



Open Studio

What is an Open Studio?

A studio is usually a space and place (space) where artists work/study. An Open Studio is a place where non artists are given the space, materials, freedom and facilitation to express, explore and learn.

Within an organisational context, it is a space people can access to use creative means to inquire, study, learn about topics or issues that really matter to them. The versatility of this open container means that this space can be used for authentic individual, group and 'whole system' learning, support and development.

A range of artistic medium is used for exploration and dialogue. The range could include: Music, art, dance, movement, sculpture and theatre. Expressive medium is used in conjunction with dialogical approaches and other group facilitation processes and methodologies. At the heart of an Open Studio are spontaneity, improvisation and authentic contact.

Why create an Open Studio?

Conventional ways of exploring issues through the use of rational-logical approaches including systems thinking can be very useful in helping people make sense of their situation. However, by placing a pre-determined 'frame' around issues, the potential field of awareness and diversity of possibilities can be limited too soon. Open Studio is an open, experimental, experiential, integrative and creative container that provides an opportunity for people to bring more of 'what is' to awareness through creativity and dialogue. Through increasing our awareness of what is in the field, we allow ourselves and

our solutions to be guided by a better understanding of what is present and what is wanting to emerge.

"Change occurs if one takes the time and effort to be what he is..." (Beisser).

It is a way of enabling us to encompass more, to include more diversity and to trust that solutions come from awareness and when we build a capacity to hold and see all that we are, we are also developing a greater capacity to respond to and negotiate multiple polarities. Open Studio is a response to our shared challenge of how to manage differences, conflict and things as they are (rather than how we wish they would be).

How does an Open Studio work?

People make their own discoveries by connecting with themselves and others more authentically through their senses directly and emotionally. Conventional workshops tend to be conversationally or dialogically based, using creative medium only as an enhancement. An Open Studio puts creative, exploratory and expressive medium first as an alternative way of individuals leading themselves to connect with what's going on for them, how they are feeling. This provides a different way of expressing self, meeting self and other and these experiences lead to different dialogues- heart to heart, deeper and richer. This process is inherently open, choiceful and inclusive.

Applications

Organisation development - we bring artistry to your people and leaders to enhance connection, creativity and engagement.

Creativity, co-creating and learning - we create an environment that enables people to connect with their own creativity, to learn about their creative processes and to develop a better understanding of the conditions which enable creativity to thrive.

Leadership development - we can help you design developmental events that enable real, authentic learning. Such events can prepare leaders who are truly fit to lead in complex changing environments.

Leadership dialogues - we facilitate "deep dive" conversations that uncover and examine the most pressing issues which are facing your leadership team.

Culture and branding - bringing your people and brand together through individual creativity and co-creating.

Examples from past co-creative events

Summer 2010

An Open Studio was offered as one of the parallel sessions at the OD World Summit in Budapest, Hungary. This was the abstract for the workshop:

In order to tackle the most pressing issues of our times, we need different approaches and different capabilities. Yet within organisations we seem to be stuck with conventional ways of facilitating change- a reliance on models, different ways of manipulating the system and a reliance on answers 'out there' as oppose to what we already know. This type of approach is inherently limited because of a lack of real learning of 'what is'. Without real learning, we cannot truly develop new capabilities from within. Open Studio is an experimental, experiential, integrative and creative container that provides an opportunity for people to bring more of 'what is' to awareness through creativity and dialogue. Through increasing our awareness of what is in the field, we allow ourselves and our solutions to be guided by a better understanding of what is present and what is wanting to emerge. "Change occurs if one takes the time and effort to be what he is..." (Beisser)

The workshop was full to capacity and when I asked people what brought them to the workshop, some people said that they were drawn to the workshop by the abstract, some people said they specifically wanted to have something that wasn't 'another theory and another set of models' and others were looking for people offering something 'on the edges'.

The following process was provided which took into account the limited time, the intensity of the previous days and the amount of presentations participants had already attended:

Individuals were invited to connect with an issue they really cared about- work, OD field or personal.

Individual were invited to make an image or images, using the materials available to them, as a means to explore and express how they felt about their issue/ topic.

Each person was asked to give feedback to another person by sending them a postcard (an idea gifted to me by Lenard McComb, RA)

The whole group was invited to present their work as a collective whole.

There was a brief discussion at the end of the session as to how people wanted their work to be handled. The agreement made was for a photo to be taken of the collective whole and for a group photo to be taken of all those who took part. As permission was not specifically sought for the images to be displayed on this website, photos and images from the day cannot be shown here.

Due to time constraints, very little time was left for comments. However, these were some of the comments made to me by individuals after the experiential:

'Thank you for a lovely oasis- just what I needed.'

'Thank you so much for what you did.'

'I really enjoyed the session- thank you so much.'

'I took my picture home to my six year old daughter and she loved it...she thought my picture was really good....good work daddy...'

For more information on the OD World Summit please go to www.odworldsummit.org
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Summer 2009

Amy Barnes Consulting was invited by a Canadian entrepreneur, the co-founder of Lampo Communications Inc. to act as key partners in their launch of The Monticle Challenge, a youth leadership course. We were responsible for co-designing and co-facilitating an exploratory two days, using artistic means and simple scenario techniques. For this event, I partnered with an artist from the UK. The intention of the event was to raise the awareness of the participants to emerging global issues and to enable them to explore what *their role* is within our changing contexts.

The event had to be sufficiently challenging and we felt that this quality of learning experience was best achieved by not prescribing in advance exactly what we would do with this group of 40 people.

We had some key ideas in terms of how we would start the day and kept in hand a large range of options which we could use as we improvised with the flow of the day.

They started simply, playing with brushes on the back of their hands, to get a feel for our main tool of communication - the brush. This gradually developed into making water marks with pure water, then single colour marks that progressed into working in pairs, then to small group collaborative works and finally contributing as a whole to a shifting 'flag of dispositions'.

The day was punctuated by specific interventions we requested from our Canadian co-facilitators which included brief talks on peace-keeping missions. They then used the remaining time to focus on global issues which were built around grouped images they had produced from the morning sessions.

Towards the end of the day, all participants signed up to one true action that they were committed to make happen.

A comment made by one of the participants at the end of the event when the group was asked 'What would you like us to do with your work?' she replied 'To keep it and show it to others who will come after us...as a way of saying...we were here'. The last three words 'we were here' prompted Dave Pollard, a former CIO for Ernst & Young to write in his blog <http://blogs.salon.com/0002007/2009/08/03.html>