Affinity Grouping
Technique

Step by Step

1. Generate and brainstorm ideas concerning the selected issue.

2. Make available the ideas that have been generated in the form of a list and place the brainstormed ideas on large chart pads.

3. Write single ideas on individual cards, adhesive notes or stickers (there should only be one idea per card).

4. Put cards, notes or stickers randomly on a table.

5. Without explaining, put together cards, notes or stickers that seem to be related. Others can add additional cards, notes or stickers to a group as it forms or reform existing groups.

6. Continue until all items have been grouped (or set aside). At the end of the process you may have not more than 10 groupings.

7. Make a group discussion to generate short/descriptive sentences that describe each group – avoid one or two word titles. In case of conflicts, items can be moved from one group to another. If there is still a lack of consensus, create a copy of it and place it in two categories.

8. Consider the possibility of additional brainstorming to capture new ideas using the group titles to stimulate thinking.

Facilitator's Role

- Clarify the context. Before starting the brainstorming, a facilitator should address the Affinity Technique asking the group a specific question. Then, he will have to instruct each participant to write their ideas on four or five cards.

- Clarify ground rules. Identify the team's sponsor, i.e., the person with the issue to be addressed by the team. Select participants based upon their expertise, diversity and willingness to think flexibly.

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- Create ideas. All ideas are good and can lead to new ideas. At the beginning, you should not analyze but just generate ideas.

- Do it silently. A key advantage of the Affinity Technique over Classic Brainstorming is that the generation and grouping of ideas is done silently. Silence makes the Affinity diagram a very "democratic" process, i.e., less likely to suffer from lack of participation due to the presence of a "dominant" team member.

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