

Affinity Diagram

The affinity diagram is a creative process that gathers and groups information in order to find the major themes out of a large number of ideas, opinions, or issues.

Use an affinity diagram to...

Gather and organize large amounts of information that, at first glance, appear to be disorganized, chaotic and unrelated to each other or the problem.

Obtain a breakthrough in traditional concepts and thinking.

How to build an affinity diagram...

1. Take the issue/problem on which you and your team are focusing and write it into a problem statement agreed to by all team members.

2. Generate and record ideas using brainstorming guidelines. Record each idea on a card (such as a Post-it note) and ensure that it is visible to everyone. (A typical affinity diagram has 40-60 ideas.)

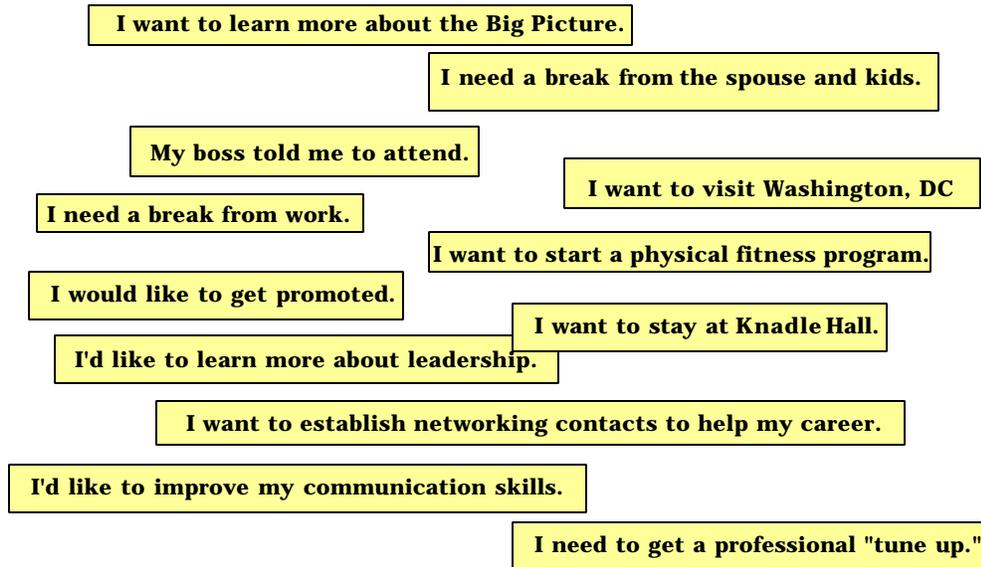
3. Without talking, team members begin to sort the cards into related groupings based on their opinion of how they fit together. Team members take turns passing by and placing the cards until everybody is satisfied with the groupings and indicates this by making no changes. The idea is that each team member will see different connections as he or she tries to understand why others put the cards into different groupings. Even though disagreements will occur, the moving of cards will eventually settle into consensus. Your team should come up with 5 to 10 groupings of ideas.

4. For each grouping, the team decides on a title that describes the central theme of the cards. These are the header cards. Teams have a tendency to rush through this part of the exercise, but it's important to give it more consideration. The header cards provide the workable issues that are part of a larger problem, and they should be as accurate as possible.

An example of an Affinity Diagram

Problem Statement: Why do Army employees attend the Army Management Staff College?

Brainstorm the idea: Why do Army employees attend AMSC?



Group the Ideas and Develop Header Cards

Improve my Leadership Skills

- I want to learn more about the Big Picture.
- I'd like to learn more about leadership.
- Improve my communication skills.

Following orders

My boss told me to attend.

Evaluate my life

- Take a break from work.
- I need a break from the spouse and kids.
- I want to start a physical fitness program

See different places

Improve my career chances

- Washington, DC is a great place to visit.
- I would like to get promoted.
- I want to stay at Knadle Hall.
- I need to get a professional "tune up."
- I want to establish networking contacts to help my career.