

## Affinity Diagram

The Affinity Diagram is a basic technique for brainstorming and grouping ideas. (Also known as the “KJ Method,” after its inventor, Japanese anthropologist Jiro Kawakita.)

**WHEN TO USE:** The Affinity Diagram is useful to a team as a way of collecting a large number of random thoughts around a given topic and ordering them into categories.

**HOW TO USE:** Four easy steps:

1. *State the Topic.* Phrase the issue under discussion in a full sentence.
2. *Capture All Ideas.* Everyone writes down his or her ideas, one to a Post-it™. Typically, an affinity exercise has at least 20 ideas per person. *Tip:* Use at minimum a noun and a verb on each Post-it™. Use markers so that the words on the Post-it™ are easy to see.
3. *Grouping of Ideas.* The Post-its™ are spread out on a table or wall and the team arranges them into related groupings. Traditionally, this step is done in silence, but silence is not necessary in a well functioning team where no members dominate the activity. It is ok for some notes to stand alone.
4. *Look for Patterns.* The team talks about what they see as the rationale for the groupings that have emerged. Create a summary or header card for each grouping using consensus.

### BENEFITS OF THE METHOD:

- ◆ It's simple and quick. In a very short time (often a matter of 10–15 minutes), a large number of ideas/issues are generated and order is created in what seemed to be random thoughts.
- ◆ It allows people to discover patterns on their own and encourages non-traditional connections among ideas or issues.
- ◆ It's a consensus builder and ownership generator.
- ◆ Overcomes team paralysis which is brought on by an overwhelming array of options.
- ◆ Allows “unspoken” items to surface in an environment that protects anonymity.

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**Notes:** When using the Affinity Diagram, make sure that all the post-its go up on the wall (or flipchart sheets) together so no one person is singled out. Also, do the sorting of the post-its as a group (or in sub-groups if the whole group is too large). When the sorting is done, identify a category “header” for each group of post-its. Sometimes it's valuable (if time allows) to read through the post-its and be certain that the team agrees on all the post-its included within the category. When done with the activity, place clear tape over the post-its so they can be transcribed into notes for the team.