**AFFINITY DIAGRAM**

An Affinity Diagram is a creative process, used with or by a group, to gather and organise thoughts, ideas, and other issues. It is normally carried out in combination with a brainstorming session.

**AN AFFINITY DIAGRAM IS USED FOR:**

1. Adding structure to a large or complicated issue
2. Breaking down a complicated issue into broad categories
3. Gaining agreement on an issue or situation

**STEPS IN CONSTRUCTING AN AFFINITY DIAGRAM:**

1. S**tate the issue or problem to be explored**. Start with a clear statement of the problem or goal and provide a time limit for the session-usually 45-60 minutes is sufficient.

1. **Brainstorm ideas for the issue or problem.** Each participant should think of ideas and write them individually on index cards, sticky notes, or have a recorder write them on a flip chart.
2. **Collect the cards or sticky notes**, mix them up and spread them out (or stick them) on a flat surface. Index cards can easily be secured to a wall with a putty-type adhesive.
3. **Arrange the cards or sticky notes into related groups**. For approximately 15 minutes allow participants to pick out cards that list related ideas and set them aside until all cards are grouped.
4. **Create a title or heading for each grouping tha**t best describes the theme of each group of cards.

**EXAMPLE**

**Obstacles in Implementing Total Quality Management in an Organisation**

**Generated Thoughts by the Group:**

* No one has done this in our industry
* Management has no vision
* Lack of direction
* People don't have the math skills for this
* We've never worked in teams; don't know how
* Management doesn't understand their role
* Senior management are not committed
* Will probably fail like most new programmes
* No time to do it
* Direction unclear
* No major problems, why do it?
* Management has no credibility
* No leadership at the top
* Will never be able to sell the idea throughout the organisation
* Will turn into downsizing
* Too busy fighting fires to start something new
* Will turn into another performance appraisal system that pits people against each other
* Too much fear in the organisation; management has not demonstrated ability to share information
* Employees are getting conflicting messages about the importance of TQM
* We'd have to restructure to even begin
* Untrained in TQM
* Don't understand systems thinking
* No funding for education and training
* Don't know what work improvement is
* Don't know how to make the tracking/measurement systems necessary
* Management will never accept outside help in beginning the process
* Company has tried too many new things that haven't worked
* Will really threaten middle management
* No time for any more work (work day is only 10 hours!)
* No ongoing group to model this behaviour
* Why do it? Won't benefit me!
* Little trust in management
* Most people will just resist change
* Many employees are illiterate and won't be able to learn this
* People don't have the math skills for this
* We've never worked in teams; don't know how

**Categorised Obstacles: Now Solutions Can Be Devised Already Over Worked (Too Busy)**

* No time to do it
* No time for any more work (work day is only 10 hours!)
* We'd have to restructure to even begin
* Too busy fighting fires to start something new

**Communication Issues**

* Will never be able to sell the idea throughout the organisation
* Employees are getting conflicting messages about the importance of TQM

**Resource Problems**

* No funding for education and training
* No ongoing group to model this behaviour

**Educational Problems**

* Don't understand systems thinking
* Management will never accept outside help in beginning the process
* Company has tried too many new things that haven't worked

**Trust Problems**

* Little trust in management
* Will probably fail like most new programmes
* Will turn into downsizing
* Too much fear in the organisation; management has not demonstrated ability to share information

**Current Reward/Recognition System not Compatible with New System**

* No major problems, why do it?
* Will really threaten middle management
* Why do it? Won't benefit me!
* Will turn into another performance appraisal system that pits people against each other
* Most people will just resist change

**Training**

* Untrained in TQM
* Many employees are illiterate and won't be able to learn this
* People don't have the math skills for this
* We've never worked in teams; don't know how
* Don't know what work improvement is
* Don't know how to make the tracking/measurement systems necessary

**Leadership**

* No one has done this in our industry
* Direction unclear
* Management has no vision
* Lack of direction
* Management doesn't understand their role
* Senior management are not committed
* Management has no credibility
* No leadership at the top