Affinity Diagrams

Affinity diagrams are a great method to help you make sense of all your information when you have a lot of mixed data, such as facts, ethnographic research, ideas from brainstorms, user opinions, user needs, insights, and design issues. Affinity diagrams are all about bundling and grouping information, and this method can be one of the most valuable methods to employ.

The method is also called "Space Saturate and Group". The term "**saturate**" relates to the method in which everyone covers or saturates the "**space**" with images and notes, in order to create a wall of information, to inform, and start "**grouping**" the following problem-defining process. You then **draw connections** between these individual elements to join the dots and develop new and deeper insights. They will help define the problem(s) and develop potential ideas for solutions. In other words, you go from analysis to synthesis.

How to Create an Affinity Diagram

1 Put pieces of data, small documented facts, drawings, ideas, and observations onto post-it notes, cards, or pieces of paper and put them up on wall charts, white boards or chalk boards. This is where the associated imagery of walls filled with post-it notes comes from. The sticky notes allow the design team to easily stick up and move pieces of data around in order to create clusters of similar themes, groups and patterns.

2 Take one post-it and make it the first post-it in the first group.

3 Take the next post-it and ask, "Is this similar to the first one or is it different?". Then, you will place it in the first group or into its own group.

4 You continue post-it by post-it as you place similar ideas together and create new groups when ideas do not fit into an existing cluster.

5 You should now have 3-10 groups, so it's time to talk about the best elements of those clusters.

6 Name the clusters to help you create an information structure and discover themes.

7 Rank the most important clusters over less important clusters. Be aware which values, motives, and priorities you use as foundation ideas before you start ranking: Is this your user's priority, your company's, the market's, the stakeholder's, or your own? Which ones should you put most emphasis on?

8 Sometimes it makes sense to create connections with other clusters using lines or other devices between individual bits of data or clusters of data.

9 Describe what you have synthesized, for example, insights, user needs, pain points, or look for gaps you haven't addressed yet.

10 Focus on translating what you've organized and understood into practice, rather than just identifying similar ideas.

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