

## AFFINITY DIAGRAM

### What it is:

An affinity diagram is a technique for organizing verbal information into a visual pattern. An affinity diagram starts with specific ideas and helps you work toward broad categories. This is the opposite of a cause and effect diagram, which starts with the broad causes and works toward specifics. You can use either technique to explore all aspects of an issue. Affinity diagrams can help you:

- Organize and give structure to a list of factors that contribute to a problem.
- Identify key areas where improvement is most needed.

### How to use it:

**Identify the problem.** Write the problem or issue on a blackboard or flipchart.

**Generate ideas.** Use an idea-generation technique from Section 2 to identify all facets of the problem. Use index cards or sticky-back notes to record the ideas.

**Cluster your ideas (on cards or paper) into related groups.** Use questions like “Which other ideas are similar?” and “Is this idea somehow connected to any others?” to help you group the ideas together.

**Create affinity cards.** For each group, create an affinity card, a card that has a short statement describing the entire group of ideas.

**Cluster related affinity cards.** Put all of the individual ideas in a group under their affinity card. Now try to group the affinity cards under even broader groups. You can continue to group the cards until your definition of “group” becomes too broad to have any meaning.

**Create an affinity diagram.** Lay out all of the ideas and affinity cards on a single piece of paper or a blackboard. Draw outlines of the groups with the affinity cards at the top of each group. The resulting hierarchical structure will give you valuable insight into the problem.

## Affinity Diagram Example

A publication team wanted to reduce the number of typographical errors in their program's documentation. As part of a first step, they conducted a brainstorming session that produced the following list of factors that influenced errors.

Computers	No Feedback	Proofreading Skill
Printers	Unreasonable Deadlines	Noise
Lighting	Typewriters	Chair Height
Comfort	Desk Height	Time of Day
Technical Jargon	Interruptions	Handwriting
Grammar	Slang	Spelling
Draft Copy	Punctuation	Distribution
Font	Final Copy	Editing Skill
Computer Skill	Typing Skill	No Measurement

The following affinity diagram helped them to focus on areas for further analysis.

### ***Typographical Errors***

