

Quick Tips

Collecting Group Data: Affinity Diagram

The affinity diagram is a tool for helping to organize ideas, a complex issue or situation. It involves a group meeting of usually five to 10 people and lasts about one hour.

The affinity diagram is used to:

- Bring structure to a large or complicated issue
- Break down complicated issues into easy-to-understand categories
- Ensure that all participants have an equal voice
- Build consensus

Preparation and supplies

1. Select and invite participants. Plan affinity session.
2. Supplies needed include:
 - o Large post-it notes or index cards
 - o Marking pens (regular pens are hard to see at a distance)
 - o Masking tape if you will post the index cards on the walls

Procedure

1. Make introductions, review purpose and procedure for the meeting. Clearly state the question participants are to generate ideas about—have it written on a flip chart for all to see.
2. Generate Ideas.
 - o Each participant writes ideas on post-it notes or index cards.
 - o Encourage people to write clear, concise ideas in one to three words.
 - o One idea is written per note/card.
 - o Allow about 15 minutes.
3. Collect notes/cards.
 - o Collect the post-it notes or index cards.
 - o Mix them up and spread them out on a flat surface.
4. Arrange cards into groupings.
 - o Participants pick out sticky notes/cards and place them into groupings. This can be done using the walls where sticky notes are clustered for all to see. Or, with a smaller group, index cards can be arranged on a large table.
 - o Restrict talking during this process so that participants aren't influenced by each other and arguments don't arise.
 - o Don't force cards/notes into groupings. It is okay to have "loners."



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- o Encourage participants to move sticky notes around until the best groupings emerge.
- o Participants may move cards/notes that someone else has already placed; or if an idea seems to fit in two places, make a second card.

5. Label each grouping.

- o Participants develop a title or heading of a few concise words for each card grouping.
- o Sometimes there is a card that captures the meaning of the group. Place that at the top of the group. If there is no such card, write one.
- o Place groupings that are similar next to each other, or in order.
- o Combine groupings that seem very similar, or divide groupings where the clustered cards/notes seem too dissimilar.
- o Continue this process until participants agree on the groupings and labels.

References:

Chang, R., & Niedzwiecki, M. (1993). *Continuous Improvement Tools: Volume 1: A Practical Guide to Achieve Quality Results*. Irvine, CA: Richard Chang Associates, Inc.

Tague, N. (1995). *The Quality Toolbox*. Milwaukee, WI: ASQ Quality Press.