
Tools

Affinity Diagram

Collecting and Grouping Ideas

Background

The affinity diagram is a tool to gather and group ideas, issues, or problems. It helps teams to organize large volumes of information into major categories and apply unconventional thinking.

When to Use

- When a large number of ideas, issues, or problems need to be generated; grouped in natural groups; and summarized
- When communication barriers need to be dissolved
- When creativity and ownership are needed

How to Use

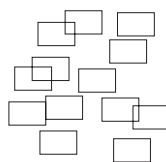
1. Write the idea, issue, or problem as a statement. Reach agreement on the statement and post it for all to see.
2. Each participant generates ideas, issues, or problems related to the statement and writes them on index cards--one per card.
3. Collect the cards from all participants, mix them up, and spread them out on a flat surface.
4. Have participants sort the cards into 5-10 related groups **without talking**. Allow approximately 15 minutes for participants to pick out cards that list related ideas and set them aside until all cards are grouped. Cards will probably be moved from one grouping to another. If consensus does not occur, duplicate the card and place in both groups. It is OK for some cards to stand alone.
5. For each card grouping, have participants create a title or heading that best captures the essence of all of the cards in the group. This is hard work but often leads to breakthrough thinking. Provide ample time for this part of the activity.

Hints

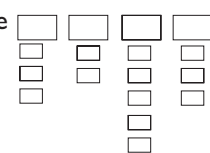
Encourage participants to react quickly without agonizing over sorting. If a participant disagrees with the placement of a card, the participant simply moves it. If consensus cannot be reached, make a duplicate of the idea and place one copy in each group. If clarification is needed during the process, a participant can give the “time-out” signal, at which time all participants move away from the table, break silence, and get quick clarification. When participants return to the table, silence is the rule.

How Does It Look

In Process



Final Outcome



Next Steps

The interrelationship digraph can be used to identify, analyze, and classify the cause-effect relationships among the ideas, issues, and problems.

