Addendum 1: Affinity Diagramming Defined

The affinity diagramming process defined in this book stems from Quality Function Deployment, and is one process used to define customers' needs, and then products. It is a brainstorming process, which is used to tackle difficult requiring cross-organizational problems. The more difficult the challenge, the more powerful this method is. A very brief process is:

1. All members of the group agree on and understand the problem statement.

2. Each member of the group writes down verbal responses to the problem on post-it notes, one response per card, trying to keep the response to 3 to 5 words, if possible. This is done independently and in silence.

3. The post-it notes are stuck in no apparent order on a flip-chart paper which has been taped onto the wall.

4. The team members then silently move the notes into clusters that appear to share similar ideas. The notes can be moved as many times as is necessary until the group is satisfied with the clusters. A cluster can contain any number of notes - even one. Often seven to ten clusters will come out of this activity.

5. The group then clarifies open issues and discusses the relationship(s) among the ideas and assigns a title for the cluster. Many times one of the cards within the cluster will serve as a title for the entire cluster, if not, develop one and place it over the cluster. If there are any items that fell into a miscellaneous cluster, see if they now fit one of the designated clusters.

6. Depending on the problem, the team can then assign points to each individual post-it in a group and/or to the titles given each group. These are used to prioritize in different ways, including the most urgent, the highest risk, the most important, etc.

7. An example is provided on the following page.

Basic example of an Affinity Diagram, answering the question: "What are the attributes of a quality company?"

Bibliography for Affinity Diagramming:

Bossert, J. L. (1991). Quality Function Deployment: A Practitioner's Approach, ASQC Quality Press, Milwaukee WI.

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Web addresses for further research:

http://www.saferpak.com/affinity_articles/howto_affinity.pdf

http://www.krysak.com/affinity.htm

http://www.managers-net.com/affinitydiagram.html

http://web.mit.edu/tqm/affinity.html

http://koal2.cop.fi/leonardo/pa-affinity.htm

http://www.usabilityfirst.com/glossary/term_338.txl

Mark Paul has more than twenty years of executive level leadership experience - including 11 years at Global 500 companies (Ford and Northrop Corporations, where he built a $50 million business unit in two years) and 14 years of business leadership consulting as the president at Phoenix Management, Inc., and most recently as a partner at Synergy Consulting Group, LLC, an executive / business development consultancy. Synergy Consulting (www.synergy-usa.com) helps companies increase their revenue, profitability and company value. Mark has served on boards of directors and advisors for various technology-based companies.