

Developing Innovative Ideas.

AFFINITY MAPPING

Affinity Mapping is a very simple but powerful technique for grouping and understanding information. It can help you to organise similar ideas and make meaning out of lots of data. There are several variations of the technique. Use affinity mapping in a workshop environment when you want participants to work together identifying, grouping and discussing issues. You can also use affinity mapping when you have a large amount of information – for example, at the end of an enquiry, when you may have hundreds or even thousands of individual notes. Affinity mapping simply consists of placing related items together.

STEP 1: In a group situation, begin by handing out Post-It notes. Ask participants to write one issue on each note. If you have a pre-existing set of information, you can print these on labels or card, or print on paper and guillotine to a convenient size. Give participants some minutes for this activity, but ask them to stop when a large majority of participants have stopped.

STEP 2: Get all participants to gather at a vertical surface suitable for Post-It notes. Windows are appropriate. Encourage participants to place notes, one at a time, on the surface. As each note is placed, other participants may add similar notes together. Depending on the amount of time, the information being analysed, and on group dynamics (and patience) it may be worth spending some additional time considering and rearranging the groups. Encourage participants to read their notes aloud while placing them on the surface. Encourage participants to place one note at a time.

STEP 3: When all notes have been placed, and grouped, you can name each group and discuss the groupings. Affinity mapping is best used if the work can be followed up quickly. For example, affinity mapping of issues can lead into discussion of methods to address the issues. Allow all participants to contribute. There may be an individual who wants to take control of positioning and moving the notes. Do not allow this to happen. Do not move someone's note without their agreement. Discussion will often indicate that the participant wanted to articulate a different issue.

GROUP 1	GROUP 2	GROUP 3	GROUP 4	GROUP 5