 12 books on facilitation methods.

I remember reading about Future Search, Whole Systems approach and a bunch of other methods. But I was more and more disappointed as in all those methods the "facilitator" was always in a central role, controlling almost everything, "facilitating too much" and, IMHO, disempowering the people. This was exactly contrary to what I was doing and looking for.

One of that dozen or so of books was left to the end because I had mixed feelings about it - on one hand, the idea of "Open Space" was central to my thoughts at the time; but the word "Technology" was the exact thing I was trying to get rid of... I had to force myself to repeatedly think that "technology" has not the same meaning in English than it has in my own language to finally open the book. Or the space. Or something.

Upon first reading it was very much what I was looking for - not so much because of the procedures, the circle, or the principles, as I had not used any of those. It was not the letter of it that impressed me at first, but the **spirit** of it.

Apart from the minimalist "foundations" of OST, another thing impressed me the most: It was clearly stated that **the method was not copyrighted** (and not copyrightable, either in the initial form or in any derivative of it), that a certification was neither needed nor recommended, and that anyone with "a good mind and a good heart" who read the book (or even without doing that, as my experience seemed to prove) could begin using it. As I always thought that copyrights and certification programs are normally ways for someone to copy one part from one author and other parts from others to "create a new method" and create a living for themselves, exploiting those that he or she becomes the "master" to - that point was very important for a free minded individual such as myself.

But one thing is to read a book - and a different one is to understand how it is put into practice and how the practitioners talk about it. So I joined the OSLIST and was on a reading mode for over one year (lurking, some would say). Two things impressed me in the list. First a sense of community between the members. Second, the way they integrated newcomers. If someone sent a first message just presenting herself or asking a question (even if it was a question already asked and answered many times), she would receive many messages acknowledging her presence or answering her question. Sometimes, in 24 hours, a dozen messages, each one clarifying a different point or giving a new example, would be received.

Normally, at least one of this messages was from Harrison himself and the general guidance everyone gave to the newcomer was "go for it!". Marvelous. Apparently these people really walked their talk. And Lave's words about "legitimate peripheral participation" seemed to make some sense to them. Or to me...

After being silent in the list for over a year, I understood that the annual transnational OSonOS was to be held that year of 2000 - for the first time, out of the North American continent - in Berlin. I hesitated, but then decided it was time to present myself on the list and try to get in at the last minute to the Berlin conference, which I could, due to the kindness of the organizers.

My experience in Berlin in 2000 cannot be fully described with words. Not only because I got to know Harrison and others who I already knew only by name (and many others of course), but also - being someone who needs to sleep 8 hours each night - I was so excited that I used a good part of the nights to read more books I bought there and to write. And even the bad sessions or the controversies seemed to be a natural part of the experiment. I had entered the event as an observer and left it as a member of the community - even if a very unorthodox one.

I have tried to describe my experience in Berlin in some posts to the OSLIST, which can be seen in the Archives. Back to Portugal, I wrote a small booklet on the methodology, began using OST in some professional trainings and other events but, living in a Catholic country where the majority of the managers (in companies, in Government and even in NGO's) are normally control freaks, who only care about the hierarchy, the hard plan and the money they can put in their pockets, I have not tried to "sell" the method very hard. And I become a non frequent - and often heretic - contributor to the OSlist.

Anyhow, my new assignment at a Lisbon Engineering University helping students to develop soft skills and teaching soft subjects like "Organizational Learning " took precedence. In those experiences I have continued to use the spirit, if not the letter, of OST.

In 2009 I was approached by a company and by the Engineering National Organization to facilitate OST events, which I did - so something is changing even in this Western country of Europe (or is it the Northern country of Africa?) - the economic crisis and the increasing corruption of elected politicians and executive managers convinced many people that something must change once again. So, I also organized the first OST events with my own students and have created the Portuguese OSI, to help in that process.

And now, on April 25, 2010, I am making preparations to go to WOSonOS, again in Berlin, this time with 3 other members of OSI Portugal, 10 years after my last trip there. But the way I am in debt to Harrison Owen and to all the OST community is something I am not able to put into words.

Thoughts and memories on OS

Diane Gibeault,
Ottawa, Canada, April 28 2010

Yes there are many good reasons to celebrate at the 18th WOSonOS May 12 - 15th in Berlin. I will be celebrating from a distance but I will be there in spirit and with this small testimony that I add to the 'Festschrift'.

I have said this in other contexts: The greatest gift I received when discovering Open Space Technology (OST) with Harrison Owen years ago, was to see life with a different mind set that can be summarized in two words, "*letting go*". Those words along with the open invitation, which also characterizes the OST method, have opened up space in my life by bringing me peace of mind and peace with those I love as well as with those who are not necessarily friends.

The most important contribution of Open Space is that it can increase the health of organizations and the well being of humans in all spheres of life because of its self-organization principles. This is in addition to creating increased performance and results.

Congratulations to Harrison Owen who offered this wonderful gift to the world 25 years ago. His work has been replicated by hundreds and hundreds of facilitators and leaders who recognize the exceptional potential of this democratic and participatory way of holding meetings, working, being and leading.

What a gift in a world of competition, when in general, people meeting in OS naturally want to cooperate. The creative and relaxed atmosphere brings out the pleasure of working together. Add trust that develops with people connecting in a meaningful fashion and cooperation becomes a way of being.

As long as a group has a real reason for meeting and that there is openness to outcome, OST will work. Open Space Technology truly leads us off the beaten path, to a place where people can breathe more easily, work more effectively and contribute wholeheartedly.

People ask me why so much of my work is with OS. Of all the methods I have learned and experienced, it is the one that brings the most results at the same time as the most smiles. I am always surprised and amazed to see at every OS event, the deep transformational effect it has on at least a certain number of people and invariably, a wow effect on others: highly satisfied and enthusiastic participants, organizers, leaders and clients will want to tell others about this very special experience. There is in the room, a sense of well being that we all yearn for in our work life and our personal life. Why would I not want to be there and offer it to others as well, over and over again? Especially that people want from thereon to replicate the natural and universal law of self-organization that was allowed to surface. After the OS meeting, they tend to walk more often, the steps of the respectful freedom-responsibility tandem.

Open Space provides an opening to better our world. I am very happy to be part of that movement. The bonus is that this cooperative approach is not only good for the planet but that it is anchored in what is real and can truly bring personal serenity.

Estonian Experience of OS with 10K participants

Mikk Sarv, Open Space Ltd, Estonia

About a year ago, on the first of May we had in Estonia simultaneous open space events all over country. The background of this event was a year earlier organised happening, when about 100 000 volunteers cleaned up our forests from garbage and trash, which was left there over decades by Soviet military forces, private persons and businesses. The huge work has been sampled now by several other countries like Letland Portugal, Slovenia and others.

The second year's idea was to invite people to do the mental cleaning and to find in discussions the opportunities, how to make our lives more feasible. After long discussion the decision was made to use for that purpose Open Space Technology. Hundreds of facilitators volunteered to open the space all over Estonia. All of them were trained with workshops in different parts of Estonia to get done with opening and closing the space. The first workshop was facilitated by me and it finally convinced the organizers, that Open Space is just the best format for such a mental cleaning work. The trainings lasted about half a day, but as Harrison Owen says, the most important thing is to go and to do the opening of space, even with the children or cats and dogs of your street. And all of them did it wonderfully.

Several hundred Open Space events happened simultaneously all over country. The reports were written and actions initiated to follow up, what was discussed.

As I am just now translating into Estonian Harrison Owen's book Wave Rider I like to parallel our experience with it. We succeeded to ride all together the powerful wave of selforganization and to give a taste of it to thousands of Estonians. This was wonderful experience as you all know and it is going on.

My best thanks to Harrison Owen and friends all over world, who assisted us to get it on way.

Mehr Ertrag mit weniger Kontrolle

von Mia Konstantinidou und Jo Töpfer

Äußerungen von Teilnehmende zum Abschluss von Konferenzen:

*“Mein Leben hat sich verändert und unser Leben hat sich verändert in den letzten drei Tagen. Und unsere Zukunft hängt von uns ab.”(Ukraine) „Den Weg, wie wir hier miteinander gelernt haben, sollten wir mit nach Hause nehmen und weitergehen“
(Suriname)*

*„Noch niemals zuvor wurde ich mit solch einer Menge an neuen Ideen in nur 2,5 Tagen konfrontiert. Ich hoffe, dass dies zu neuen Lösungen der Probleme in unserem Stadtteil führt, da viele von uns jetzt mit einem gemeinsamen Verständnis vorgehen.“ (Berlin)
“Hier habe ich in wenigen Minuten Antworten auf Fragen gefunden, die mich schon sehr lange beschäftigen.“ (Ukraine) „Ich möchte Euch daran erinnern, dass es nicht nur Probleme in unserem Land gibt, sondern auch viele Ressourcen, um sie zu lösen.“(Suriname)*

“Hier habe ich verstanden, dass wir unsere Probleme nur gemeinsam lösen können.”(Berlin) “Das Gefühl der Hilflosigkeit ist gewichen, denn ich habe gleichgesinnte Mitstreiter gefunden für die Umsetzung neuer Ideen.“(Ukraine) „Ich werde den Menschen in meinem Dorf berichten, was wir hier erfahren und gelernt haben. Wenn wir ehrlich sind, haben wir hier einen Weg der Zusammenarbeit erlebt. Lasst uns den weitergehen auch über die Konferenz hinaus!“(Suriname)

Diese Äußerungen stammen von Menschen, die an Konferenzen zu drängenden Fragestellungen teilgenommen haben:

- Im September 2003 trafen sich 124 Teilnehmende im Berliner Stadtteil Wedding zum Thema: *„Angst und Dreck: Wann ziehst Du weg? - Soldiner Kiezkonferenz“*
- Im Januar 2006 trafen sich 116 Teilnehmende in Chernowicz, Ukraine zum Thema: *„Wie führen wir die notwendigen Ressourcen für die Lösung der sozialen Probleme in unserer Region zusammen?“*
- Im März 2009 trafen sich 92 Teilnehmende in Paramaribo, Suriname zum Thema: *„Zeit für Veränderung! Die Rolle von NGOs und CBOs gestärkt für Entwicklung.“*

Obwohl Zeitpunkt, Ort und Kontext dieser Anlässe wenig Gemeinsamkeiten zeigen, äußern sich die Teilnehmenden am Ende jeder dieser Konferenzen ähnlich und weisen auf Gemeinsamkeiten in Erfahrung und Wirkung des Erlebten hin: Sie haben Zusammenarbeit, Kooperation und Gemeinschaft erlebt. Ressourcen und Möglichkeiten samt vorhandener Ideen, Kompetenzen und Problemlösungen konnten entdeckt und damit neue Handlungsperspektiven gewonnen werden. Alle tragen gemeinsam die Verantwortung für die Umsetzung der nächsten Schritte nach der Tagung.

Wie kommt es zu diesen Aussagen?

Der Grund für die Gemeinsamkeiten im Erlebten liegt im Verfahren, in dem die drei Konferenzen durchgeführt wurden: Das open space Verfahren.

Anders als in anderen Konferenzen, sind die Teilnehmenden bei einer open space

Veranstaltung nicht das „Publikum“, das durch vortragende ExpertInnen informiert wird, sondern selbst die ExpertInnen in eigener Sache. Was sie verbindet, ist ihr Interesse und ihre Expertise zum Thema der Konferenz.

Es handelt sich um ein Verfahren, bei dem es keine vorgegebene, von anderen im Vorfeld festgelegte Tagesordnung gibt. Die Anwesenden entwickeln zu Beginn der Veranstaltung die Agenda aus ihren Anliegen und entscheiden selbst, was, wann, wo und mit wem behandelt wird.

Auch während der open space Veranstaltung moderieren, leiten und entscheiden die Teilnehmenden und bestimmen die Größe, Zusammensetzung, Arbeitsweise und Dauer der Kleingruppen selbst.

Und das soll funktionieren?

Die anfangs zitierten Äußerungen, unsere eigene Erfahrung und die vieler KollegInnen mit tausenden von open space Veranstaltungen auf allen Kontinenten zeigen: Es funktioniert!

Das open space Verfahren basiert auf der Beobachtung, dass Bedeutsames bei Konferenzen sich in den Kaffeepausen ereignet. Menschen in kleinen Gruppen besprechen, was ihnen wichtig ist, tauschen Telefonnummern aus und schmieden Pläne.

Dementsprechend schafft das Verfahren einen Rahmen, in dem genau das passieren kann, was den Menschen, die ein Thema verbindet, wichtig ist. Es orientiert sich an dem Prinzip: So wenig Struktur wie möglich und so viel wie nötig. Damit wird Raum und Zeit für Selbstorganisation geschaffen. Das open space Verfahren greift auf bewährte Formen menschlicher Kommunikation zurück (vgl. Owen 1997):

- Den Kreis - Bedeutendes findet im Kreis statt. Im Kreis gibt es kein Oben und Unten, kein Wir und Sie.
- Das Atmen - wenn wir „außer Atem“ sind, läuft nicht viel. Wir müssen erst wieder „Luft holen“, damit sich Zusammenarbeit und Lernen entfalten können.
- Das Schwarze Brett - dort teilen sich Menschen gegenseitig ihre Interessen mit.
- Den Marktplatz - hier wählen wir zwischen Angeboten und können einen Handel zum gegenseitigen Nutzen eingehen.

Eine open space Veranstaltung verläuft folgendermaßen: Zu Beginn sitzen alle Teilnehmenden im Kreis. Es gibt eine leere Wand (das Schwarze Brett) mit einer Zeit- und Raummatrix, an der die Teilnehmenden ihre Anliegen veröffentlichen. Anschließend werden die Anliegen von Kleingruppen in vorbereiteten Zonen zu unterschiedlichen Zeiten parallel angegangen. Es gibt die Möglichkeit, jederzeit zu wechseln. Die Kleingruppen veröffentlichen ihre Ergebnisse an der Doku-Wand. So können alle nachvollziehen, was in den anderen Kleingruppen passiert ist. Nach Abschluss aller Kleingruppen liegt die vollständige Dokumentation der Ergebnisse mit einer aktualisierten Kontaktliste vor. In der Handlungsplanung treffen die Teilnehmenden selbstorganisiert Verabredungen zu den nächsten Schritten und stellen sie vor. Zur Zwischenbilanz und Planung nächster Schritte gibt es sechs bis

zwölf Wochen später ein Nächstes Treffen.

Während die Teilnehmenden, wie beschrieben, ihren Interessen folgen und die Veranstaltung mit Leben füllen, halten sich die BegleiterInnen aus der Arbeit der Kleingruppen heraus. Indem sie nicht intervenieren, gewähren sie den Raum für die Selbstorganisation der Teilnehmenden. Die BegleiterInnen wissen von der Kompetenz der Teilnehmenden und der Fähigkeit der Gruppe, ihre Arbeit selbst zu gestalten - auch wenn sie sehr konfliktreich ist. Sie sind möglichst präsent und unsichtbar. Gelingt diese hohe Kunst, erhöht sich der Grad der Beteiligung gegenüber herkömmlichen Planungs- und Entscheidungsverfahren erheblich.

So wird im open space der Fähigkeit von Gruppen, sich selbst zu organisieren, Raum gegeben. Dabei erfüllt Selbstorganisation natürlich keinen Selbstzweck. Ihre Kraft und Wirkungsweise zeigt sich darin, dass open space oft ertragreicher als das herkömmliche Vorgehen ist. Denn die Teilnehmenden übernehmen bereits während der Veranstaltung Verantwortung für die Umsetzung der nächsten Schritte. Es ist ein handlungsorientierendes Verfahren, das die oft verborgenen Ressourcen des gesamten Systems aktiviert und nachhaltiger als herkömmliche Planungsworkshops wirkt.

Open space gelingt besonders gut, wenn die folgenden Voraussetzungen bestehen (vgl. Owen 1997):

1. Die Aufgabenstellung ist komplex und tendenziell konfliktträchtig.
2. Die Lösung ist unbekannt.
3. Das Thema brennt allen unter den Nägeln.
4. Die Gruppe ist ein Spiegelbild des ganzen Systems.

Open space Veranstaltungen dauern zwischen vier Stunden und mehreren Tagen. Optimal sind 16 Stunden über drei Tage verteilt. Erfolgreich gearbeitet wurde mit Gruppen von weniger als zehn und mehr als 2000 Menschen.

Der Vergleich mit herkömmlichen Konferenzen

Bei herkömmlichen Konferenzen wird meistens darauf geachtet, dass prominente Vertreter aus dem betreffenden Feld anwesend sind, eloquente Redner unterhaltsame Vorträge halten, ausgefeilte Präsentationen gezeigt werden, die Teilnehmenden viel Input bekommen, eine umfangreiche Tagungsmappe verteilt wird, ein striktes Zeitmanagement herrscht, das Rahmenprogramm attraktiv ist und die Dokumentation vier Monate später vorliegt.

All das steht im open space nicht im Mittelpunkt und trotzdem (oder gerade deswegen?) gibt es meistens einen ertragreichen Verlauf, eine friedliche und produktive Atmosphäre mit engagierten Teilnehmenden. Wie ist es zu erklären, dass die Dinge, die wir bei der Organisation einer traditionellen Konferenz beachten, so wenig mit dem Ergebnis zu tun haben? Oder anders herum: Warum gibt es begeisterte Teilnehmende und einen ertragreichen Verlauf, wenn so wenig Zeit für die inhaltliche Vorbereitung investiert wird?

In der Auswertung einer open space Veranstaltung bei AT&T, einem US-amerikanischen Telekommunikationsunternehmen, wurde deutlich, dass in 2,5

Tagen Resultate erzielt werden konnten, für die man in herkömmlichen Abstimmungs- und Entscheidungsverfahren zehn Monate gebraucht hätte; eine Steigerung der Produktivität von 15.000% (Owen 2008). Rechnerisch trifft dies gewiss nicht für alle Veranstaltungen zu, aber es gibt einen kleinen Vorgeschmack auf das Potenzial von open space.

Auf der Suche nach der Erklärung dieses Phänomens kommen wir an einem zentralen Begriff nicht vorbei: KONTROLLE. Je mehr die Organisatoren, Moderatoren und Veranstalter das Geschehen einer Konferenz dominieren, um so weniger Raum und Zeit bleibt für die Selbstorganisation der Teilnehmenden. Ihre Ressourcen kommen nicht zum Tragen, ihre Kreativität entfaltet sich nicht und sie machen sich das ganze Geschehen weniger zu ihrer eigenen Sache.

Ein Erklärungsversuch:

In der Menschheitsgeschichte fällt auf, dass die meisten bahnbrechenden Entdeckungen und Durchbrüche in Wissenschaft, Wirtschaft und Politik nicht Resultat eines geplanten und strukturierten Forschungsprozesses waren, sondern eher das Produkt von Fehler, Zufall und Chaos. Die meisten Nobelpreisträger sagen von ihren Entdeckungen, dass es ein Produkt des Zufalls war (vgl. Owen 2000). Daraus entnehmen wir, dass der Durchbruch stattfindet, wenn nicht alles bis ins kleinste Detail geplant ist und die Entdeckungsreise unter Kontrolle scheint. Wenn jedoch alles fest gezurrt ist, wird die Entfaltung von Kreativität eher verhindert.

Vielleicht steckt in dieser Beobachtung der Schlüssel zur Auflösung des Dilemmas und der Grund für die Begeisterung hinter den Äußerungen am Anfang des Textes. Eine Gruppe, die heterogen zusammengesetzt ist und sich trifft, um eine komplexe, konfliktträchtige und dringende Frage zu bearbeiten, deren Antwort noch gänzlich unbekannt ist, tut das am besten, schnellsten und einfachsten, indem sie sich in einen ergebnisoffenen Prozess begibt, in dem der Raum und die Zeit strukturiert sind, der aber ansonsten völlig offen ist. Dort kann das Zusammenspiel von Chaos und Ordnung in eine neue Struktur münden, die für diese Gruppe und diesen Anlass genau passt. Eine solche Umgebung ähnelt der Kaffeepause, in der gar nichts passiert, es sei denn irgend jemand zettelt etwas an.

Wenn wir KONTROLLE aufgeben und Raum öffnen für das schöpferische Potenzial, das Menschen mitbringen, kommen wir schneller, eleganter, friedlicher und mit mehr Freude zu Resultaten, die kein fauler Kompromiss sind, der von vielen getragen wird und deren nächste Schritte bereits im Vorfeld fest standen.

Wenn wir open space zu allen Anlässen einsetzen, bei denen die Voraussetzungen eingelöst sind, leisten wir einen riesigen Beitrag zur Entfaltung des menschlichen Potentials und zur Vereinfachung unseres Zusammenlebens.

Wir alle profitieren: weniger vertane Zeit, weniger Burnout, keine unnütze Arbeit, bessere Verständigung und mehr Frieden. Eine lohnende Perspektive, oder?

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Weiter lesen?

Owen, H. Open Space Technology - A User's Guide. Third Edition. San Francisco 2009

Owen, H. Expanding our Now - The Story of Open Space Technology. San Francisco 1997

Owen, H. The Power of Spirit: How Organizations Transform. San Francisco 2000

Owen, H. Wave Rider - Leadership and High Performance in a Self-Organizing World. San Francisco 2008

email 5th January 2010:

Dear friends and colleagues,

2010 just began. This year is full of joyful anniversaries:

- Open Space Technology turns 25
- Harrison Owen turns 75
- Michael M Pannwitz turns 70
- WOSonOS turns 18 (adult)

All these occasions are remarkable and seem to be good reasons to celebrate. Most of us will meet for the 18th WOSonOS May 12 - 15th in Berlin. Where we can do so.

Our idea is to create a 'Festschrift' - a collection of essays, memories, stories, etc. - and we invite you to become co-creator of this.

Each co-creator has a maximum of 4 pages (A4 - letter size) to fill with her / his memories, stories, etc. You choose the way how to do this - as usual in Open Space Technology manner. And we will put it together into a nice book and present it during the WOSonOS in Berlin.

We need 4 weeks to finalize the book and invite you to submit your pieces before April 12th, 2010.

Any questions? Ask

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Jo Toepfer: jotoepfer@boscop.org

Greetings from snowy Berlin

Anna C. and Jo