**Purpose:**

To generate, pull together and organise a potentially extensive and disorganised amount of disparate information. This could be a mixture of facts, ideas and intuitions and the technique leads to consensus and ongoing ownership. The big advantage of an Affinity Diagram is that it generates a lot of ideas creatively and comparatively quickly. What’s more, the ideas aren’t lost and everyone owns the finished result.

**Tip:**

The sense of ownership, understanding and action increases significantly if an Affinity Diagram is used in conjunction with an Interrelationship Diagram.

**Directions:**

Essentially, it is a silent brainstorm on a grand scale with grouped and ordered output. Firstly, everyone must agree and understand what the problem or issue statement is to begin with. Take a little time to make sure that this has been captured properly. Words like ‘factors that influence…’ or ‘what are the issues involved in….’ are good starting point.

1. Everyone present does a personal silent brainstorm on the issue statement, capturing each idea on a Post-it note. One-word statements are not very useful because other people will need to read and understand the idea. Use a noun and a verb if possible.

2. Follow the normal brainstorming rules allowing enough time and for people to have second or third winds.

3. Once everyone has finished writing, get them to post up their ideas on the wall in any order – still in silence.

**Tip:**

Stick a roll of plain brown paper or a number of flip chart sheets on the wall for people to attach their Post-its to. Now all stand back in amazement and read the collection of Post-its. This will probably spark fresh ideas which should also be captured on Post-its and stuck on the wall.

The next step is the heart of the process and can be quite entertaining.

4. Still in silence, everyone together can start to move the Post-its around, putting them into clusters or groups of similar ideas and themes. The groups can be quite lateral so do not look for the normal themes of people, process, etc.

5. The silence can be broken at this stage as there may well be discussion over which group a particular idea should join or how the ideas have been grouped.

6. There may be some ideas (stragglers) which do not seem to fit any grouping – if so, put them to one side for the moment. Also, remember that other ideas or Post-its can be added at any time.

7. Now agree a header or definition for each grouping. This may sound easy but it will probably be far from it since a one word title is unlikely to be suitable. These headers need to be able to stand on their own with meaning and may also be used on an Interrelationship Diagram.

8. Now deal with each straggler as follows: -

a) A home will become obvious now that headers have been agreed.

b) The straggler may form a new grouping and further brainstorming could generate further ideas.

c) Bin it!

This process will result in a broad range of ideas grouped into sensible clusters which can be developed further. Incidentally, Affinity Diagrams can be a great way of identifying themes for action as a result of customer feedback.