



Affinity Mapping

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Description

This activity works best when begun with an open-ended analytic question that asks for defining elements of something, or that has many answers and thereby provides many points of entry for deepening a conversation.

Ex. What is the purpose of discussion? Or, perhaps: What do you need to be able to contribute to discussions?

Preparation

Hang pieces of chart paper on a wall in the room so that small groups can gather around the paper. Hand out to every participant a “block” of post-it notes (perhaps 5-10 maximum).

Step 1

Ask the question and request that participants write one idea in response per post-it note. Instruct them to work silently on their own.

Step 2

Split into groups (of 4-8). In *silence*, put all post-it notes on the chart paper.

Step 3

Reminding participants to remain silent, have them organize ideas by “natural” categories. Directions might sound like this:

“Which ideas go together? As long as you do not talk, feel free to move any post-it note to any place. Move yours, and those of others, and feel free to do this. Do not be offended if someone moves yours to a place that you think it does not belong, just move it to where you think it does belong — but do this all in silence.”

Step 4

Once groups have settled on categories, have them place post-it notes on chart paper in neat columns. At this point, ask them to converse about the categories and come up with a name for each one.

Step 5

Have the groups pick a “spokesperson” to report their ideas to the larger group.

Gather that data, and have an open discussion using questions such as the following to help participants make connections between each groups’s responses and categories:

1. What themes emerged? Were there any surprises?
2. What dimensions are missing from our “maps”? Again, any surprises?
3. How did this expand your knowledge or your notion of what the question at the beginning asked you to consider?