

France Explores Open Space Technology Training

Diane Gibeault, 2004

Recently I facilitated a training workshop on Open Space Technology on the outskirts of Paris, possibly the first OST training of this kind in France. A team of consultants called Ockham gathered for a three-day training with clients from the fields of communications technology, auto manufacturing and heavy equipment production.

We began by looking at how OST can be explained to a client. In order to experience the method, participants chose a theme that had real meaning for them and proceeded to do the preparation for the event. Their passion for this theme was made evident by the depth of the conversations and by the commitment reflected in their action plans later on during the convergence phase of the process. They completely set aside their “training hat” and let themselves fully live their OST event.

During the debriefing, leadership, vision, community and management were examined through the lense of the OS experience. Various options for collective convergence processes were presented, the reflection went deeper on the roles of the facilitator and leader and participants addressed their various “how-to” questions. Theory was intermingled with practice throughout the workshop.

“I had certain doubts at the outset but I leave delighted about the training...and the possibilities of the OST method,” one participant said. Others saw the potential of this approach not only to produce measurable results but more importantly, to transform interpersonal relationships which are instrumental in creating and sustaining healthy and high performing organizations.

Several participants are already planning an OS event, with groups of 10, 150 and even 800. One has since successfully integrated the approach in the second part of a team training day by letting participants chose what they wanted to discuss about team work. “The client was a bit scared of the emptiness and the disorganisation but at the end was enchanted by the results,” he reported. The excitement he demonstrated at the OS training has gone up several notches since then.

For my part, I could not have hoped for a more pleasant and gratifying experience. A great camaraderie developed as we all enjoyed the richness of experience in the room as well as the different terminologies, colloquial expressions and accents coming from both sides of the ocean and also from different regions of France. The workshop allowed us all to enhance our knowledge and also gave us the opportunity to share stories around a good glass of wine and exquisite food, a much appreciated custom of our French cousins.

Diane Gibeault is an experienced bilingual consultant in facilitation and organizational change. She has trained on Open Space Technology with founder Harrison Owen and is an active member of the Open Space Institute of Canada.

