

EPICENTRAL

A Newsletter from Epicenter Development Group highlighting ideas that improve organizations

Welcome to Epicenter Development Group's newsletter, EPICentral. The purpose of this newsletter is to highlight fundamental ideas that have helped organizations develop and maintain great manufacturing and service operations. We hope that you find our EPICentral newsletter helpful, and we would welcome your comments on its content.

Affinity Diagrams and the Power of Relationships

This month's article is on a commonly used tool called an Affinity Diagram. "Affinity" is defined as a "likeness based on relationship or causal connection." It is appropriate, therefore, that an Affinity Diagram is a method for displaying/organizing information based upon relationships. As a visual and flexible tool, Affinity Diagramming is a great technique for groups to brainstorm, problem solve, and prioritize activities.

Making an Affinity Diagram

There are many different ways that an Affinity Diagram can be developed, but the traditional process is to hang "butcher paper" on the wall and use Post-It Notes to document ideas:

1. **List General Categories** - This is the "backbone" for how the information is related. Examples include: steps in a process, categories of problem types, categories of solutions, and locations within an office or plant.

2. **Write Information on Post-It Notes** - This is the information that you are considering. Examples include: potential root-cause problems, potential solutions, and tasks that are part of the process steps.

3. **Place the Post-It Notes on the Diagram** - As ideas are generated, the Post-It Notes are placed on the Affinity Diagram under the appropriate category.

4. **Review the Information** - Once all of the Post-It Notes are placed on the diagram, then the group reviews each of the notes to make sure that the information is understood by everyone. During this time, additional Post-It Notes can be added (cross-fertilization).

Problem: Ice Cream Too Soft

MIX INGREDIENTS	FREEZE INTO ICE CREAM	STORE UNTIL SERVED	SERVE
Wrong Ingredients Mixed	Bad Process √	Temperature Set Too Low √√√√	Left Out Too Long √√√√
Improper Mixing √√	Stopped Before Freezing Completed	Freezer Door Not Closed Properly	High Air Temperature √
Poor Quality Ingredients	√ = One Vote	Freezer Malfunction	Server Temperature Too Low √√√

5. Rank the Information - Once all information has been reviewed, each person in the group "votes" on the information by placing "tick marks" on the Post-It Notes. Voting could be, for example, for the top five causes for a quality problem or the top five tasks that need to be improved to meet the project goals. The Post-It Notes with the most "votes" get the highest priority when considering areas for improvement.

Considerations:

- The process of generating the Post-It Notes of information is similar to the brainstorming process. People should individually brainstorm ideas (as many as possible in a set period of time) and ideas presented should not be criticized.
- As with all tools, the technique can be modified to suit the needs of your project or team. For example, we have often used colored stickers for the voting process when there is a larger project team.
- Once the Affinity Diagram is complete, it can be photographed (digital camera) or the Post-It Notes can be taped to the butcher paper for transport. Be aware that the Post-It notes will sometimes fall off of the butcher paper if not taped down -- especially in dusty, plant environments.

Next Steps

If you would like more information on this topic or other similar types of tools, please contact Bill Proctor with your request at wproctor@epicentergroup.com or 216-702-0952. You can also find previous issues of EPICentral at [Newsletters](#).

Mr. Proctor also speaks on a variety of problem-solving and system design topics that can help companies significantly increase the success and profitability of their businesses. If you are interested in having Bill speak at one of your upcoming meetings/events or would like more information on any of the speaking topics, please visit [Speaker Services](#) or you can email sales@epicentergroup.com.

Epicenter Development Group is a unique consulting firm that seamlessly integrates the disciplines of Systems Engineering and Organizational Analysis & Development to create practical design solutions to your toughest challenges. It is on the cutting edge of problem-solving solutions and the creator of a unique process called GreenRoom Engineering. This process adds greater value and cost savings for clients as compared to traditional engineering methods.

William Proctor, Epicenter's founder and president, has provided services around the country to more than 100 companies consisting of a variety of organizations; and Epicenter continues to grow as a resource

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