Problem Solving Tools

Affinity Diagrams

Creating an affinity diagram is a useful activity for the team to undertake once brainstorming has occurred. It allows the team to gather information and/or data captured during brainstorming and organise ideas into common themes.

Benefits of Affinity Diagrams
• Allows the team to work on a creative level to address difficult issues.   • Allows the team to explore unknown areas or situations.   • Allows the team to see the connections between ideas and deal with them in groups.   • It can assist the team to identify a priority area of focus.

How to use an Affinity Diagram

1. Assemble the team who are familiar with the problem and undertake a brainstorming activity. Write down all your ideas on separate sticky notes.
2. Put all the sticky notes on a wall or table for all the team to view.
3. Sort the ideas into groups. Start small by finding two ideas that are similar and put them together, then build the small groups into larger ones.
4. Label each group.
5. Develop solutions – now that you see how the ideas connect, you can identify as a team how to solve the problem.
6. Once you have identified a list of ideas to solve your problem, select an idea and test using a PDSA cycle.

Affinity Diagram Example

Be Well Health Clinic had recently undertaken a brainstorming session to gather ideas as to why they may have a data quality issue. Once the team had completed writing their ideas on post it notes, Carol the Practice Manager proceeded to create an affinity diagram to organise the ideas into common themes. Once this task was completed, Carol discussed each theme with corresponding ideas with her team. As a team they then identified one key area to start their improvement work to address their data quality issues.

Training	Communication	Processes	Staff
Insufficient training on how to use the clinical software	We do not discuss data quality at our practice	We do not archive inactive patients	We don't have time to address the issues
Our doctors do not use drop down selections for diagnosis	What is data quality? – I don't understand the issue	We have duplicate records in our system	I do not have authority to make changes to mistakes I identify
Our doctors code differently		Everyone does things differently – there is no process	
We do not use the data tool or know how to use it			