Tools to Develop Consensus: Affinity Diagram

What:
A method to elicit and organize thoughts from a group of individuals who may represent disparate points of view.

Why:
Some individuals are not comfortable in traditional brainstorming sessions. They need a supportive environment in which they do not perceive any risks connected to ideas they may share.

Sometimes viewpoints seem so different, that a vehicle to close the gap is useful.

How:
1. Assemble a group of 3 to 8 open-minded people who bring varied perspectives.

2. Display a statement which clearly identifies the issue.

3. Following brainstorming guidelines, give a time limit of 6-8 minutes in which individuals work independently according to the following:
   - Ideas are recorded separately on index cards
   - No one-word cards are allowed
   - Each statement should contain a noun and verb
   - Write clearly, large enough so everyone can see
   - Follow general brainstorming rules
4. Gather around a table or wall. Lay out completed cards.
   - Sort into related groupings
     - Do it in silence
     - Follow first reaction
     - If disagree, don’t discuss; simply move the cards

5. Create header cards.
   - Each statement needs to make sense independently
   - Look for header within grouping
   - Place at top

   If useful, can draw the finished diagram by connecting.

A common next step is to apply some criteria to make a decision. The “multi-votes” or (3 Votes) technique will be useful here.
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